



# Town of Ashland

*Center of the Universe*

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October 5, 2017

Ashland Citizens, Friends, Neighbors and Community Members,

Yesterday, we launched a website ([www.savedowntownashland.org](http://www.savedowntownashland.org)) enabling residents to easily add their comments into the public record of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). We are at a critical moment in the DC2RVA process, and your voices are needed to keep the trench or a third surface track out of Ashland.

JAMES R.  
FOLEY,  
MAYOR

STEVEN P.  
TRIVETT,  
VICE MAYOR

GEORGE F.  
SPAGNA, JR.,  
COUNCIL MEMBER

KATHLEEN K.  
ABBOTT,  
COUNCIL MEMBER

JOHN H.  
HODGES,  
COUNCIL MEMBER

JOSHUA S.  
FARRAR,  
TOWN MANAGER

ANDREA E.  
ERARD,  
TOWN ATTORNEY

JOSEPH A.  
COLLINS,  
CLERK OF COUNCIL

The Town Council is recommending the western bypass as the preferred alternative from the three remaining least objectionable alternatives. I would like to explain how we reached this decision, and to clear up some confusion in the community. Here are some of statements we most often hear:

### **Why didn't the Town try to work with our county neighbors to come up with a better alternative?**

We've been working with them for more than a year. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed specifically to bring together the people most affected by the proposed routes. The group examined two dozen alternatives – east, west and through town. In the end, the committee could not recommend a final alternative, because all of the options are harmful. Therefore, they brought forward the three “least objectionable,” which was the trench option, a modified western bypass option, and the 3-2-3 option.

### **Why can't the Town work with our neighbors now?**

We are at the end of a state-mandated process that neither the Town nor the County control. The public comment period closes next month, and then the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) will make its recommendation about the Ashland area at its December meeting. After that, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will issue its decision. The town has not stopped searching for a new solution, or ways to fight the process. We have even suggested a few creative solutions that move and contain the rail within the Town limits to DRPT since the CAC process concluded. But for now, it is imperative that we do everything we can to keep the trench out of downtown Ashland, and the public comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is our most powerful way to do that.

### **Why can't the Town oppose the trench, but not endorse the western bypass?**

There are two reasons. First, state representatives made it clear that simply saying “No” is ineffective, particularly for the impact that the public comment record will have on the final decision. Second, the group that represents our western neighbors,

Families Under the Rail (FUTR), publicly announced on September 7 that people should support the trench in their public comments on the DEIS, before the Community Advisory Committee even held its last meeting. At the very least, it is imperative that we “cancel out” any pro-trench comments already submitted in the public record during the 4 weeks of FUTR’s encouragement.

**Is the 3-2-3 really a dead option? Why should CSX control everything?**

CSX owns the rail lines, and publicly stated they will attempt to “veto” this option because they believe it negatively impacts on-time performance of freight deliveries. The 3-2-3 is also worrisome for the Town because it kicks the can down the road to a future date when significantly more rail traffic will clog the rail lines. If the CTB and FRA choose this option, in the near term it will be much better for the town as compared to the Trench and Third Rail options, but will likely leave a longer term unmet rail capacity that future generations will be forced to address.

**The trench will just be an inconvenience for the Town during construction. 24 homes will be lost if the western bypass is built.**

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation has identified 1 residence impacted by the chosen bypass alternative (AWB1): [DC2RVA\\_CAC\\_WesternBypass\\_ProConsList.pdf](#). There are many other landowners affected, but as we have stated before, people’s lives are dramatically impacted no matter where it goes. It is wrong to characterize the trench construction as an “inconvenience” to the Town. The price to be paid are the lives of people who could never anticipate that their choice to live and work in Ashland would mean a 5-10 year massive construction project right outside their door. The 3 years of construction suggested by the state is completely unrealistic. Recently, Amtrak showed us its latest designs to rebuild the Ashland station platform to make it ADA compliant. They anticipate at least *two years* of construction, just to improve a 300-foot platform. Businesses will be lost, possibly for decades, in the years preceding, during and after construction of a trench. Entire childhoods will be spent with a temporary road and fence only feet from front porches. Property values will plummet immediately. Moreover, we do not gain a park; we just lose the economic benefits of the trains. No one’s lives, livelihoods or futures are less important because of their choice of where to call home. For more information about the trench impacts based on documentation and comments provided by the DRPT: <https://youtu.be/32d7cPqsyuI> .

**The tracks should be kept in the current right-of-way. Ashland prides itself on being a train town, after all.**

The width of the right-of-way in Ashland is the same as it's been since the railroad was built 180 years ago. It is a tiny fraction of the width of the standard railroad right-of-way today, because the town was literally built on top of the tracks. To shoehorn a third track on the surface or dig a trench within that right-of-way would threaten all of our historic structures along the tracks, as well as kill our downtown's economy.

Mayor Foley noted in public comments (scroll to the end of the letter) on 10/11/2017 that this number is incorrect. There are, in fact, a varying number of homes at risk along each of the Western Bypass alternative routes.

**Won't supporting the Western Bypass just serve to split the community?**

The residents of the Town, and the residents of the County should not look upon one another with contempt. The strategy and decision to support the Western Bypass rests solely on the shoulders of the Town Council, based on the overwhelming feedback we received from our citizens on the devastating impact any option through Town would have on their homes, businesses and lives. As elected representatives of the Town of Ashland; the Council felt they were left with only one realistic option that would not destroy the lives and livelihoods of those they represent.

It is important to point out that there are no villains here. We are all victims of a federal project that – despite the necessity to increase rail capacity in the coming decades – has created this situation where we are forced to choose between two devastating alternatives. We are at this point *despite* everyone's passionate efforts not to be. In the end, Town Council has a responsibility to the citizens who elected us. We have to be able to look our residents in the eye and say, "We did everything possible to protect you and your investments in our town."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JRF', written over a vertical dotted line.

James R. Foley  
Mayor  
Town of Ashland, VA  
*The Center of the Universe*

Good Evening. I am James Foley, the Mayor of the town of Ashland.

A few weeks ago, the town reached out to DRPT regarding the possibility of another - different - trench location. We were not advocating or supporting another location - we were just exploring and looking for alternatives that would not destroy the town. We were informed that due to the late date - other trench options could **not** be explored in this DEIS process. We accept that – although the Center Street trench idea itself was very late to the process (less than two months ago) and has **not** been sufficiently analyzed. We believe the CTB can **NOT** possibly recommend the Center Street option to the FRA.

As I stand here, the 323 option is still on the table. The Town of Ashland cannot endorse this option, and here's why. The appeal of the 323 option is that it would allow us to unite the community. But it is a short-term solution at best.

We have to be clear. Whether in this DEIS process, or 20 years from now, the town can **never** support a third track – whether on the surface or in a trench. These options will in fact destroy our town. The narrow right-of-way through town simply can **not** support a third set of tracks. Period.

Our fear is that advocating for the 323 now will lead to an inevitable decision of a third track in the future. So while the 323 recommendation may be easier to make in the short term, we simply cannot support that option today. We fear that this leaves decision makers in twenty years with only that one option for additional rail capacity.

Tonight you will likely hear our western friends advocate for the trench. While this option will destroy the town, we do not take this personally. Advocating for the trench does not mean they are advocating for the destruction of our town. Our western friends simply do not want the bypass and many are acting from those concerns. We understand that.

Similarly, while we advocate for the western bypass, we are simply trying to save our town. We hope they will come to understand that.

I also need to acknowledge a mistake that I made in my most recent letter to the community. I quoted from the DEIS that only 1 home in the west would be “directly impacted” by the bypass. While that is in fact part of the DEIS, I did not realize that the chart was based upon the underlying zoning. In fact many homes in the west would be impacted and some destroyed. It would be devastating.

With that in mind, I would also ask that our friends in the west acknowledge that 57 homes and more than 30 businesses in town are at significant risk and could be destroyed from any third track option.

In closing I respectfully remind you that the Center Street trench option will destroy our town. There is simply not enough room in the right of way.

Secondly, I implore all of us -to consider what is truly dividing us here. We have been forced to make a choice by an entity larger than us. That entity is pitting neighbor against neighbor. Let us not give them the power to divide the good people of Hanover County.

Thank you.

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