

Rep. Richard Neal calls east-west rail a ‘priority’ at House hearing, cites success of New Haven-to-Springfield route

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6/10/2019 -Springfield- Congressman Richard Neal speaks at Union Station earlier this year. He advocated for east-west rail through Springfield Wednesday in Washington . (Don Treeger / The Republican)

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WASHINGTON — Ways and Means Chairman Rep. Richard E. Neal told the committee Wednesday that passenger rail connecting Boston, Worcester, Springfield and Pittsfield will be a priority as the U.S. House of Representatives considers a [\\$760 billion infrastructure program Democrats introduced Wednesday](#).

Neal opened a transportation funding hearing praising the 18-month-old CTrail Hartford Line, which links Springfield with New Haven, Connecticut. A pilot program continues service farther north along the Connecticut River valley.

“For me the concept of east-west rail expansion in Massachusetts will be a priority,” said Neal, D-Springfield. “The success that we had with the north-south rail link that we had with Springfield and Northampton was a substantial achievement.”

[The hearing was broadcast on the Ways and Means Committee’s YouTube channel.](#)

Earlier Wednesday, Neal and his colleagues in the House majority introduced their plan to spend \$760 billion over five years and create 10 million jobs through improvements to roads, bridges, transit systems, railways, airports, seaports, inland waterways, wastewater and drinking water systems, brownfields, and broadband internet.

At the hearing, Neal expressed his desire to apply a budget concept called dynamic scoring to any upcoming discussions of infrastructure investment.

Dynamic scoring means that lawmakers and analysts consider economic benefits from changes in behavior. For infrastructure, that would mean considering the jobs and business opportunities created by better infrastructure, like people in Springfield having an easier, quicker commute in to Boston.

“With each dollar spent, our nation becomes more competitive and prosperous,” Neal said.

Neal reminded Republicans that dynamic scoring was used to justify President Donald Trump’s tax cuts back in 2017.



1/15/2020 -Springfield- The CTrail 1:50pm train pulls out of Springfield's Union Station. The Springfield to New Haven CTrail line has been well received by people who commute to the Hartford area. (Don Treeger / The Republican)

Connecticut transportation officials said ridership on the CTrail Hartford Line passed the 1 million mark over the Thanksgiving weekend. The route launched June 18, 2018.

Hartford Line ridership grew at 25% year-over-year, according to the Connecticut Department of Transportation. The route is now expected to exceed 750,000 passenger trips during its second year, outpacing the 666,960 passenger trips originally forecast.

Massachusetts officials are studying the feasibility of east-west passenger rail, with a report expected this spring. The project advisory committee meets Feb. 6 in Springfield, and there is a public meeting set for 6-8 p.m. Feb. 12 at the UMass Center in Tower Square.

At a meeting this summer, state officials said a commuter train [trip from Springfield to Boston could take 80 to 105 minutes](#), but only if the state builds a new rail line along the Massachusetts Turnpike and connects it to Springfield Union Station and Worcester Union Station. The trip is about 90 minutes to just under two hours if new rails are built basically along the existing freight rights of way with curves straightened out.

At Wednesday's hearing in Washington, U.S. Rep. John Larson, D-Conn., said how to pay for it is always the sticking point with infrastructure.

"You'll hear great agreement up here until it comes to how do we pay for this," Larson said. "Then it becomes the dance of the tarantulas. No side is willing to stick its head out because the other side will lop it off."



U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal (MA-1) and John B. Larson (CT-1) held a press conference at Springfield Union Station to thank CT Governor Dannel Malloy in 2018. Larson and Neal talked infrastructure at a hearing Wednesday in Washington. (Hoang 'Leon' Nguyen / The Repub