

P.O. Box 216
Washington Grove, MD
20880

28 December 2009

Representative Chris Van Hollen
51 Monroe Street, Suite 507
Rockville, MD 20850

Honorable Mr. Van Hollen:

The Town of Washington Grove in Montgomery County—one of 157 municipalities in the State of Maryland and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places—needs your help on a Federal issue of grave concern.

As you are aware, CSX has proposed their National Gateway Clearance Improvement Project. To date, the project has received \$395 million in funding commitments from CSX Corporation and its affiliates. States involved in the project, including Maryland, are expected to fund \$189 million, with an additional \$258 million requested from the federal government. In order for the project to succeed, CSX will have to resolve 61 bottlenecks on the East Coast rail lines that currently restrict their use of “double-stack” freight trains because the height of the underpasses are not adequate for clearance. Fourteen of these restricted tracks are in Maryland. CSX has been holding information sessions in affected communities to meet their requirement for public input on proposed solutions. The Town of Washington Grove (Town) and surrounding communities have met with CSX in public fora, and I, as Mayor of the Town, have met individually with them three times.

The focus of the bottleneck affecting the Town is known as the East Deer Park “Humpback” bridge, which has been an integral part of the history of our Town for more than 100 years, and was recognized as such when the Town was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

CSX has proposed 4 potential solutions for increasing clearance at the Humpback Bridge—removal, raising the current bridge by 4 feet, tearing down the old bridge and building a new bridge at the higher clearance, or lowering the tracks by 3-4 feet. To our dismay, CSX is discounting the only acceptable solution to the Town, lowering the tracks, although they are proposing lowering the tracks in 6 of the other locations in Maryland. I understand they have a challenge in lowering the tracks at our bridge, mainly because of a short length where there is very little horizontal space to work, but they certainly have engineers who can meet this challenge.

In the past year, the Town has worked with Montgomery County to resolve issues regarding rotting timbers and the surface of the bridge. This culminated in a \$500,000 repair that was completed on August 28, 2009. The County said at the time that with

regular maintenance the bridge will last another 50-75 years. For a Town that has been in existence for 136 years—as a Methodist Camp Meeting site established in 1873 and later as an incorporated municipality in 1937—we view the long-term survival of our Town in much more than 50-75 years, but subsequent generations will have to do their part after the current residents are gone.

The Humpback Bridge currently has become eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (see attached letter from J. Rodney Little, Director and State Historic Preservation Officer of the Maryland Department of Planning, Maryland Historic Trust).

I am asking for you to intervene on behalf of the Town and implore CSX to lower the tracks at the Humpback Bridge. I will meet with you or your staff to provide more detail if needed. This is a very time-sensitive issue because CSX is hoping to push forward with their plans by the summer of 2010. I also want you to know that the Town supports the concept of improvement of the rail system to carry more freight and commuters. We support reducing the number of long-haul trucks and understand the environmental savings that may occur with greater reliance on rail traffic, but CSX will reap great monetary benefits from their project and the small benefit the Town is asking for is inconsequential to them.

The Town also understands that lowering the tracks will cause some disruption to freight traffic, but minimal disruption to commuter train traffic, during the 2-3 month construction phase. Similar disruptions will occur during any of the proposed solutions. Lowering the tracks also will be more cost effective than any other solution except removing the bridge, a solution untenable to Gaithersburg and Montgomery County. Raising the bridge or building a new bridge will require condemnation of substantial Town property and will result in 7-10 foot retaining walls in resident's back yards.

Thank you for any efforts you can to protect Washington Grove and our historic resources. Please contact me at the Town Office at 301-926-2256 if you want to discuss this further.

Best regards,

Darrell Anderson, Mayor
The Town of Washington Grove
<http://washingtongrovemd.org>

Attachment