



NEWS RELEASE

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**GROUP FORMS TO BRING PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE  
TO VIRGINIA'S NEW RIVER VALLEY**

**BLACKSBURG, April 14, 2015** -- Leaders from throughout Virginia's New River Valley region have formed a partnership to bring passenger rail service to the area by 2020. With AMTRAK passenger rail coming to Roanoke in 2017, community leaders are hopeful that the Commonwealth of Virginia will support extending the service to communities comprising the largest urban concentration west of Roanoke. The group dubs itself, "New River Valley Rail 2020, Putting Passengers on Track."

"The New River Valley, particularly the areas around our universities, has experienced strong growth over the last several decades. We believe that, given the strong demand for service in Lynchburg, which has been used heavily by riders from Roanoke and points west, we can demonstrate enough demand right here to justify extending service to our region," said Ray Smoot, co-chair of the steering committee and retired chief executive of the Virginia Tech Foundation. In the last census, Montgomery County passed Roanoke County in size and is the most populated county west of Albemarle County, Smoot added.

The planning committee is populated by senior officials from the counties of Montgomery and Pulaski; towns of Pulaski, Christiansburg, and Blacksburg; City of Radford; Radford University and Virginia Tech; Virginia Tech Foundation; New River Valley Planning District Commission; New River Valley Economic Development Alliance; The Blacksburg Partnership, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, and the New River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization. The offices of Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, Congressman Morgan Griffith, State Senators John Edwards and Ben Chafin, and Delegates Joseph Yost, Nick Rush, and Sam Rasoul have also lent support.

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“We are convinced that our region is primed for rail and will support it. Passenger rail is resurgent throughout the nation. We believe that we have the institutional support necessary to convince state government of the need. Now, we plan to engage our community to understand their desires, prove rider demand, and build the grass roots support,” said Wally Nelson, steering committee co-chair and vice president at SIA Group in Blacksburg.

The New River Valley Planning District office will soon launch a market demand study. “We are partnering with the New River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization to identify potential station locations, as well as information about the types of travelers who would use passenger rail service in the New River Valley,” said Kevin Byrd, Executive Director of the NRV Planning District Commission.

“We are releasing a series of surveys and hope that anyone interested in passenger rail will participate.”

As part of these efforts, the Planning District Commission is gathering information about the travel habits of regional residents, visitors and university students, and has developed a survey to collect information from these groups. The survey results will help our regional partners to understand potential passenger rail use, and ensure that a new station would offer the services that travelers want the most. All survey responses are anonymous.

The survey takes about 5 minutes to complete and is online available at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/nrvrailsurvey>.

Additional information can be found at: <http://www.nrvpassengerrail.org/> or [Facebook.com/nrvpassengerrail](https://www.facebook.com/nrvpassengerrail).

Questions concerning the market demand survey can be directed to Kevin Byrd, NRVPC Executive Director, at [kbyrd@nrvpdc.org](mailto:kbyrd@nrvpdc.org) or (540) 639-9313.

The Blacksburg Partnership is staffing and coordinating work of the NRV Rail 2020 steering committee. Questions can be directed to Diane Akers, President, [diane@blacksburgpartnership.org](mailto:diane@blacksburgpartnership.org), 540-443-2008. Co-chairs Wally Nelson ([wnelson@siagroup.net](mailto:wnelson@siagroup.net)) and Ray Smoot ([smootr@vt.edu](mailto:smootr@vt.edu)) may be available for comment.

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