

February 1, 2019

The Honorable Richard Neal
United States House of Representatives
300 State Street
Suite 200
Springfield, MA 01105

Dear Congressman Neal:

Following up on our chat on the train with you, Congressman Larson, and former CT Governor Malloy, I would like to elaborate on some of my points on the East-West Passenger rail study. In sum, CT's Capital Region should be included in calculating the ridership potential and economic benefits of the project.

The CT Capitol region here is made up of 38 towns and 1 million residents with many connections to Massachusetts in economic and transportation arenas. Tim Brennan of the Pioneer Valley and I have worked together on several major ventures over the years.

The Hartford Line passenger rail service recently began operating more frequent rail service between Springfield, Hartford, and New Haven with connections to New York City. This fast and convenient rail service strengthens the connection between our regions that already existed through the Interstate 91 corridor. It also builds upon our shared regional airport, Bradley International, located in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. While physically in Connecticut, it serves as the primary airport for the Pioneer Valley and is now more easily accessible from the Hartford Line.

Given these close links, we are very concerned that the East-West Passenger Rail study does not seem to include an analysis of the ridership potential from and to locations in Connecticut, with 1 million people residing in this region alone. Enhanced rail service in the East-West Corridor building on the Hartford line would be transformative for both Connecticut and Western Massachusetts. Just as the Hartford line considered Western Massachusetts in its planning, we believe that it only makes sense to include North Central Connecticut in the East-West passenger rail study.

Second, the scope of work that we have seen includes limited analysis of the potential for increased economic development. As you no doubt know, at the study's kickoff meeting participants were asked about what they view as most important to the study. The overwhelming response was economic development. We believe that this should be a key objective of the study for both states.

This passenger rail service would connect our combined region, which, as you know, we collectively call New England's Knowledge Corridor, to Boston and New York via fast and reliable rail. These connections have the potential to reposition both Springfield and Hartford as lower-cost secondary market locations for companies in Boston and New York. This connection also has the potential to increase the labor sheds of both regions, which, due to demographic changes, face similar labor force shortages in the coming decades.

The potential for transit-oriented development is also well documented in other regions and should be seriously examined in this study. A 2018 study by MassINC, titled "The Potential for Transformative TOD in Gateway Cities", included an extensive analysis of downtown station areas in Springfield and Worcester. It showed a large untapped buildout capacity in both cities that was hindered by local real estate market conditions and the limited rail service to Boston and New York. Similar conditions exist in Hartford. Rail service between Springfield and the Boston area (with its connection to the North-South Hartford Line) has the potential to improve those local real estate conditions. The Hartford Line is already producing promising early results with its connection to New York City. Those early successes can only be magnified and expanded by a connection to Boston.

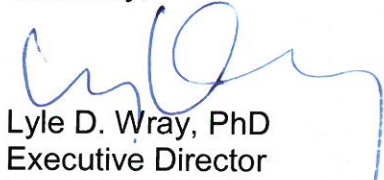
While we are primarily concerned with the positive impacts that could occur in New England's Knowledge Corridor, there is the potential for significant benefits in Boston as well. As you know, the Boston metro area is growing quickly. While beneficial to the local economy, this boom has strained the region's housing supply, increased congestion, and placed pressures on the local bus and rail system. An East-West connection could help redistribute some of that growth to markets farther West, lessening this strain on Boston's infrastructure and housing supply. The passenger rail service would broaden growth in terms of geography and in terms of social equity.

In addition, regarding environmental impacts, the recently released final report of Governor Baker's Commission on the Future of Transportation in the Commonwealth had a key recommendation (#10) that says: "Collaborate with other Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states to establish a regional market-based program to reduce transportation sector greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions". Implementing a cross border MA and CT passenger rail connection would be an ideal way to help move that recommendation forward to in turn, realize significant mutual environmental, economic and social benefits.

The Pioneer Valley and the Capitol Region have long recognized our interrelated economies and shared assets through our Knowledge Corridor Partnership. We jointly undertook a \$4 million Sustainable Communities Initiative project and have worked closely to promote Bradley Airport and the Hartford Line.

We urge your office to consider weighing in on asking MassDOT to expand the East-West Passenger Rail study scope to recognize our shared economy and history of collaboration and the reality of the large passenger market in our area.

Sincerely,



Lyle D. Wray, PhD
Executive Director
Capitol Region Council of Governments