



City of Havre de Grace

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

Advisory Bulletin #4 Westerly Right-of-Way and Alignments October 31, 2014

Background

The Advisory Board met on October 28, 2014, to examine the current and proposed railroad right-of-way corridor, extending from the bridge abutment area in downtown Havre de Grace to the Lewis Lane overpass. The recommendations provided below are based on several current assumptions that would appear to be likely outcomes as the SRRBP Project Team moves forward with its preliminary design analysis. These are also based on other closely-related recommendations of the Advisory Board that have been issued or are soon to be issued.

More specifically, it is assumed that a new river bridge abutment would be located westward to the Freedom Lane tunnel-style underpass (Advisory #3), an additional pair of high-speed rail lines would need to be located significantly southeastward of the existing rail lines to achieve a more favorable curve radius, and all four new rail lines would shift accordingly to align with both new bridges (assuming the two-bridge concept). Expansion and repositioning of the new rail corridor would therefore require repositioning and reconstruction of up to three sets of street underpass bridges and two sets of lane underpass bridges or tunnel-like passages.

Right-of-Way Recommendations

1. In situations where the outermost high-speed rail line will be required to pass very close to City streets, private property structures, public facilities, and high/middle school facilities, especially in the case of the new James Harris Stadium, a vertical or nearly vertical retaining wall system should be installed to reduce the broad footprint required of earthen embankments.
2. All new street underpass construction should provide enough open span to ensure room for a public sidewalk along both sides of each street passage and one side of each lane passage, with each walkway a minimum of six feet in width and elevated to curb height.

3. As rail alignments are relocated southeastward, the existing northwestward embankments should be retracted southeastward and reduced to natural grade where no future need for trackage or trackside facilities are envisioned. The purpose of this is to increase open space at natural grade and to reduce the overall visual impact of a wider and higher earthwork.

Architectural Recommendations

1. All railroad overpass abutments should be of a consistent architectural design and appearance, using the same materials.
2. All railroad overpass spans should be of a consistent architectural design and appearance, allowing for depth variations that may be required for differing span lengths.
3. Retaining walls and abutments should incorporate a natural texture and color that suggests stone, and should be designed to emphasize horizontal lines while de-emphasizing height.
4. Retaining wall and abutment architecture and materials should discourage noxious weed growth as much as possible.
5. Earthen embankments should be densely planted with a variety of landscaping species that resist erosion and noxious weed growth wherever they are exposed to developed property or unforested areas.
6. Security fencing should be minimized as much as possible in appearance, placed far enough from the toe of embankments to allow weed control, and coated black to blend with the landscape.
7. Underpass abutments should be designed with wing walls that provide a natural and architecturally pleasing connection with security fencing by terminating them at fence height.
8. Guard railings that may be required along the tops of retaining walls and railroad overpass bridges should be painted black and be designed for minimal appearance.

Noise Reduction

1. Retaining walls, track beds, and embankment landscaping should be designed to mitigate noise reflection as much as possible, whether generated by railroad operations or deflected from other sources within the community.
2. Sounding of locomotive horns at the northbound approach to the Susquehanna River Bridge, which always occurs at about the James Harris Stadium, is highly disruptive to activities in all the nearby public facilities, and is detrimental to sleeping residents. It is understood that this grade-crossing warning is not a normal requirement when approaching bridges, and was once implemented by special request of the City of Havre de Grace in response to a bridge fatality. The subsequent installations of bridge safety catwalks, guard railings, and approach security fencing should reasonably justify elimination of the horn warning.

General Comments

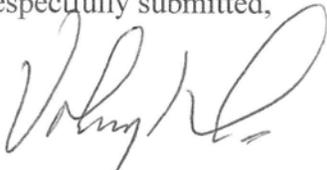
The current right-of-way passes through the heart of what is known as the historic "old town" Havre de Grace, dividing neighborhoods, impacting traffic flow, detracting from normal residential views, and producing a very significant amount of noise. In the years since its creation, the elevated earthen right-of-way has produced unsightly weed and tree growth, unattractive security fencing, heavily stained stonework, overpass bridges that are functional but lack form, and tunnel-like passages that appear dirty and unsafe.

The recommendations provided herein would appear to significantly exceed the traditional appearance standards and practices of railroad rights-of-way in towns and cities throughout our nation. This corridor is a notable exception. It will pass in closer proximity to, and in full view of, almost all modern and about-to-be-built public institutions in this city: City Hall, Police Station, Post Office, James Harris Stadium, High School, Middle School, and Senior Activities Center. It will also pass immediately adjacent to residences, offices, retail business establishments and tourism attractions. We should ensure that the increased impact of this massive railroad realignment and enlargement project is mitigated by quieter operation, more impressive architecture and more attractive landscaping.

Recommended Action

The Advisory Board requests that the Mayor and City Council take necessary steps to consolidate these or similar recommendations into a formal communication to the SRRBP Project Team as soon as possible. The extensive use of retaining walls, along with underpass requirements, are engineering issues that affect overall track alignment, and must be resolved by the SRRBP project team very soon. The Board also recommends that the Mayor submit a formal inquiry to Amtrak officials regarding the bridge warning horn issue.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Volney H. Ford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "V".

Volney H. Ford
Chairman