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Norton Joins Councilmembers' Request to Delay Decision on CSX Tunnel

Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton has asked the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to delay making a final decision on CSX's proposed expansion of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel until September 15, 2014. Norton's request joins DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson and Ward 3 Councilmember Mary Cheh's parallel request to the District Department of Transportation (DDOT). Norton has also asked for an extension of the review and comment period.

Noting that the city has "serious concerns," Norton's August 4th letter requests that FHWA respect the DC Council's desire to conduct proper investigation and oversight. This includes an August 26th hearing, at which councilmembers will look for DDOT to explain the "agreements made between CSX and DDOT prior to the issuance of the draft [Environmental Impact Statement]."

"We are thrilled that Congresswoman Norton is supporting the councilmembers' no-decision request so there can be a fair process and proper oversight," said Helena Smolich, DCSafeRail member. "The August 26th hearing will be the first opportunity to investigate DDOT's pre-approval of the project, as reflected in agreements revealed for the first time with the issuance of the Final Environmental Impact Statement in July. We then expect federal and District elected officials to support DCSafeRail's request to put the project's approval on hold until the Council is able to complete a comprehensive rail plan, which is needed to ensure a holistic review and a fair process."

The Council's rail plan will analyze, among other issues, how to accommodate expanded passenger and commuter rail service, along with increased freight traffic. The Committee of 100 on the Federal City has demonstrated that the proposed expansion of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel would prioritize freight passing through the city over people commuting to and from the city.

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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.