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STUDY TO IMPROVE BALTIMORE AND POTOMAC TUNNEL ALONG BUSY NORTHEAST CORRIDOR IN BALTIMORE ENTERS NEW PHASE

Study team of FRA, MDOT and Amtrak seeks public input from residents and commuters

 Existing 141-year-old tunnel is safe but nearing the end of its useful life

FRA & MDOT take lead on Environmental Impact Statement

BALTIMORE, MD (June 11, 2014) – Working to improve rail service, reliability and address a longstanding bottleneck along Amtrak’s busy Northeast Corridor (NEC), the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Amtrak are advancing an engineering and environmental study to examine various improvements to the 141-year-old Baltimore and Potomac (B&P) Tunnel in Baltimore, Maryland.

“We're taking the first step toward upgrading rail traffic through this Civil War era tunnel, which will improve passenger rail service along the entire East Coast,” said Governor Martin O’Malley. “Working together to enhance transit service and reliability will increase ridership and create a sustainable, more competitive future for Maryland. I want to thank U.S. Senators Barbara Mikulski and Ben Cardin, Congressman Elijah Cummings and Maryland’s entire Congressional Delegation for their hard work and support for federal funding to advance this much-needed study.”

“We are committed to building a modern transportation network that supports our growing economy here in Maryland, but our progress wouldn’t be possible without the support we’ve received from our Federal partners,” said Lt. Governor Brown. “We look forward to working with the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, local officials and citizens to advance this critical study. Upgrading this section of rail line will enhance service for our MARC passengers, create jobs and break the bottleneck along the busy Northeast Corridor.”

The two-track tunnel, which opened in 1873, is located between the West Baltimore MARC Station and Baltimore Penn Station and is used by Amtrak, Maryland’s MARC Commuter Rail trains and Norfolk Southern Railway freight trains. The existing track geometry and outdated tunnel design significantly impedes rail movement along the busy NEC, creating a low-speed bottleneck impacting approximately 85 Amtrak trains, 57 MARC commuter trains and one to two freight trains each day. The $60 million federally-funded study, which began last fall, is moving into a new phase with expanded public outreach and opportunities for residents and commuters to learn more about the project’s purpose and need.

“This is good news for Baltimore and the entire Northeast Corridor,” said Senator Mikulski. “Replacing the B&P Tunnel is on the must-do list for Baltimore’s aging infrastructure. The B&P Tunnel is critical to keeping Maryland’s economy rolling, carrying all passenger and freight rail traffic on the Northeast Corridor through Baltimore. Years of operation have left it deteriorating to the point of being operationally outdated. This is an important step in the right direction for safety and the modernization of our railroad.”

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"Solving the bottlenecks is important to improving the reliability and safety of passenger rail travel along the Northeast Corridor. The time has come to move forward on improvements to the B&P Tunnel, part of our critical transportation infrastructure that supports local jobs and businesses, benefits our local communities, and keeps regional and national commerce moving,” said Senator Ben Cardin. “MARC, Amtrak and our freight lines are a part of Maryland’s economic backbone. Sustained federal investments and partnership with Maryland are essential to increase and maintain safety and continuity of service.”

“Replacement of the B&P Tunnel is essential to improving rail transportation on the Northeast Corridor and is a necessary precursor to the introduction of high speed rail service into Baltimore,” Congressman Cummings said. “Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement will take us one step closer to identifying the best plan to modernize Baltimore’s rail tunnel infrastructure.”

“The B & P Tunnel is as much a critical link to the Northeast rail corridor today as it was in 1873 when it was built,” said Joseph C. Szabo, Federal Railroad Administrator. “The study being undertaken today is the first step in replacing this aging infrastructure with a new tunnel that meets the increased demand for capacity and enhances the efficiency of rail operations on one of the busiest rail corridors in the world. A key component of the study will be to assess input from the people of Baltimore, and we look forward to that feedback.”

Continuous and active public involvement is important to the study process and will help to answer questions and identify community needs and concerns. An upcoming open house will kick off the public outreach process, which includes a website, informational flyers, advertising and presentations to communities and organizations. The first open house will be held on Thursday, June 19, 2014, at the Coppin State University Talon Center, 2nd Floor Atrium (2500 West North Avenue, Baltimore, Md., 21216). The community is invited to attend the fully accessible open house anytime between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. to meet the project team, learn about the project, ask questions and provide feedback. Additional meetings will be scheduled throughout the study process and publicized on the project website: www.bptunnel.com.

“Public outreach and input will be key to the success of this study,” said Maryland Transportation Secretary James T. Smith, Jr. “We look forward to meeting with residents, commuters and interested citizens to explain the purpose and need of this study and listen to their feedback.”

The study, which will be complete in mid 2017, will include development and evaluation of various alternatives based on the need to enhance rail safety and to improve capacity, reliability and travel time for commuter, freight and intercity passenger rail service on the NEC. Alternatives will include the No Action Alternative, as well as a full array of Build Alternatives such as rehabilitation of the existing tunnel and a new tunnel on new alignment.

“The B&P tunnel is a crucial link on the Northeast Corridor making Amtrak and MARC service possible through the City of Baltimore,” said Amtrak President and CEO Joseph Boardman. “As owners and stewards of this vital piece of infrastructure, we know that a new or rehabilitated tunnel is what we need to maintain and ultimately improve reliability, speed and safety for all trains – Amtrak, MARC and others – that use it. This study is an important step forward toward realizing that goal, and will help to expand economic development opportunities for the greater Baltimore region.”

The study also involves development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which examines various alternatives while considering environmental and community impacts. The project also will be subject to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 and other applicable environmental laws and regulations. FRA is leading development of the EIS in close coordination with MDOT and other stakeholders.

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Interested parties are encouraged to comment online at the B&P Tunnel Project’s website, via email at info@BPTunnel.com or in person at the June 19 open house.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Because Amtrak is considered a private entity, they are not designated managers involved in developing the EIS for the study. Questions specific to the EIS should be directed to FRA and/or MDOT. The B&P Tunnel is owned by Amtrak and should not be confused with the Howard Street Tunnel, which is owned by CSX and used solely by CSX freight trains.

About FRA

The mission of the Federal Railroad Administration is to enable the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people and goods for a strong America now and in the future. The FRA is the nation’s safety regulator for the rail industry and manages a $23 billion grants and loans portfolio. The agency has nearly 900 employees nation-wide and a budget of $1.8 billion.

About MDOT

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) was formed in 1971 to consolidate several independent State agencies into one cohesive organization to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people, goods and services across multiple transportation modes throughout Maryland. Today, MDOT consists of a headquarters unit and six Modal Administrations, including: the Maryland Aviation Administration; the Maryland Port Administration; the Maryland Transit Administration; the Motor Vehicle Administration; the Maryland Transportation Authority; and the State Highway Administration. With 9,000 employees, MDOT works closely with citizens, elected officials, businesses, communities, governmental agencies and stakeholders to ensure that transportation investments move the State’s economy forward by creating jobs and expanding opportunity for all Marylanders. More information about MDOT can be found at www.mdot.maryland.gov. Follow us on Twitter (@MDOTNews).

About Amtrak®

Amtrak is America’s Railroad®, the nation’s intercity passenger rail service and its high-speed rail operator. Amtrak and its state and commuter partners move people, the economy and the nation forward. Formally known as the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, Amtrak is governed by a nine member board of directors appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Anthony R. Coscia is board chairman and Jeffrey R. Moreland is vice chairman. In FY 2013, a record 31.6 million passengers traveled on Amtrak on more than 300 daily trains – at speeds up to 150 mph (241 kph) – that connect 46 states, the District of Columbia and three Canadian Provinces. Enjoy the journey® at Amtrak.com or call 800-USA-RAIL for schedules, fares and more information. Like us on Facebook, Follow us on Twitter (@Amtrak) and check out our blog at blog.amtrak.com.

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