



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA  
Office of the  
SECRETARY of TRANSPORTATION

## Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail Update

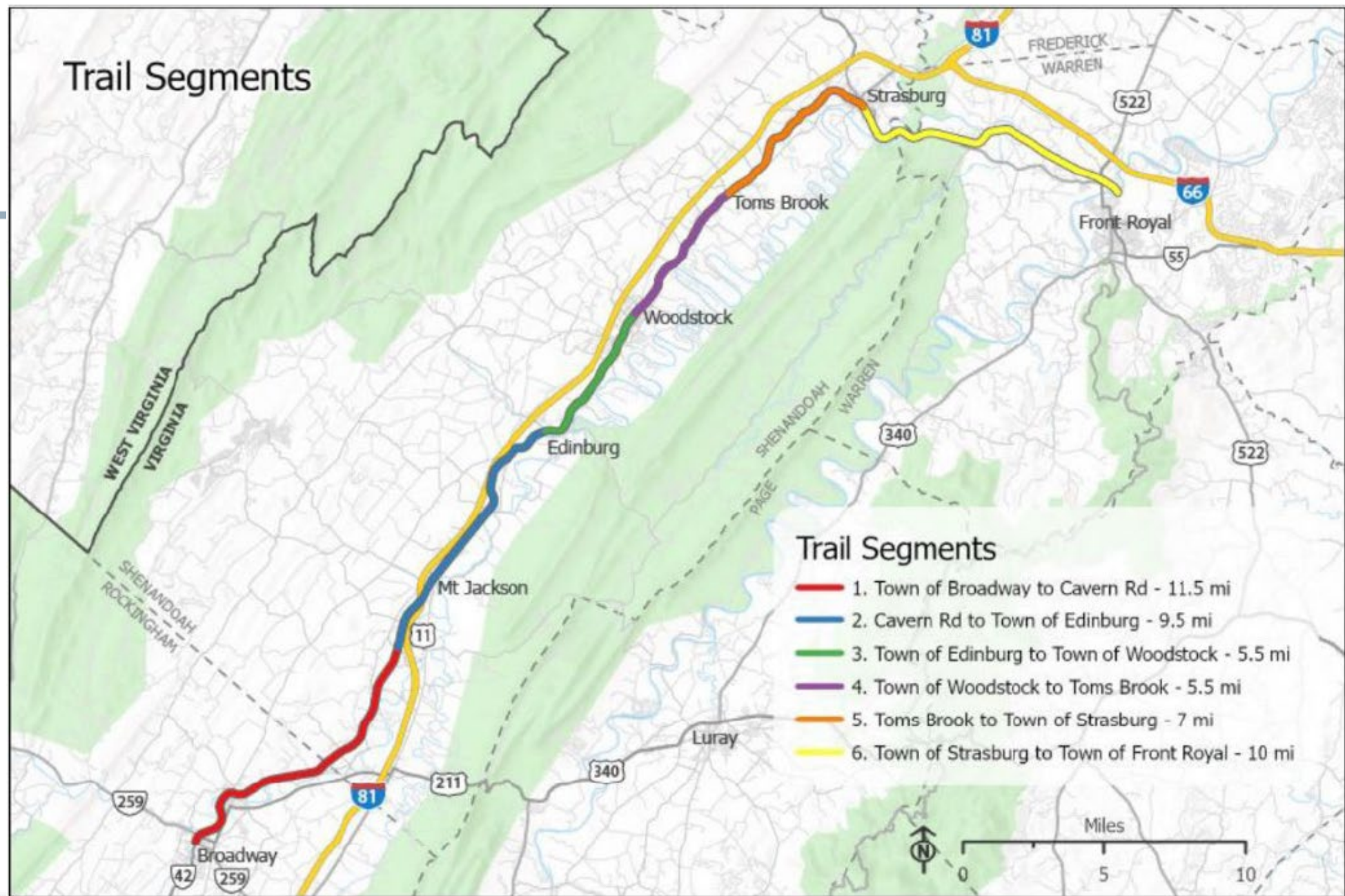
John Lawson  
Deputy Secretary of Transportation

December 9, 2025



# Background

- There is interest in developing a trail on the Norfolk Southern (NS)-owned rail corridor that traverses the Shenandoah Valley between the Town of Broadway in Rockingham County, and the Town of Front Royal in Warren County
- The General Assembly requested a feasibility study on a rails-to-trails conversion of the corridor through a joint study effort by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and VDOT
  - The report from that effort was published in 2021 under the title, ‘Feasibility Study for a Linear Park in the Shenandoah Valley’
  - Public survey and outreach found widespread support for the project





# Background

- In 2023, the General Assembly provided funding for the development of trails
  - Stipulated that up to \$35.0 million shall be allocated to the Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail (SVRT) for the purposes of land acquisition, initial planning, and site development and stated that the related efforts shall not preclude options that would maintain rail transportation in the corridor
- To address the budget language, VDOT assessed the constraints, considerations, and costs for constructing a trail alongside the subject rail line as an alternative to the previously studied rail-to-trail option

# Trail with Rail Assessment

- **The assessment was completed in three phases:**
  - **Phase 1: Alternatives Analysis (March 2025)**  
Evaluated and identified typical sections that could accommodate a rail-with-trail alternative
  - **Phase 2: Corridor Assessment (September 2025)**  
Conducted field evaluations of track and structure conditions & perform public outreach campaign
  - **Phase 3: Assessment Findings (November 2025)**  
Developed cost estimates and documentation of assessment outcomes

# Our Recommendations

- The trail concept should advance, together with preservation of the railroad corridor for potential future rail service
  - The corridor currently does not have rail service and the rail infrastructure would need extensive upgrades to reintroduce service
- With future rail service considerations, transfer the project to the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA)
- VPRA would partner with the Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation (SVBF) to execute development
- This approach is consistent with the 2021 feasibility study which identified involvement by a state agency or a regionally-sponsored nonprofit as potential methods of owning and maintaining the rail corridor

# The Parties

---

- **VPRA is responsible for promoting, sustaining, and expanding the availability of passenger and commuter rail service in the Commonwealth**
  - **Excursion trains and/or other passenger train service may be options in the future if the rail features are retained**
  - **Has experience working with railroad owners and operators**

# The Parties

- **The Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation (“SVBF”) is uniquely suited to be the managing partner for the Shenandoah Valley Rail Corridor**
  - **The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District was established by Congress under The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District (District) Act in 1996**
  - **The Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation was formed to serve the role as the lead managing partner of the District**
  - **SVBF is charged to investigate the establishment of a Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District Walking Trail**
  - **Governor or his representative serves on the Board**



# The Process

- **Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation (SVBF) would be the purchaser of the corridor**
  - SVBF would have the right to restore rail infrastructure, introduce excursion passenger rail service and explore freight rail
- **VPRA would have the right to introduce commuter or intercity passenger rail service in the distant future**
- **VPRA would serve as the state party to facilitate acquisition of the corridor by SVBF from NS and supply grant funding to SVBF for the development of the trail**
  - VPRA and SVBF agree in concept

# Commonwealth's Transactional Goals

- Facilitate SVBF's acquisition from NS of the 48-mile Shenandoah RR corridor between Front Royal and Broadway
- Supply residual grant funding to SVBF for trail design and construction
- Cap maximum financial contribution at \$35M (the amount of funding appropriated by the General Assembly)
- Avoid taking on liabilities / responsibilities that would come with direct Commonwealth ownership
- Preserve corridor (land) for future RR use by easement granting the exclusive right (but not duty) to introduce intercity and/or commuter rail service in the future
- Reasonably preserve usable railroad assets from avoidable deterioration
- Have an option to acquire (at no or nominal cost) the purchased RR corridor if SVBF does not fulfill its duty to design and construct the recreational trail timely

# Commonwealth's Duties and Rights

## Commonwealth duties

- Supply \$23M for corridor acquisition
- Supply residual grant funding (by reimbursements) to SVBF for trail development (with no additional financial commitment once grant funding is fully consumed)

## Commonwealth rights

- Review and approve trail design plans
- Rehab rail and introduce commuter and/or intercity passenger rail
- Must consent before any abandonment proceedings started
- Acquire corridor (at no or nominal cost) upon SVBF default

# SVBF's Duties and Rights

## SVBF Duties

- Enter purchase/sale agreement with NS
- Satisfy STB approvals
- Design / construct a recreational trail
- Submit annual progress report to SOT
- Maintain railroad assets generally in equal or better condition compared to current
- Refrain from abandonment proceedings unless VPRA approves

## SVBF Rights

- Rehab rail and introduce excursion service
- Explore opportunity and feasibility of freight rail

# Next Steps

---

- **VPRA board meets on 12/16/2025**
  - Request VPRA board to authorize DJ Stadler to revise the VPRA budget to accept the funds from the CTB and provide funding for the SVRT effort
- **Request CTB action in January 2026**
  - Transfer of unspent funds to VPRA
  - CTB approval of MOA with VPRA concerning the use of the funds