

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 16, 2019
TO: CRCOG Policy Board
FROM: Lyle Wray, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Resolution Authorizing an Economic Impact Study of Rail Link to Boston

The resolution included in your packet authorizes CRCOG to spend up to \$50,000 in agency funds to commission an economic impact study of reestablishing a commuter rail link between the Hartford Line and Boston. Staff intend to solicit contributions from other entities in the region with an interest in transit-oriented development, to participate in the study.

The State of Massachusetts is currently conducting a study that is looking at reestablishing commuter rail along an East-West corridor between Worcester (with its existing commuter rail link to Boston) and Pittsfield, with stops in Springfield and other towns. If pursued, this link would provide the region with a convenient rail connection between the Hartford Line and Boston via Springfield. Our region would then have easy rail connections to both Boston and New York City, the two largest markets in the Northeast.

While Massachusetts is studying this link, there are important limitations to their study. One limitation is that they are not focusing on the ridership and economic potential of the Capitol Region and its one million residents. Another limitation is that the study does not include a full economic impact analysis of establishing this service. While it does include a basic benefit cost analysis (BCA), that analysis will not extend beyond travel time savings for riders and the immediate job creation that will result from construction and operations.

CRCOG staff have been working with a locally-based economist to develop a proposal for a study that would take a broader look at the potential economic impacts of this transformative service. The study would look at economic impacts accruing due to increased property values near rail stations, increased economic activity due to improved accessibility to Boston, increased transit-oriented development activity, and increased attractiveness of the region to segments of the workforce who are drawn to places rich with urban amenities. These impacts are not traditionally captured in BCAs and rely heavily on peer region research, making them more difficult to assess.

Once complete, the results of the study would be used to make the case for establishing rail service between Hartford and Boston.