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COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE

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Rio

May 4, 2016

The Honorable Senator Tim Kaine
231 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kaine:

I am writing on behalf of the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors to seek your help with an item in the Transportation Budget Bill making its way through the U.S. Senate.

We are grateful for your consistent support for intercity passenger rail. The Charlottesville-Albemarle region has enjoyed many benefits from the highly successful Lynchburg-DC Northeast Regional Amtrak service which began during your administration. This train has resulted in a three-fold increase in the number of passengers at the Charlottesville Amtrak station, which reached 134,000 in FY2015. Yet Amtrak facilities at the privately-owned station remain exactly as they were in 1998, when annual ridership was only 28,000.

In 2015, 190,000 passengers boarded or alighted the Northeast Regional at stations between Lynchburg and Washington, DC, with Charlottesville the most robust station on the route in terms of ridership and revenue. The Commonwealth has committed to a second frequency of the Lynchburg train, which is needed to add capacity as ridership continues to grow. Yet, in spite of these successes, and partially as a result of them, the future of passenger rail for our region is at risk.

Amtrak and Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT) are dissatisfied with the facilities at the Charlottesville station and have informed us there must be major improvements, as well as a return to public ownership, before service to Charlottesville will be expanded. Because many Albemarle County citizens patronize Amtrak at the Charlottesville station, the Board of Supervisors has an equal interest in solving this problem. The Charlottesville-Albemarle MPO is leading a planning study for the station project, but there is little doubt that federal matching grants will be needed before the public ownership and station upgrades required by Amtrak and DRPT can be achieved.

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A promising new source of such grants was introduced in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program was authorized for up to \$190 million in order to cover a broad range of rail projects. However, the Senate Appropriation Transportation Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Subcommittee narrowed the scope of the program by stripping eligibility for passenger-specific goals such as investment in stations, upgrades to reduce train congestion, and enhancements to facilitate ridership growth. With this restriction on the use of funds, projects like the Charlottesville station will be unable to receive these federal funds for the necessary improvements to support the region's growing demand for passenger rail.

We are writing to request your support for restoring passenger specific goals to the CRISI Program. As we understand it, this will require a motion for a germane amendment to restore the original references to passenger rail in the CRISI portion of the bill. More specifically, we request that you introduce such an amendment when the bill comes to the Senate floor.

On behalf of the citizens of Albemarle County, we thank you for considering our request.

Yours truly,

Liz Palmer
Chair

cc: Albemarle County Board of Supervisors



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The Honorable Senator Mark R. Warner
475 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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