



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO... AN INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME!

RAIL Solution is a grassroots advocacy group with over 1300 individual participants and a coalition of allied organizations.

We emphasize balanced transportation planning, with a leading role for railroads. The time has passed when every problem of congestion and growth can be solved with more lanes of highway. Proper, balanced transportation decisions are vital to preserving the natural environment, ensuring our quality of life, and providing sustainable economic opportunity for Virginia and the nation.

Much has been accomplished since our founding in 2003.

STAR Solutions, a construction consortium headed by Halliburton's KBR subsidiary, then proposed to privatize I-81 across its 325 miles of western Virginia and rebuild it as an 8-12 lane truck tollroad. Citizens felt that the giant project was much too costly, both environmentally and economically, and that equivalent truck-carrying capacity could be furnished by upgrading the Norfolk Southern (NS) rail line parallel to I-81 at far lower dollar cost and environmental impact.

During public comment periods, thousands of residents turned out in support of the RAIL Solution vision, submitting oral and written statements favoring rail and opposing tolls. In spite of STAR's strong backing by the highway engineering and construction lobby, as well as state and federal politicians, more sensible citizen viewpoints prevailed. The dedicated truck lane concept failed to pass muster in the Purpose and Needs review done as part of the I-81 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and STAR could not deliver on the promised hundreds of millions in federal funding for its "demonstration" project.

Today a saner I-81 policy prevails in Virginia. Limited available funding will target safety issues and capacity chokepoints, but rail will be relied on for new long-term freight-carrying capacity.

<p>I-81 Existing Highway: 4 lanes</p> <p>Trucks + Cars Trucks + Cars</p>	<p>Higher-speed Intermodal Rails <i>Roughly Near I-81</i></p>	<p><u>READ MORE INSIDE:</u></p> <p>→ Advantages of rail</p> <p>→ HB-1581 "I-81 Freight Rail Study" --page 2</p> <p>→ A vision for America: the Steel Interstate --page 3</p> <p>→ Get involved – join RAIL Solution --page 4</p>
<p>I-81 At Trouble Spots: 6 lanes</p> <p>Trucks + Cars Trucks + Cars</p>	<p>Higher-Speed 2-Way Intermodal Rails</p>	

Movement of Goods and People by Rail Has Numerous Advantages

Here are some talking points favoring broader use of rail transportation. Help communicate these to officials at public hearings & meetings.

Safety. Safety is greatly enhanced when as many through trucks as possible are removed from the highway altogether and carried on trains. The likelihood of spills and crashes involving hazardous materials is reduced, too.

Energy. The U.S. Department of Transportation says trains are more than three times as fuel efficient as trucks per ton-mile of freight.

Pollution. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says trains produce only one third the emissions of trucks per ton-mile of freight handled, including greenhouse gasses. This is a key public health benefit and critical in the I-81 Corridor's non-attainment areas.

Land Use. For equivalent throughput, an additional railroad track has a far smaller footprint on the land than highway lanes. It can often be added within an existing right of way, disrupting far fewer farms, homes, businesses, and historic sites.

Passengers. Rail corridors upgraded to move freight provide an enhanced opportunity to operate intercity passenger trains with more reasonable speed and reliability.

Congestion. Diverting as many through trucks to rail as possible can reduce the urgency and scope of highway expansion needed, saving money for citizens and taxpayers in road construction and maintenance costs.

Economics. Truck-time-competitive freight rail service would boost the economic advantages of our region. Imposing high tolls to pay for Interstate widening would damage businesses, employment, and economic development.

9/4/07

VISIT OUR UPDATED WEBSITE:

WWW.RAILSOLUTION.ORG

Read our official filings, opinion pieces, and news. Find out the date and location of our next meeting. Discover who makes us tick and how to contact us. Keep up to date with our activities. Read our 2006 year-end report. Join our listserv.

HB-1581 Leads to I-81 Freight Rail Study by Norfolk Southern & DRPT

The EIS process for proposed I-81 expansion has been a major disappointment for RAIL Solution. Though Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) studied in detail dozens of highway expansion scenarios, it selected for evaluation alongside all of them a hopelessly inadequate rail option, involving improvements on 13 short segments of railroad within Virginia. These ranged from one-half mile to 10 miles, averaging only a mile or two in length. Some were not even in the I-81 Corridor. Even taken all together, they could not possibly have a meaningful impact on I-81 capacity or truck volumes.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) legal guidelines for EIS studies require equal attention to and evaluation of alternatives. Yet the rail option was seriously shortchanged. To have a realistic chance to divert through trucks from I-81 in Virginia, the rail and highway corridor between Knoxville, TN and Harrisburg, PA would need to be considered, but VDOT refused to look beyond the 325 miles of I-81 in Virginia.

To plug this hole, RAIL Solution drafted, and secured unanimous passage of, a bill in the 2006 Virginia General Assembly to undertake just such a multi-state rail intermodal feasibility assessment. Known as HB-1581, it triggered the "I-81 Freight Rail Study".

Begun in the fall of 2006, the study is ongoing, jointly funded and performed by Norfolk Southern (NS) and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) with their respective consultants.

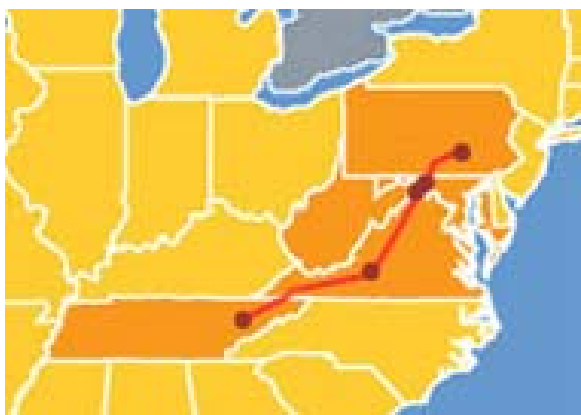
The detailed scope of work for the study, written into the legislation by RAIL Solution, has been divided up between NS and DRPT. DRPT will independently audit and validate results produced by NS.

The goal of the study is to determine the level of investment in an upgraded, double-tracked railroad needed for truck-time-competitive rail service that could divert up to 60% of through trucks from I-81 in Virginia. That level of diversion would permit a meaningful reduction in the scope and urgency of multi-state highway expansion.

Results will allow cost comparisons, both economic and environmental, of adding equivalent new freight-carrying capacity on rail and highway. After all, isn't that what the EIS should have done in the first place?

Not just for Virginia anymore....

We have intensified our outreach efforts in Tennessee, where critical hearings have begun on the I-40/I-81 Corridor, and are involved in efforts in Pennsylvania possibly leading to a six-state I-81 Corridor Coalition.



RAIL Solution's Transportation Vision for America -- the "Steel Interstate" -- a national network of high-capacity rail corridors

The concept of a steel interstate system in the U.S. is rather analogous to the Interstate Highway System that has been built out over the last 50 years. That has given us a core national network of high-capacity, grade-separated roads that made travel faster and safer than on the old system of U.S. Routes.

Today's railroads are like the old U.S. Routes – built a long time ago and often seriously under-engineered and lacking in capacity to handle the demands of today's shipping volumes. Therefore, a dollar of transportation investment made today can often have a bigger impact in increased freight-carrying capacity when invested in rail instead of in more highway lanes.

The railroads have been investing billions of dollars in improved infrastructure, but they are limited in what they can do with internally generated funds from earnings. To restore balance in our national transport network, we need a steel interstate program with state and national funding to augment private capital and create a core network of high-capacity rail freight corridors for the 21st Century.

This approach would only be used where public benefits exceed public investment cost. We listed some of the areas of possible rail benefits on page 2. But there is another vital consideration. Today in the U.S. our national transportation system is virtually 100% dependent on oil. We need to be planning now to cope with a world without cheap and abundant oil, or without oil at all!

Railroads can be readily electrified, so our steel interstates can be powered by whatever fuels (nuclear, coal, solar or renewables) are then being used for electrical generation.

With proper planning over ensuing decades, we can have a core national steel interstate system in place before oil becomes prohibitively expensive or runs out. Featuring a network of high-capacity, electrified rail lines, it would be the backbone for movement of both goods and passengers in this country.

Long-distance trucks can also be carried on such trains. Though this has been done in Europe for some time, the knee-jerk approach to accommodating trucking growth in the U.S. has always been to build ever more lanes of highway.



A truck-ferry operation in Switzerland (hupac photo)

Currently the railroad system in the United States lacks the capacity, reliability, and speed necessary for this type of service. But the time has come to explore public/private ventures to bring public investment into a steel interstate system. Equivalent capacity can be put in place at lower economic and environmental cost than adding more roads.

Railroads in the U.S. have done a fine job developing long-haul intermodal business, but it is focused almost entirely on moving ocean shipping containers, mostly to and from ports. Millions of trucks on the nation's highways remain a huge, untapped opportunity and challenge. As a nation we need an "open" intermodal approach, a technology that can handle not only shipping containers but all kinds of trucks and trailers.

RAIL Solution hopes that the on-going I-81 Freight Rail Study of the Harrisburg, PA to Knoxville, TN corridor will bring new insight on the facts and feasibility of open intermodal services. Because of our HB-1581 initiative, Norfolk Southern, Virginia's DRPT, and several major consulting firms are, at least, and at last, exploring it together.

Join RAIL Solution! Make a Donation! Support our Work!

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If you wish to make a tax-deductible contribution, the non-profit Virginia Organizing Project will accept donations for our account. VOP is a 501(c)3 organization. Make check to VOP and put "RAIL Solution" on the memo line.