

Stop The CSX Big Dig

What you see now when you cross under the freeway from Capitol Hill into the Navy Yard neighborhood is the result of considerable federal, local, and private investment. It's a neighborhood that has emerged over the last decade under the promise and expectation that each new project will go one step further to stitch our long-severed communities back together. The proposed CSX Virginia Avenue Tunnel expansion, regardless of which of the existing build alternatives is chosen, threatens both the progress and community connections that have already been made, as well as the progress and redevelopment that is still to come.

The community of residents bordering the tunnel is large and diverse: young families, seniors, people with disabilities, people of varying income levels—some with more choice than others where they live, and all of whom will be dramatically impacted by this project. CSX has been showering money on the community in an effort to engender good will. But no amount of CSX ads at Nats Park will make up for the damage CSX will do to our children's and seniors' health, make up for the environmental impact of the majestic trees CSX will fell, or prevent the noise, frustration, risk, and severed connections between Navy Yard and Capitol Hill.

It still isn't clear how close CSX plans to dig next to existing homes and apartments along Virginia Avenue and I Street SE, how emergency vehicles are expected to reach homes along the construction path, how air quality will be affected, what construction area safety measures will be put in place, how pedestrian and bike routes will be preserved, and what the sound and vibration levels will be. What is clear is that over the four years that this has been under consideration, the proposed construction timeline has grown from "two to three" years, to up to six years, and that the build "alternatives" left at this point in the process aren't alternatives at all, most being variations on the

same theme: freight trains running in an open trench along what is now Virginia Avenue SE.

If you are a regular at Garfield Park, Canal Park, or Yards Park, a DCPS or Capitol Hill Day School family, a member of Results, a homeowner who may be interested in renting or selling your home in the immediate work area, a Nats fan, a fledgling Navy Yard neighborhood business owner or patron, or if you regularly use the on/off ramps to the Southeast Freeway, this project will affect you negatively. Demand that our community voice be heard and voice your concerns to Delegate Norton, Mayor Gray, and Councilmember Wells. This destructive project will soar forward unless our leaders continue to hear that there are significant concerns that will not only affect our environment, health, and quality of life, but also the incredible work that has been done to develop, promote, and reconnect the Navy Yard neighborhood with Capitol Hill.

At this stage, until CSX, the Federal Highway Administration, and the District Department of Transportation answer critically important questions about how the proposed build alternatives will address our health, safety, environment, quality of life, and community connections, and present meaningful alternatives that look into re-routing trains during or instead of construction, the only reasonable option for our elected leaders and the community at large to pursue is to join me, the Sierra Club, Capitol Hill Restoration Society, Committee of 100, and Capitol Quarter 1 Homeowners' Association in calling for the only alternative that at this point makes any real community sense: No Build.

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Thank You Tommy

We would like to thank Councilmember Tommy Wells for his recent letters to DDOT/FHWA and the Fire/

Emergency Medical Services Department regarding the CSX Virginia Avenue Tunnel project. In writing these letters he has advocated for the safety of his constituents and political transparency.

We agree with Wells: freight rail should not increase its operations through the high-density historical treasure that is Capitol Hill and the recently-revitalized Navy Yard. We also agree that residents deserve process transparency, decision transparency, and viable build alternatives that reroute trains during construction - if not permanently. All have been missing from the NEPA process to date.

DDOT/FHWA need to publicly disclose how much additional right of way CSX would receive from the district and/or federal government, who would make these decisions, and what the city would get in return.

We would go further and make this request: CSX, which has a powerful lobbying operation, must make public all donations made to local community groups, churches, business organizations, individuals, and others, so residents are clear about potential conflicts of interest. Absent this transparency, many residents have come to the conclusion that CSX is trying to buy influence far beyond what is reflected in lobbying disclosure reports.

Finally, as a community with a large population of seniors and young children, we fully support Wells' letter to the Fire Chief requesting emergency response plans in case of derailment or other rail accidents—potentially involving hazardous materials. (The CSX Howard Street Tunnel derailment/fire in 2001 provides a powerful lesson on the importance of coordinated emergency planning and responses.) We have not seen any outreach by CSX or local government on this critical issue. We are grateful to Wells for involving emergency responders in the dialogue, so they can publicly address the increased risks during and following any construction.

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Remembering Sid Yudain

My first editor was Roll Call founder Sid Yudain, who died Oct. 20 at age 90. I met him in the early 1970s through his sister Charlotte, a dear friend and neighbor. Newlyweds, Peter and I lived in a tiny apartment at first and D Streets SE. Charlotte and her beloved dachshund Sable lived downstairs.

Eventually she introduced us to her brother Sid, who operated the (then) weekly Roll Call, which covered Congress in a folksy, lighthearted way. Charlotte was his business manager. In 1975, Sid asked me to write a weekly gossip column. I shared this social beat with Lois Romano who later wrote for The Washington Post. I recall fighting good naturedly with Lois over the one electric typewriter in Roll Call's modest digs at 428 Eighth St. SE. For my column, I visited Congressional offices, asking about birthdays, weddings, babies, etc. Not exactly earthshaking news, but it was fun and I learned a lot. Later I launched a Congressional recipe column.

Sid could be crusty and gruff, but he was a shrewd journalist and good teacher. He also made the best soups in town. His parents—like many Jews—had emigrated from Russia in the early 20th century, bringing tasty soup recipes with them. In Russia, people existed mainly on soup mainly because it was nutritious and inexpensive, Sid told me. Here in Washington, Sid showcased his soups (especially short rib sauerkraut) at his famous parties.

At those lively soirees, Sid played the saxophone, accompanied by other musically-inclined friends. A frequent guest was humorist Mark Russell, whom Sid had discovered emceeding at a strip joint called the Merryland Club. At Sid's gatherings, Mark would test his joke material before delivering them at the long-gone Marquis Lounge in the Shoreham Hotel. Before Sid and his wife Lael started their family (Rachel and Raymond), they lived on 10th St. SE. Soon they moved to Upper Northwest and later, to Arlington.