



# City of Havre de Grace

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

Advisory Bulletin #6  
Rail Commuter Station  
November 5, 2014

### Background

The Advisory Board met on October 28, 2014, to examine the feasibility and best location of a new rail commuter station to serve Havre de Grace. In order for this commuter station to be most successful in ridership and most beneficial to local commerce, it should be located within easy walking distance to the downtown, waterfront, retail offerings, restaurants, bed-and-breakfast establishments, and other tourism destinations. It would also require ease of access and plenty of parking for commuters.

In visiting this important issue, the Board has considered a wide range of concerns with regard to available parking areas, station security, neighborhood safety, traffic impact, traffic routing, rail alignments and possible turnouts, distance from the river bridge, station layout, and boarding platform access. This advisory assumes that current alignment of the elevated railway is likely to be repositioned southeastward to align with the replaced bridges.

### Station Location

In keeping with the objectives of positioning the station as close to the central business district as possible, while allowing enough distance from the proposed river bridges to ensure passenger safety and to install a possible fifth track turnout, The Board recommends centering the station between Stokes Street and Centennial Lane, with a shift more toward Centennial Lane if absolutely necessary. This position would also be at the epicenter of available parking opportunities and would offer the most ideal ingress and egress of vehicular traffic from Stokes, Adams, and Warren Streets.

### Station Configuration

The height and relative narrowness of the elevated railway earthwork, even when repositioned and enlarged to align with the proposed bridges, is not favorable to the layout of a traditional rail commuter station at track level. The Board recommends a rather novel approach to this situation, which can offer many other benefits. The station proper, containing the ticket kiosk, restrooms, access to rail platforms above, information displays, and local tourism kiosks, should be located within a reinforced underground shell at street level, extending across the entire elevated portion of the right-of-way, with a main entrance at both ends.

The south entrance on Warren Street would provide access to parking areas on that side of the elevated railway with pedestrian access directly into downtown, only one block away. The north entrance would provide direct access the largest commuter parking lot and a potential parking area just beyond it. Both entrances should be attractively designed as retaining wall facades with wing walls and sheltered entryways. Small plazas at both entries should be well-lit, well-landscaped, and secure in appearance.

### Boarding Platform Access and Layout

Public access to the boarding platforms should be restricted to interior stairways and elevators that would rise from the station interior and terminate within the shelter of boarding platform roof systems and weather screens. The advantage of such an access is that when the station is closed and locked during non-commuting hours, the boarding platform area will be completely inaccessible. Under this arrangement commuters will have less exposure to inclement weather, from station entry to rail car boarding.

The Board proposes a covered boarding platform length of 250 feet, with platforms and platform accesses along the northbound and southbound commuter/freight tracks, each having a widened shelter at the center for elevator and stairway shafts, and commuter congregation areas. Platform shelters should be carefully designed to resist exceptional wind and blowing rain conditions created by the river gorge and elevated embankment effects. The stairway shafts should be cross-connected at the highest practical level under the tracks to permit rapid commuter movement from one platform to the other and to discourage track-crossing.

### Track Alignment

The northwesterly pair of tracks normally designated for freight and commuter trains, and expected to extend across the north bridge span to align with the Perryville freight wye and commuter station, should remain on tangent from the bridge as far as possible toward the

station. This is intended to provide significant separation from the high-speed pair of tracks that are expected to utilize the south bridge span, and which will likely begin a path of radius at the immediate end of the bridge.

#### Emergency and Maintenance Access

The boarding platform area will require vehicular access for emergency response, periodic maintenance, and routine custodial service. The Board recommends a securely gated vehicular ramp beginning at Adams Street and rising along the northwesterly side of the embankment to boarding platform level. The access ramp can rise from Stokes Street as an alternative plan, if the station is positioned farther southwestward.

#### Station and Restroom Maintenance

The Board recommends that the City of Havre de Grace enter into an agreement with MARC to provide daily custodial maintenance and service within the station and restrooms, but not including the boarding platform area, as part of its city-wide public restroom and public facility custodial program. The station restrooms and tourism kiosks would provide a convenient location at the north end of town for non-rail visitor access, and could be kept open beyond commuting hours and on weekends by City personnel if boarding platform access is otherwise locked within the station. The station and its entrances should be video-monitored at the City Police Department to ensure public security and rapid response to incidences.

#### Commuter Parking

The railroad owns a significant amount of vacant land along its current right-of-way that lies beyond the toe line of the elevated embankments, forming triangles of flat ground between the embankments and public streets or private property. Some of this street-level vacant land will likely be absorbed along the southeast side of the right-of-way by realignment of the trackage in that direction, but land at ground level along the northwest side may be expanded if the embankment toe-line along that side is retracted accordingly. It appears to the Advisory Board, when taking into account the likely repositioning of elevated portions of the railroad right-of-way, and assuming that appropriate railroad property and City property will be made available for commuter parking, the following opportunities exist:

1. The large open area of railroad property between Stokes and Adams Street, which lies behind dwellings fronting on Otsego Street, should become the principal station-entry parking area, with access from both Stokes and Adams Street. The Adams Street point of

entry and exit should occur at its intersection with Warren Street, assuming elimination of the Adams Street underpass, and would thus be accessed straight in from Juniata Street. This parking lot can be made significantly larger by the installation of a vertical retaining wall extending from the station entrance to both street entrances, thus eliminating the space required for a sloped embankment.

2. The Susquehanna Hose Company owns a sizable triangle of vacant and unused land behind its fire station on Juniata Street. This land fronts Warren Street along the northwest side of the railway embankment, and offers a direct and safe pedestrian connection to the proposed main station parking lot without a street crossing, provided that the Adams Street underpass is eliminated. It is also directly accessed from Juniata Street.
3. The railroad owns a large square-shaped area of vacant land fronting Warren Street between Freedom Lane and Stokes Street. The apartment building at the east side of Freedom Lane leases from the railroad a small strip of parking spaces just across the lane. These spaces, necessary to the apartment off-street parking requirement, can be relocated into the Freedom Lane right-of-way proposed for closure to the public, and then leased from the City. This vacant land is positioned very close to the proposed south station entrance, and would be accessed easily from Union Avenue or Stokes Street.
4. Warren Street is not fronted by any dwellings or businesses between Stokes and Adams Streets. There may be enough available space between its northwest edge and the toe line of a relocated railway embankment to allow diagonal on-street parking or a narrow on-site parking lot. A parking lot at this location can be enlarged significantly by the installation of a vertical retaining wall instead of a sloped embankment, which can also be designed as an extension of the station entrance.
5. A large area of vacant private property exists directly across from the proposed station entrance, bordered by Warren and Stokes Streets and Centennial Lane, which could become available in the future.
6. The large apartment building at the corner of Warren Street and Freedom Lane lies very close to the railroad right-of-way and could be in conflict with alignment of the south river bridge and the path of high-speed rail radius. If this property must be taken, additional parking area would thus become available.

### Street Modifications

1. Under the assumption that the Adams Street underpass would be eliminated, Warren Street should be reduced to a single lane of travel in both directions and realigned closer to the southeast edge of its right-of-way between Adams and Stokes Streets, to allow more room for a narrow parking lot or for head-in parking along its northwest side, while retaining good flow of truck traffic serving commercial enterprises along Adams Street. There are no dwellings or businesses along this block of Warren Street that would require on-street parking.

2. Stokes Street should be reverted to two-way traffic operation between Otsego and Warren Streets, to facilitate traffic flow to and from the south parking areas of the proposed station.
3. Stokes Street should be widened along this same block, with larger corner radiuses at Otsego Street, to allow ample two-way traffic flow and to retain on-street parking for the few dwellings that face it.
4. Centennial Lane should extend into the proposed north parking lot of the station to eliminate the need for a dead-end turnaround; however, it should be made one-way only, in the southward direction.

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 need of a rail commuter station has been an important component in the Havre de Grace Comprehensive Plan for at least two decades, and should be vigorously pursued.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Volney H. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Volney H. Ford  
Chairman