

Frequently Asked Questions: Freight Trains through the B&P Tunnel

Q If the purpose of the Project is to improve passenger rail, why will the tunnel be large enough for double stack freight?

A Amtrak design practices require new Northeast Corridor (NEC) infrastructure meet current standards, including double stack clearances. However, the new tunnel could not be used by double stack freight trains until substantial improvements are made to other NEC infrastructure.

Q Will more freight trains run through the new tunnel? If so, how many?

A It is unlikely that there will be an increase in the number of freight trains using the new tunnel in the foreseeable future. Norfolk Southern currently uses the existing B&P Tunnel to operate one round trip five days per week (i.e. ten trains per week) between its Bayview Yard in East Baltimore and customers south of Baltimore. There are no freight trains originating outside of Baltimore using the tunnel. The number of variables involved makes it virtually impossible to accurately forecast future freight usage. Therefore, due to the low probability of new freight customers south of Baltimore and the high cost of interconnecting freight lines with the NEC, Amtrak anticipates that the number of freight trains using the new tunnel will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.

Q Will hazardous materials be transported through the tunnel? What types of materials will be transported?

A Possibly. Federal law prohibits major freight railroads from refusing reasonable requests for their services, including the movement of hazardous cargo. Provided all of the safety requirements have been met, hazardous cargo may be transported on any of the freight lines in the region, including those using the existing or future B&P Tunnel. Hazardous materials that may be transported by rail include petroleum, chemical and nuclear products. It is possible that Norfolk Southern freight trains may currently carry these materials through the existing B&P Tunnel.

Q Will there be an emergency response plan to protect residents in the event of an emergency?

A The Federal Railroad Administration's Hazardous Materials Division administers a safety program that oversees the movement of hazardous materials throughout the nation's rail transportation system. FRA requires a range of measures that minimize the risk to the public, including container labeling, container durability standards, emergency response information, and safety and security plans. Local first responders receive training in hazardous materials incidents for specific facilities, including the B&P Tunnel. The tunnel would be constructed to meet current standards for fire protection and hazardous material detection.