

NC gets federal grant to buy corridor for Raleigh-Richmond high-speed rail

Herald-Sun By Richard Stradling September 18, 2020

RALEIGH – The effort to establish high-speed passenger rail service between Raleigh and Richmond, Virginia, got a boost Friday with a \$47.5 million federal grant to the N.C. Department of Transportation.

The money will allow the state to buy a rail line between Raleigh and Ridgeway, near the Virginia state line, from freight railroad CSX. The grant was announced late Friday by Democratic Reps. David Price and G.K. Butterfield and both of North Carolina's Republican U.S. senators, Richard Burr and Thom Tillis.

North Carolina and Virginia have been planning for high-speed passenger trains through the two states since 1992 and have long coveted access to CSX's so-called S-line between Raleigh and Petersburg.

Price called the acquisition of the rail line in North Carolina "a critical step" in developing intercity passenger rail service in the corridor, while Tillis said he was proud that members of both parties had worked together to secure the money.

Preserving our rail systems is crucial to future tourism and economic growth, and this funding will help ensure the S-Line in Eastern North Carolina is secure for generations to come," Tillis said in a written statement.

Last December, Virginia struck a deal to buy 65 miles of the CSX rail corridor from the state line north to near Petersburg. CSX also agreed to allow NCDOT to eventually acquire about 10 miles of railroad right-of-way in Warren County, between Ridgeway and the Virginia state line.

The tracks on the CSX line between Ridgeway and Petersburg were removed in the 1980s.

There are still tracks on the section between Raleigh and Ridgeway, but they are "under-utilized" by CSX, according to Jason Orthner, who heads NCDOT's rail division. CSX moves most of its freight on the so-called A-line through Fayetteville, Wilson and Rocky Mount, where the company is building a terminal to shift cargo containers between trucks and trains.

The state's long-term plans for rail service include passenger trains capable of going 110 mph between Raleigh and Richmond on the S-line. Orthner says the tracks also could be used eventually for commuter rail service between downtown Raleigh and Wake Forest.

Actual construction of the project is still years away, but NCDOT is working to eliminate railroad crossings on the CSX line in Wake County by building bridges, starting with Durant and New Hope Church roads in Raleigh.