





All Roads and Rails Will Lead to **Main Street**

Richmond's Main Street Station
Evolves into Modern Multimodal
Transportation Hub

13

By Jennifer Pullinger

It's hard to believe there was a time when Main Street Station, the historic train depot in downtown Richmond, was being considered for demolition. "It's so iconic architecturally. It's one of those landmarks that anyone would fight not to tear down," says Jeannie Welliver, City of Richmond project development manager. It's one of the oldest examples of French Renaissance architecture left in the country—and it's hard to miss. Motorists by the thousands on elevated I-95 get an intimate view of the ornate clock tower and terra cotta roof daily as they zoom by within a few yards at eye level.

Main Street Station, designed by Wilson, Harris, and Richards of Philadelphia, opened in 1901, and for the next 50 years served millions as a bustling and vibrant regional rail center. In the intervening decades, however, this National Historic Landmark survived its share of challenges: fires and floods, deterioration and obsolescence, and, ultimately, declining passenger traffic and the loss of Amtrak service to the less physically impressive Staples Mill Road Station in Henrico County.

Main Street Station no longer serves as the transit hub it was in its heyday, but that will change as plans for transforming

A sleek TDX train speeds out of Main Street Station.



the complex into a modern Multimodal Transportation Center roll forward to capitalize on its strategic location in the heart of Virginia. Two architecture firms currently working on the revitalization are SMBW Architects of Richmond and Beyer Blinder Belle of D.C.

Momentum for these changes came in 1991, when Richmond officials secured federal funding from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) to help reinvigorate Main Street Station as a Multimodal Transportation Center—

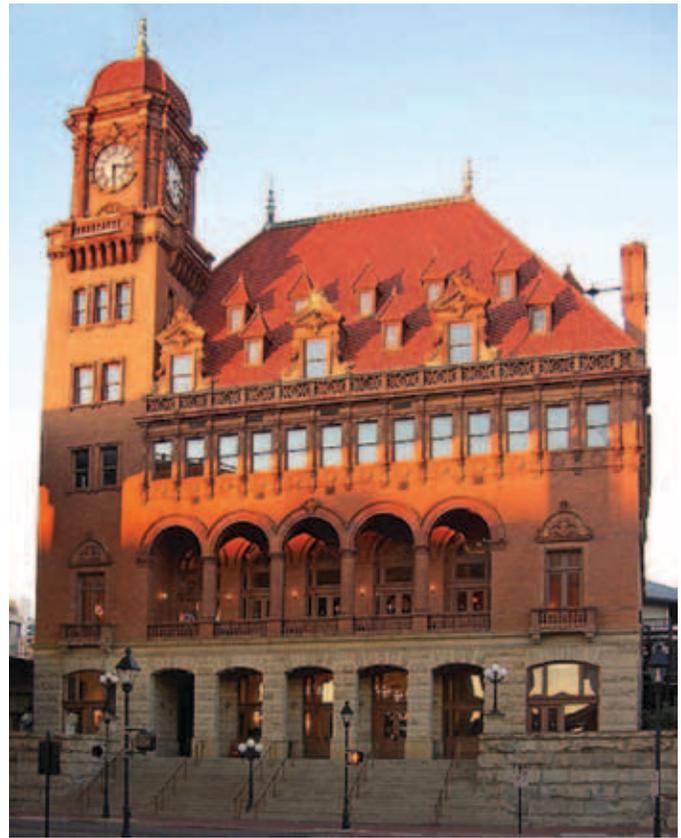
one that reconnects the capital to the national network of intercity high-speed passenger rail and other modes of travel. “Obviously high-speed rail is a huge economic game changer for this region if it’s delivered,” Welliver says.

Main Street Station is serviced by Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor—the only high-speed rail corridor in the U.S., but not by the Southeast Corridor, the fastest growing corridor in the country. Passengers have to hop aboard Southeast-bound trains at the Staples Mill Road Station. Ideally, planners want to



Instead of whizzing by, people in cars and trains will be more engaged with the multi-modal station.

Photo courtesy of the Greater Richmond Transit Company.



The front façade of the historic Second Renaissance Revival station.



Jennifer Pullinger (left, right)

Downtown Richmond from the station roof.

have Main Street Station serve as the connection point of those two corridors, but expensive track improvements are needed.

Meanwhile, planning for alternate modes of getting around is making headway. In addition to de-clogging congested highways and improving regional air quality, ISTEA funding is designed to help projects like Main Street Station make not only rail, but also buses, taxis, shuttles, bikes, even segways and pedestrian travel more accessible to the public.

A concept known as Bus Rapid Transit—the “rubber-

wheel” version of light rail—will be part of that plan. The GRTC Transit System is in the midst of reviewing the feasibility of establishing express bus service through the high-capacity Broad Street Corridor now, with Main Street Station as one of its stops.

The Plaza at Main Street Station, which debuted in 2007 and is located directly under I-95, is an intermodal site unto itself, with public parking spaces for vans, cars, bikes, and limousines and connections to the Canal Walk and Capital Bike



Trail. Four bus bays are also available to serve the motor coach industry, including Megabus, a low-cost intercity bus service first introduced to Richmond in late 2010, now serving 7,500 people a month. Back across the street, a bike transit, rental, and storage station; electric vehicle charging stations; and Zipcar accommodations will soon be added to the variety of options for getting around the city.

Main Street Station will eventually serve as a welcome and travel center for the greater Richmond area and for the 45 million travelers that motor by annually on I-95, Broad Street, and other nearby arterial roads. “We are going to have a visitor’s

center that showcases all of the best that Richmond has to offer, and now that we own the train shed, we’ve got the architecture and the space to deliver a travel and welcome center at a larger scale,” Welliver says.

Restoring the 100,000-sf train shed, which has one of the last riveted steel roof truss systems in the country, is one of the most exciting aspects of the revitalization of Main Street Station. In the mid-80s, the original open-air train shed was enclosed and became a corrugated metal discount shopping mall. Plans call for reopening the shed and installing glass plate in the walls, similar to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts’ new



Jennifer Pullinger (left), Photo courtesy of the Greater Richmond Transit Company.



The station already features welcoming amenities for visitors.

glazing structure.

“So you’ll have a platform on the interior perimeter of the train shed on both sides and then we are going to return the underside of the roof to a heavy timbered roof, replace the roof structure, and allow this to be read as an open shed structure,” Welliver says.

By making Richmond more accessible—by rail, car, bus, bike, or foot—officials hope to accommodate local commuters and further position the city, region, and state as a tourist destination. If Main Street Station truly goes multimodal, residents, businesses, visitors, and travelers alike will become more closely engaged with a capital city that has much to offer.

The grand opening of Richmond’s high-speed Trans-Dominion Express (TDX) rail service.