Dual On-Dock Rail Access at the Port of Virginia

Hampton Roads is served by both CSX and Norfolk Southern (NS). Currently, none of the three marine terminals at the Port of Virginia provide access to both Class I rail carriers. NS maintains the only on-dock facility at the Norfolk International Terminals (NIT). Containers unloaded at the Newport News Marine Terminal (NNMT) and the Portsmouth Marine Terminal (PMT) destined for the NS network are drayed to the NS intermodal facility in Chesapeake called Portlock. The containers destined for the CSX network are drayed from each of the three ports to the CSX intermodal facility just outside of PMT. The trip from PMT to the CSX intermodal terminal is less than a mile. This process, as described, applies to container movements in either direction between the ports and the rail intermodal facilities. Occasionally some containers are exchanged between NNMT and the NS rail facility at NIT.

When APM Terminals -Maersk (APMT) proposed to construct a private marine terminal in Portsmouth, a plan to provide dual carrier rail access to the proposed terminal was required by APMT prior to advancing its port terminal development. A rail service concept was provided to APMT and validated through an outside consultant company. Both CSX and NS presented proposals to APMT to provide dual Class I service to the Commonwealth Railway, the shortline that would provide connecting dual access to the terminal site. Similarly, the development efforts of APMT has led to the Virginia Port Authority (VPA) advancing a design build proposal to construct the median rail line that would create sufficient capacity to provide dual Class I rail access to serve VPA's planned Craney Island Marine Terminal (CIMT). Like with APMT, dual access to CIMT would be achieved through the connecting Commonwealth Railway.

Providing access for more than one Class I rail carrier could benefit the Commonwealth significantly by increasing the rail share of container cargo, reducing truck traffic, attracting more steamship lines, and building redundancy into the system. Currently, 25 percent of the cargo leaving the port does so by rail, 70 percent by truck and 5 percent by barge. Dual rail access at both NIT and PMT could eliminate more than 90,000 truck trips per year.

Dual rail access to the port provides an advantage for the shippers and terminal operators through stimulating competition and multiple market availability to different inland terminals. Providing for dual access to new port development is more easily achieved than through established port rail facilities where the existing railroad is protective of its franchise and the capital investments made to achieve its exclusive access. Additionally, access changes to established ports create cascading issues that could impact a railroad's competitive advantage and access to other ports both in the Commonwealth and along the Eastern seaboard.

Virginia Freight Advisory Committee (VFAC) Recommendation

Consider appropriateness for further study to determine the benefits of unimpeded rail access at key locations.

VTrans Technical Committee Recommendation

Further evaluate the VFAC recommendation.

The public benefits (e.g., reduction in truck miles, air emissions, and transportation costs) may justify the need for the Commonwealth of Virginia to take the lead and work toward creating an integrated rail network that would significantly reduce local truck drays between rail intermodal facilities and the marine terminals.