



2018 Annual Report and Membership Renewal

→ I-81 Gets a New Study

This year Interstate 81 became a hot issue once again. This was triggered by SB-971, passed by the Virginia General Assembly in January. It authorized the I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan. For the first time in many years this study offered prospects for a Corridor-wide look at how to meet future capacity needs.

Of course we wanted the study to be multi-modal in scope. At the May 10 public hearing in Roanoke, RAIL Solution Chairman Foster made a passionate plea to Secretary of Transportation Valentine to include rail. She told him they would do it.

For years we have sought an environmental and economic cost and benefit assessment of adding new capacity on rail vs. highway widening. *The best way to reduce highway congestion is to get as many trucks as possible off I-81 altogether and onto the parallel rail line.*

**“It’s not enough to be a NIMBY.
We have to offer a reasonable
alternative.”**

-- RAIL Solution founder Rees Shearer

As true today as in 2003!

So far, however, the study has not gone this way. Draft proposals are focused almost entirely on making improvements for trucks – truck climbing lanes, truck messaging signs, truck parking areas, and extended entrance and exit lanes. In a presentation to the Commonwealth Transportation Board, trucks are projected to get 50% of vehicle hours saved - 3.6 million hours, and savings totaling \$4.6 billion in reduced costs. *By making I-81 more user-friendly for truckers, more trucks will be likely, not less,* and Virginia may have spent over \$2 billion with little reduction in congestion with this unwise approach.

Initially the Corridor improvements were to be financed by tolls on trucks. Latest iterations of the study, however, are backing away from reliance on truck tolling and now all vehicles are to be subject to tolls. This would mean that every-day users in the I-81 Corridor would unfairly pay for improvements for long-distance truckers.

Many of you have been with us long enough to recall our 5-year campaign from 2003-2007 in Virginia when we fought the massive widening of I-81 to include four truck-only lanes. At that time, 70% of the public submitting comments in VDOT hearings stated a preference for rail, second only to the 73% who opposed tolls.

We said new freight capacity could be added to the parallel Norfolk Southern mainline less expensively and with far less environmental impact and disruption than the massive highway reconstruction. That's still true today!

"It's like *déjà vu* all over again."

-- Yogi Berra

Much of this summer's I-81 activity is reminiscent of our work in 2003-2005 to promote a rail alternative

Eventually with resolutions of support from over 50 local governments, and in concert with other grassroots groups, we won that battle. Now we must gear up and fight again. With proper rail upgrading to provide highway-competitive speed, reliability, and cost, through trucks between Harrisburg, PA and Knoxville, TN could traverse the I-81 Corridor on trains, *getting them off the highway*. It's the only strategy with a true and lasting impact on congestion!

→ Message from the Chairman

At this key time when we must again campaign for the rail alternative in the I-81 Corridor, we are dangerously low on funds. This annual appeal is vital. Our work will stop without your continued generosity.

Enclosed is a donation form and return envelope. We hope you find our current I-81 focus merits your continued support. RAIL Solution is a 501(c)(3) organization and receives no corporate or government funding. We rely on our member participants in this once-a-year appeal. You keep us going!

If the return envelope has become lost, or you have received this letter electronically, you can mail donations to RAIL Solution Treasurer, 8131 Webster Drive, Roanoke, VA 24019, or you can use PayPal at either of our websites: www.railsolution.org or www.steelinterstate.org. Help us grow. Share this letter with a friend. An extra reply form can be clipped from page 6. Thank you!



David L. Foster

Trucks could travel the I-81 Corridor on trains (p. 5) →



→ Another of Life's Persistent Mysteries

Last year in this space we pondered the persistent irony of failure by the railroads to embrace grassroots advocacy groups such as RAIL Solution, when our goals are clearly congruent with rail traffic growth.

Here we reflect on the persistent pushback we encounter when suggesting investment of public funds in improved railroad infrastructure. The railroads are private enterprises and there is a perceived inappropriateness to deploy public investment in private companies.

Sometimes there is even the specter raised of enrichment of shareholders or corporate executives. Such opposition often forecloses the possibility of public benefit where transportation investment dollars may well earn a higher return spent on new railroad capacity than on ever more lanes of highway.

And there is the jarring juxtaposition of this hands-off reasoning *with the current eagerness to make several billion dollars of "improvements" to I-81 for truckers*. Are these not all private companies as well, with owners and executives?

Somehow we need to find a way to attack this persistent dichotomy where it's okay to aid trucking companies, who already benefit from construction and maintenance of a vast public highway network, but not railroads, who build and maintain their own rights of way and pay property taxes on every mile.

→ As Much Freight as Possible Should Move by Rail

Compelling energy, economic, and environmental advantages derive from movement of freight by rail, especially over mid- to long-distances. Over three times the energy is required to move comparable freight over the road by truck. That means three times the fuel burned and three times the pollution and greenhouse gases contributing to climate change. Railroad electrification can double this rail advantage over trucking.

Rail is the preferred method of adding new freight capacity, especially where new highway capacity would be economically prohibitive and environmentally disastrous. Doubling Interstate Highway capacity can mean four new lanes, and a huge new real estate grab along the entire route. An additional track can be added to a railroad in a space of 20 feet, frequently using the existing right-of-way, and increasing throughput about sevenfold.

It follows then that enhanced rail capacity is at the core of RAIL Solution's advocacy work. The nation would benefit from having many more trucks move on trains, but this requires that railroads be able to offer highway-competitive speed, reliability, and cost. Railroads are constrained, however, from decades of downsizing, and each recession triggers more disinvestment, so little capability exists today to divert more trucks to rail or operate a Truck Ferry service without substantial upgrading. [For more about how this is relevant to I-81, see p. 5.]

For the rail mode to achieve its full societal benefit, much new capacity will be needed for dependable movement of people and goods. So a key piece of our advocacy is the Steel Interstate, a core national network of high-capacity, multi-tracked, grade-separated, electrified railroad mainlines, capable of accommodating existing freight, passenger trains, and new services such as Truck Ferry, as illustrated below.



→ Need for National Environmental Support

Please help us identify and connect with national groups or foundations that might understand and support the societal benefits to be derived from wider use of rail. To make significant headway, we need a national campaign for rail modernization and expansion spearheaded by someone with more clout and deeper pockets than RAIL Solution.

We have participated with Sierra Club in its Beyond Oil campaign and served on its freight rail committee. We have been long-time members of Transportation For America and the Virginia Conservation Network. While all these associations have been helpful, we have yet to find a national entity that appreciates that the potential for broader use of rail dwarfs many other energy and environmental campaigns that are well funded but have far lower payoff.

→ RAIL Solution 2018 Recap

Because of the renewed importance of I-81 here in Virginia, we have devoted as much effort as we can to this issue. At the first round of public hearings in May, RAIL Solution Chairman Foster testified orally and presented a detailed prepared statement putting the current effort into historical context of our earlier work for rail.

At the third round of public hearings in August, he again spoke to the panel and voiced disappointment that there has been no sign of any multimodal work in the ongoing study. Another prepared statement was submitted for RAIL Solution, again articulating advantages of a multimodal perspective for the I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan

We have tried throughout the summer to keep you informed of public hearing and comment opportunities through our listserv and with a detailed op-ed in the *Roanoke Times*. Copies of these documents are available on our websites:

<http://railsolution.org/news-blog> and <http://www.steelinterstate.org/projects>.

Dwindling resources have caused us first to combine the positions of executive director and development director, then later to eliminate that paid post. True to our roots, we are not only focused again on I-81, but also a 100% volunteer organization.

Your Board of Directors remains active and committed to our mission of advancing rail for movement of people and freight. These are individuals with broad experience in transportation, science, and business, hailing from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Oregon, Illinois, and Tennessee.

At the annual meeting last month officers for 2019 were elected as follows: David Foster, Chairman; Michael Testerman Vice Chairman; Barbara Walsh, Secretary; and Bob Peckman, Treasurer. All of our officers and directors are experienced and knowledgeable and many have been with RAIL Solution for all of our 16 years.

At the end of our fiscal year on September 30, 2018, with no outstanding obligations, we had a bit over \$6,000 on hand.

→ [What is a Truck Ferry and How Could it Help?](#)

Entire trucks can drive on and drive off trains, much as they would on a ferry boat. Drivers are accommodated in a sleeping car, and other amenities are available such as food, showers, and lounge space.

There are clear advantages for everyone. Drivers arrive rested and ready to drive again while their trucks move instead of being parked in a roadside rest area or truckstop, representing a huge productivity improvement. Railroads get new business. Trucks have most of the freight, so haul the trucks! The public benefits from *actually getting trucks off the road*, as well as from reduced fuel consumption and less pollution generated.

The roughly 600-mile I-81 Corridor between Harrisburg, PA and Knoxville, TN is ideal to pioneer this concept. Though prevalent in Europe, the Truck Ferry operation (also known as Land Ferry and Rolling Highway) has never been tried in America.

“The Virginia Department of Transportation should conduct a comprehensive examination of the trucks-on-trains concept, comparing it with the cost of highway widening, as one of the serious options available to the Commonwealth of Virginia to address the problem of the of current overcrowding of Interstate 81.”

--Rupert Cutler, *Roanoke Times*, 11/9/18

The Norfolk Southern line paralleling I-81 is not suitable for such a service now. It would require at least one more track and a substantial upgrade to provide the necessary highway-competitive speed and reliability. But its life-cycle environmental and economic costs and benefits need to be weighed against impacts and expenditures to handle more and more truck freight on the highway in the future. Though RAIL Solution has often pushed for such an analysis, we have been unsuccessful getting it included in the scope of work for any of many I-81 studies.



Trucks drive off a truck ferry train at Freiburg, Germany after an over-night rail journey from Italy. Truck ferry operations, widespread in Europe, help keep through trucks off the highways and reduce congestion, maintenance, and construction costs.



Rail is GREEN! Make a Donation! Make a Difference!

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

_____ DONATION _____ DUES (\$35 individual; \$50 family or couple)

Send checks to **RAIL Solution** at this address: **RAIL Solution**, Bob Peckman, Treasurer
 8131 Webster Drive, Roanoke, VA 24019

You can also make a credit card payment using PayPal at railsolution.org

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