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PENN DOT Completes Analysis for Implementing the Reading to Philadelphia Rail Line

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation recently provided a passenger rail analysis concerning a one-seat ride from Reading to Philadelphia. The proposed service corridor includes SEPTA's Main Line from Center City Philadelphia, SEPTA's Norristown Line to Norristown, Norfolk Southern's Schuylkill River Bridge, and the Harrisburg Line to Reading. The proposed station stops are Valley Forge, Phoenixville, Royersford, Pottstown, Birdsboro, and Reading.

SEPTA was identified as the assumed operator for this analysis, considering the agency's existing Regional Rail service in the Philadelphia region and their ownership of the Norristown Line. SEPTA was identified as having a lower cost structure in comparison to Amtrak.

To enable a single-seat service on the corridor would either need to be electrified from Norristown to Reading, or dual-power locomotives running on both electric and diesel could be utilized. The constraints facing dual-mode equipment is that it may exceed SEPTA's network weight limitations and fire safety equipment employing diesel locomotives in the Center City tunnel. Diesel equipment running on the Reading corridor with a transfer connection to the existing electric service in Norristown could be an alternative.

Ridership estimate was based on weekday ridership demand in the year 2030 to range from a low of 2,300 daily riders for a two-seat ride to a possible high of approximately 6,400 daily riders single-seat ride into Philadelphia.

The analysis presented five action items that need to be completed to move forward:

Feasibility Assessment of New Service: A service operator must be

identified and obtain their commitment to being part of the project. SEPTA was identified as a potential service operator because of the SEPTA-owned Philadelphia to Norristown portion of the corridor and existing Regional Rail operations provided by SEPTA in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. A detailed infrastructure analysis and service feasibility assessment will need to be completed.

Operational Feasibility Study by Norfolk Southern: The sponsor would provide Norfolk Southern funds for an assessment of the capacity for passenger trains and freight trains to operate on the NS network without impact on the corridor.

Obtain Local Support and Determine Funding Sources: The Sponsoring Agency can avail themselves of resources to provide a local share of construction funding and continued operational support and subsidy. The analysis identified the funding component as a lengthy process that impacts the overall project schedule. The analysis identified potential local sources: Property Taxes, Income Taxes, Sales Taxes, Parking and Fuel Taxes, Utility Taxes, Toll Revenue Reallocation, Business Activity Taxes, License and User Fees, or other taxes and fees.

Preparation of Planning and Environmental Documents: The preparation of project plans and environmental clearances will enable subsequent design and construction work to proceed and can be a requirement to seek public funding.

Execution of Preliminary MOU between Owner, Operator, and Funding Entity: An MOU between Norfolk Southern, the proposed operator, and the sponsor will layout guidelines for each party and establish project expectations.

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