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CSX Tunnel Project Draws Host of Negative Comments

A wide range of comments against the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the CSX Tunnel expansion proposal were submitted to the Federal Highway Administration and the District Department of Transportation by this week's Thursday deadline. Individuals, organizations, and families pointed to the apparent pre-approval of the project before the EIS started its analysis, the lengthy environmental, traffic and human impacts and dangers of the construction plan, the questionable legality of many of the already-made decisions, the lack of attention to planned passenger and commuter rail expansion and the "decades" of use still possible for the present tunnel, thereby refuting CSX's central argument that the tunnel has to be replaced immediately.

"The EIS was predetermined before it even commenced," said James McPhillips, a nearby resident. "The execution of the EIS is riddled with conflicts of interest and lack of objectivity, suggesting a violation of federal and District laws if the decision is made based on this FEIS." McPhillips also highlighted the danger trackside residents will face during construction. "CSX plans to run freight trains loaded with hazardous materials and highly flammable crude oil through an open and uncovered trench inside a complex construction zone. This is unsafe and dangerous." Furthermore, McPhillips challenged CSX's core claim the tunnel needs to be repaired immediately because it's old and in disrepair. "The FEIS states the opposite. In fact the EIS submits that the tunnel has at least a 'few decades' left of useful life and is in no danger of collapse."

A group of homeowners living alongside the project, represented by the Capitol Quarter Community Association, urged "that no 'build option' be chosen as the preferred alternative because of the extreme environmental, traffic, and human impact" the present plan will have on them. They also questioned whether the "secret agreement between DDOT and CSX" in fact gives CSX the right-of-way it needs to complete the project.

DCSR is a coalition of citizens, organizations, and elected officials asking for accountability and oversight in ensuring the community's health, safety, and security in the Virginia Avenue Tunnel expansion project.



Recapping comments it has made previously, the citywide Committee of 100 on the Federal City said that the EIS “refuses to consider commuter and passenger rail plans” as proposed by the District Office of Planning, the National Capital Planning Commission, MARC, VRE and Amtrak. And, by only considering the tunnel in isolation, the EIS ignores the “the physical constraints that limit the ability to accommodate the need for increased freight, passenger and commuter traffic.”

The FEIS comment period was supposed to be the last stage of the EIS consideration before the “Record of Decision” is issued. However, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson and DC Councilmember Mary Cheh have all requested District Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration delay any action until after the August 26th DC Council hearing on the CSX Tunnel and until after the DC Council returns from its summer recess on September 15th. So far their requests have gone unanswered. DCSafeRail continues to request federal and District elected officials put the project’s approval on hold until the Council is able to complete its comprehensive rail plan, which will analyze, among other issues, how to accommodate expanded passenger and commuter rail service along with increased freight traffic.

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