

HEAVY RAIL-FREIGHT AND COMMUTER RAIL: Within the Study Area, the CSX freight rail line shares its tracks with Amtrak and VRE. VRE passengers can embark and disembark at L'Enfant Station. Amtrak passengers board and disembark at Union Station, which is also the terminus for the Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC) service. VRE and MARC are either at or nearing their daily ridership capacity. Both rail lines have identified the need to improve operations and to expand their service to meet ridership demands and projected growth. MARC's desired plan is to extend service past Union Station into northern Virginia, providing a stop at L'Enfant Station. While this will place more demands on the shared tracks, it will have other benefits. It will provide access to jobs and tourist destinations, contribute to the regional economy, reduce congestion at the Metro Center and Gallery Place stations, and improve rider experience. Amtrak, VRE, and MARC are studying how to expand service at Union Station to accommodate significant increases in commuter and regional rail and high speed rail service over the next 20 years.

CSX's current National Gateway project proposes to improve the flow of freight between the Mid-Atlantic and the Midwest States. To increase the movement of freight through the corridor, CSX is proposing to expand and upgrade tracks, equipment, and facilities. To accommodate double-stack rail cars, CSX proposes to reconstruct the Virginia Avenue tunnel and lower the tracks through the Maryland Avenue corridor to accommodate vertical clearance. Although these projects will improve the movement of freight through the corridor, the two-track Long Bridge across the Potomac River will limit the movement of freight and passengers. Therefore, the city is undertaking a Long Bridge expansion feasibility study to evaluate how to increase capacity through the corridor. The track work within the Maryland Avenue right-of-way provides the opportunity to increase the number of tracks and increase the clearance necessary to deck the corridor to construct a new at-grade Maryland Avenue.

Some of the constraints and competing needs that need to be addressed to improve freight and commuter rail service within the area include:

- › bottlenecks caused by constrained infrastructure along the corridor: two-track capacity across the Long Bridge, the three-track rail corridor; and the single platform at L'Enfant Station that requires two-way trains to share one track and a single-loaded platform to board and disembark passengers;
- › train propulsion methods (electric vs. diesel) which require different infrastructure systems;
- › pedestrian transfer operations between systems (vertical and horizontal access) and access to trains and platforms (the number, length, and elevation of the platforms).

The L'Enfant Plaza Metro Rail Station entrances are located near or within the Maryland Avenue and 7th Street corridors. With four Metro rail lines—Green, Yellow, Orange, and Blue—converging at L'Enfant Plaza Metro Rail Station, it is one of the busiest in the system with 23,000 daily riders exiting the station during the weekday and 5,000 riders exiting on the weekend. The Green Line is one of its heaviest used routes. The nearby Smithsonian Station—Orange and Blue Lines—logs an average of 16,000 riders exiting on a weekday. WMATA's 2040 Regional Transit System study is considering a range of new lines, stations, and inner-line connections to add capacity to meet growing ridership demands on both track and station infrastructure. These improvements will help to relieve congestion on the Green Line and at L'Enfant Station and provide the opportunity to improve Metro access for residents and visitors south of the Southwest Freeway.

The number of transit services that converge in the Study Area and the proximity of L'Enfant Station to Union Station create an unparalleled opportunity to make L'Enfant Station a regionally important transit hub. There are two metro entrances within a block and 7th Street is a surface transit corridor for local and commuter bus, as well as a planned dedicated street-car line. In addition, the expansion of Amtrak service at Union Station will limit the ability for VRE and MARC to expand their Union Station service. Therefore, improving L'Enfant Station to accommodate expanded VRE and MARC service will help to maximize regional commuter rail transit capacity.