July 6, 2017

Katie

 As we have discussed, the issue of train horns sounding in the vicinity of the VRE’s Crystal City station is not a new issue. VRE has been engaged in discussions with CSXT about this issue in the past, and is willing to assist in addressing the issue now.

For background, there are no explicit statutes or regulations mandating how a freight railroad must signal when a freight train is approaching a passenger station. The Federal Railroad Administration mandates signaling at grade crossings, but only directs freight railroads to develop appropriate means of signaling elsewhere such as at stations. At all times, the engineer operating a locomotive has discretion as to when and how to use train horns and bells.

 In 2014, in response to complaints from residents in Crystal City about train horns, VRE staff had discussions with CSXT about whether it was possible to revisit CSXT’s Operating Rules regarding how to signal freight train approaches to the Crystal City station. While these discussions did not lead to any specific commitment by CSXT, CSXT did take the matter into consideration internally and thereafter, in 2014, after working directly with the residents, CSXT decided to relax existing protocols at the Crystal City station. This relaxation consisted of using train horns only between 5:30 a.m. and 8 p.m. Monday through Friday.

 In response to concerns about train horns recently expressed by Crystal City residents, VRE staff and I spoke with CSXT officials about this issue and whether CSXT’s protocols could be revisited once more. This conversation, which just occurred, did not lead to anything definitive. However, the CSXT officials expressed a willingness to look into whether the changes made in 2014 are being adhered to, and whether anything more is possible while ensuring safe railroad operations.