

Metro Hartford-Springfield Rail Improvements Would Result in Major Economic Benefits

Connecticut and Massachusetts have the opportunity to complete the Hartford Line improvements and build the East-West Rail project in Massachusetts. This investment would reconstitute a 21st century version of the prior Inland Route—regular train service from Boston to New York via Worcester, Springfield, Hartford, and New Haven, which the region has now lacked for decades. These rail improvements would cost an estimated \$5 to \$8 billion to build. But their potential benefits are transformative—including a projected **\$47 to \$84 billion** in new regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over 30 years.

The compactness of Southern New England creates a natural rail market reinforced by two key trends: the push to decarbonize the economy in response to climate change, and a gravitation to smaller, well-connected cities in response to COVID-19. The proposed rail improvements would support frequent, transit-like commuter service between Springfield, Hartford, Windsor Locks/Bradley International Airport, and adjoining towns. High-performance intercity service would connect Hartford and Springfield to New Haven and Worcester and bring them within fast, frequent, reliable reach of New York City and Boston.

Here are some highlights of the report:

Decades of Disinvestment

- **A distinct and consequential region.** The Metro Hartford-Springfield area (defined in this study as Hartford County, CT, and Hampden and Hampshire Counties, MA) is a distinct and consequential economic region, with a population of 1.6 million, a GDP of \$120 billion, 20 colleges and universities, two historic downtowns, and New England’s second largest airport. As a metro area, it would rank as one of the 40 largest in the US. Nearby Worcester and New Haven have combined metro populations of 1.8 million. Yet the Hartford-Springfield economy is isolated and lagging.
- **A gap in the rail/transit network.** Hartford-Springfield lost most of its intercity rail service in the 1970s, and service all but disappeared from 2004 until the introduction of the Hartford Line in 2018. As a result, compared to the Northeast Corridor and other US metro areas, Hartford-Springfield has undergone a prolonged period of low rail use, as well as low combined rail and transit use.
- **A structural shortfall.** Since 1990, annual job growth in Metro Hartford-Springfield has lagged far behind that of the Northeast Corridor as a whole, representing about 130,000 jobs **not** created in this region. Slow job growth has been accompanied by an aging housing stock, slow population and wage growth, and widening inequalities of opportunity and income. In short, Metro Hartford-Springfield has fallen structurally behind the rest of the Northeast Corridor.

The Economic Opportunity

- **Missing growth sector jobs.** Some 20,000 to 40,000 jobs in information technology, finance, and professional services are “missing” from Metro Hartford-Springfield due to the lack of regional and intercity rail connectivity. These jobs, which have fueled growth elsewhere in the Northeast, are particularly attracted to rail/transit. With rail connectivity restored, these jobs can be attracted over time.
- **Transit-oriented development.** Between New Haven and Worcester, the Inland Route rail improvements would serve 16 existing and future rail stations. Recent and planned development in these station areas suggests a strong market of interconnected residential communities, employment centers, and public destinations. A capacity analysis reveals an aggregate station area potential of about 20 million square feet of commercial development and 30,000 housing units.
- **Economic benefits.** Together, these two outcomes—the gradual attraction of 20,000-40,000 “missing” professional service jobs and the construction of station-area development—account for an estimated \$47 to \$84 billion in directly generated regional GDP over 30 years, including \$27 to \$48 billion in wages. An additional \$15 to \$21 billion of indirect and induced GDP is estimated as well.

In summary, an investment of \$5 to \$8 billion in rail service is projected to generate \$47 to \$84 billion in new regional Gross Domestic Product over 30 years.