



City of Havre de Grace

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Susquehanna River Rail Bridge Project Advisory Board Of the Mayor and City Council

Advisory Bulletin #16 Westerly Right-of-Way and Alignments – First Update March 18, 2015

Background

The Advisory Board met on October 28, 2014 to examine the current and proposed railway right-of-way corridor extending from the bridge abutment area in downtown Havre de Grace to the Lewis Lane overpass. Advisory Bulletin #4 was issued by the Board on October 31, 2014 based on an assumption that the new high-speed bridge of the proposed twin bridges would be installed on the downriver (south) side of the existing bridge, with the lower-speed bridge taking the place of the existing bridge. It was also assumed that the new bridges would be elevated to an extent that would require elevation of trackage along the right-of-way, well past the bridge landing.

As feasibility studies and preliminary design with regard to track elevation and alignment have been further developed by the SRRBP Project Team since last October, it appears that the most favorable track alignments would now place the lower-speed bridge along the upriver (north) side of the existing bridge, with the other new bridge taking its place. It also now appears that little or no raising of track elevation will become necessary west of the new bridge abutment.

It is the current understanding of the Advisory Board that the long high-speed curve of the southeasterly pair of rail lines extending from the bridge to Lewis Lane will require some realignment in that direction to achieve a 150 mph design speed. The Advisory Board recently issued Advisories #6 and #12 advocating the installation of a rail commuter station along Warren Street. If implemented, this would require a significant northwesterly alignment of the lower-speed pair of rail lines to accommodate a more northerly bridge alignment and to provide adequate separation from the high-speed lines at the station platform. Both alignment changes would significantly alter the elevated embankment passing through town and would require retaining walls at certain locations.

Revised Concerns and Recommendations

In accordance with the more current alignment needs that are described above, it will become necessary to widen the southeasterly side of the railway embankment to some degree and to widen the northwesterly side to a significant degree. Both enlargements could encroach slightly upon existing property lines and could significantly reduce available public parking areas for the proposed rail commuter station unless retaining walls are installed between Freedom Lane and Juniata Street. Retaining walls would provide the additional advantages of better security against trespassing, elimination of unsightly chain-link fencing at the embankment bases, and elimination of uncontrolled growth of weeds and trees along the embankments.

It appears that significant shifts in track alignments will almost certainly require modification of the street underpass bridges that remain in place, to the extent that existing abutments would require lateral extension or total replacement. The Advisory Board emphatically recommends that no existing granite abutment, if retained, be further modified from its historical appearance. The abutments are 110 years old and have already been modified several times for bridge deck repositioning, which in turn has resulted in unsightly concrete caps and modification or removal of some granite blocks. The stone abutment and wing wall facings are continuously leaking water and forming ice, black mold, and white salts, resulting in a most unattractive appearance and promoting continual weed growth from the block joints.

Lateral realignment of the outer bridge decks would likely require lateral extension of the abutments. The use of concrete or any material other than matching granite blocks for this purpose should be entirely unacceptable to the City and its residents. As recommended in Advisory Bulletin #4, each of the abutments at retained street underpasses should be entirely rebuilt with materials that will provide an attractive appearance for the next 120 years or more. All other recommendations provided in Advisory Bulletin #4 remain valid and should be incorporated into the overall project.

Recommended Action

The Advisory Board requests that the Mayor and City Council take necessary steps to consolidate these recommendations, along with those of Advisory Bulletin #4, into a formal communication to the SRRBP Project Team as soon as possible

Respectfully submitted,



Volney H. Ford
Chairman