

REPORT OF THE WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS PASSENGER RAIL COMMISSION

NOVEMBER 21, 2023

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OPENING STATEMENT

This commission was established by the Legislature in the summer of 2022 a short time after Governor Baker, local officials and members of the western Massachusetts federal and state legislative delegations came together at Springfield's Union Station to publicly announce the Baker administration's intention to advance East-West Rail. Though details for a path forward were limited that day, there was broad agreement from participants at the event that the next step should be to seek the creation of a new rail authority as part of the transportation bond bill then being debated in the Legislature.

Senator Crighton and Representative Straus served as co-chairs of the 2022 conference committee tasked with reconciling that particular bond bill and as co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Transportation. It should be noted that no such legislation creating a rail authority for western Massachusetts was actually presented before the chairs during bond bill deliberations or to the Legislature during the 2021-2022 legislative session. However, it was abundantly clear at that time that many public officials, including officials at MassDOT, had made the determination, at least preliminarily, that there was a need for such an authority.

In response, the Legislature established this commission as a means of providing a more thorough vetting of the call for a new public entity to build and manage intercity passenger rail serving western Massachusetts. The work of the commission has served in essence as an extended public legislative hearing and public participation process on the overall concept. The commission has provided ample opportunity for those in favor of creating a separate state rail authority for western Massachusetts to educate members of the Legislature and the public on the merits of such a step. This effort will go far in informing the work of the Legislature, and the commission members thank all of those who took the time to offer their insight.

The Chairs wish to recognize and thank Transportation Committee staff Josh Katz and Siobhan Morrissey for their efforts and hard work supporting the Commission with this report.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Creation

The Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission (“Commission”) was established pursuant to section 60 of chapter 176 of the acts of 2022 to “investigate and receive public testimony concerning public entities now in existence or that may be created by statute with the ability to design, permit, construct, operate and maintain passenger rail service that meets the standards of at least 1 of the Final Alternatives set forth in the East-West Passenger Rail Study Final Report issued by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation in January 2021.”¹

This report is being issued in accordance with subsection (h) of said section 60, which required the Commission to consider not just East-West Rail but operation of passenger rail service in western Massachusetts more generally on the question of governance.²

B. Membership

As stipulated in subsection (c) of the enabling legislation, the membership of the Commission was comprised of the following members:

- Rep. William Straus (appointed and designated as co-chair by the Speaker of the House)
- Sen. Brendan Crighton (appointed and designated as co-chair by the Senate President)
- Rep. Natalie Blais (appointed by the Speaker of the House)
- Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa (appointed by the Speaker of the House)
- Rep. Bud Williams (appointed by the Speaker of the House)

¹ The Commission’s enabling legislation is reproduced in Appendix A.

² The initial reporting deadline of March 31, 2023 was extended to June 30, 2023 pursuant to section 58 of chapter 2 of the acts of 2023.

- Sen. Joanne Comerford (appointed by the Senate President)
- Sen. Anne Gobi (appointed by the Senate President)³
- Sen. Adam Gomez (appointed by the Senate President)
- Representative Todd Smola (appointed by the House Minority Leader)
- Paul Lundberg (appointed by the Senate Minority Leader)
- Hayes Morrison, MassDOT (designee of the Secretary of Transportation)
- Michael Muller, MBTA (designee of the MBTA General Manager)
- Meredith Slesinger, Administrator of MassDOT Rail and Transit Division (ex officio)
- Kimberly Robinson, Executive Director of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (ex officio)
- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (ex officio)
- Janet Pierce, Executive Director of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (ex officio)
- Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (ex officio)
- Michael Knodler, Executive Director of the University of Massachusetts Transportation Center (ex officio)
- Leah Robbins, MetroWest Regional Collaborative
- Jason Palitsch, 495/MetroWest Partnership

³ Sen. Gobi was appointed in January 2023 to replace former Sen. Eric Lesser. Sen. Gobi subsequently left office in June 2023.

C. Public Hearings

Subsection (f) of the enabling legislation required the Commission to hold six public hearings, with at least one public hearing to be held in each of the following counties and communities: (i) Hampden county; (ii) Berkshire county; (iii) Hampshire county; (iv) Franklin county; (v) Worcester county; and (vi) in a community along the proposed route in Middlesex county.

Details of the hearings held by the Commission are provided in the following table:

COUNTY	LOCATION	DATE/TIME
Berkshire	Berkshire Innovation Center Pittsfield, MA	12/9/2022 11 AM
Franklin	Olver Transit Center Greenfield, MA	1/24/2023 10 AM
Hampshire	Northampton Senior Center Northampton, MA	3/21/2023 1 PM
Hampden	Springfield Technical Community College Springfield, MA	3/21/2023 6 PM
Worcester	Worcester State University Worcester, MA	5/16/2023 10 AM
Middlesex	Morse Institute Library Natick, MA	5/16/2023 2 PM

The hearings were livestreamed to the public and conducted in a manner that allowed for remote participation by Commission members and members of the public. Archived recordings of the hearings have been made publicly available on MassDOT’s website.

PowerPoint presentations presented before the Commission have been reproduced in Appendix B.

Detailed meeting minutes of the six public hearings are provided in Appendix C.

Written testimony received by the Commission is provided in Appendix D.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Historical Rail Service Through Springfield

Western Massachusetts is home to three notable rail corridors that historically have been used to connect cities west of Worcester and to tie those cities to the Boston region and neighboring states: the primary east-west corridor, formerly part of the Boston & Albany line, that extends from Worcester to Pittsfield and on to Albany; a north-south route through the Connecticut River Valley connecting Greenfield, Northampton, Holyoke and Springfield; and a northern east-west route referred to as the Northern Tier that stretches from Fitchburg to North Adams.

Passenger rail service along the primary east-west corridor was first proposed and developed in the 1830s with the chartering of the Boston and Worcester Railroad in 1831, which initiated service between Boston and Worcester in 1835, and the Western Railroad, established in 1836, which connected Worcester to Pittsfield through Springfield in 1841. The two lines merged in 1867 to become the Boston and Albany, by which time all but six miles of the line had been double tracked (not the case today). Service along the B&A was subsequently taken over by the predecessor to the New York Central Railroad in or around 1900.⁴

⁴ Though published sources detailing service along the Boston and Albany line post-1900 are scarce, an excellent account of rail service to Pittsfield in the nineteenth century is contained in Charles E. Fisher's "WHISTLER'S RAILROAD: The Western Railroad of Massachusetts," published in *The Railway and Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin*, no. 69, 1947, currently available through JSTOR.

Though the Great Depression led to the cessation of Boston to Albany service, by the 1950s, New York Central operated both the *New England States* line with service to Chicago through Springfield and the *Beeliner*, which offered 4.5-hour service between Albany and Boston with seven intermediate stops, including a stop in Springfield. The intermediate stops on the *Beeliner* were dropped in the 1960s, and the service was ultimately discontinued.

The history of the Connecticut River line and Northern Tier likewise date back to the middle part of the nineteenth century. The former was constructed by the Connecticut River Railroad and began passenger service in 1845. The latter connected North Adams and Boston and was operated by the former Fitchburg Railroad beginning in the 1840s.

Both the Connecticut River Line and Fitchburg Railroad were eventually acquired by the Boston & Maine Railroad company, which was later acquired by Pan Am. In 1976, the MBTA purchased the corridor between Boston and Fitchburg. Pan Am sold the Connecticut River Line to MassDOT in 2014.⁵

Passenger rail ridership began to decline through the latter half of the last century due to structural issues with the private ownership of railroads and the increase in personal automobile use. Here in Massachusetts, for example, travel along the Boston & Albany decreased with the opening of the Massachusetts Turnpike.⁶ To staunch the collapse of passenger rail in the United States, Congress passed the Rail Passenger Services Act in 1970, which led to the establishment of Amtrak in 1971 as the primary operator of intercity passenger rail in this country.

⁵ The history of the New Haven-Springfield Line is also pertinent. The line was constructed by the Hartford & New Haven Railroad, which initiated service between New Haven and Springfield in 1844. The combination of this rail line with the Boston & Albany mainline track segment between Springfield and Boston forms what is today known as the Inland Route. Amtrak purchased the New Haven-Springfield line in 1976.

⁶ McKibben, Bill, "Wrong Turn: America's Car Culture and the Road Not Taken," *Yale Environment* 360 (June 2022).

B. Existing Service

Western Massachusetts is currently served by six intercity rail routes traversing both the east-west and north-south rail corridors: the *Lake Shore Limited*, *Northeast Regional*, *Vermont*, *Valley Flyer*, *Berkshire Flyer* and *Hartford* lines. Notably, all of these intercity passenger lines are operated by Amtrak.

The route identified in the East-West Rail Study as presenting the best opportunity for future service connecting Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester and Boston is currently served by the *Lake Shore Limited*, a long-distance route that provides daily service between Boston/New York and Chicago. Amtrak provides one trip per day in each direction between Boston and Pittsfield with stops in Springfield, Worcester and Framingham. The trip time between Springfield and Boston is approximately two-and-a-half hours and the time between Pittsfield and Boston stands at approximately four hours.

Northeast Regional service operates two daily round trips complementing Amtrak's regular service along the Northeast Corridor and provides 3.5-hour service between Springfield and New York. The service terminates and originates at Springfield Union Station and connects with the NEC at New Haven.

The *Vermont* is a state-supported route that stretches from Washington, D.C. to St. Albans, Vermont. This route traverses the western portion of the Commonwealth and provides one daily roundtrip with stops at Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton, and Greenfield.

Amtrak's *Hartford* Line, which is distinct from Connecticut's Hartford commuter rail line operated by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, is a service that runs between Springfield and New Haven. The service runs four trains per day, with a total trip time of one

hour twenty-four minutes. At New Haven, passengers can transfer to or from Amtrak's Northeast Regional service to destinations further south or to Metro-North's New Haven line.

In 2019, Massachusetts provided funding for the *Valley Flyer* pilot program, which extended the *Hartford* line farther north to Holyoke, Northampton, and Greenfield. Amtrak operates two *Valley Flyer* round trips per day, with a total trip time of two hours forty-eight minutes. In 2022, Amtrak and MassDOT announced that the *Valley Flyer* service would be made permanent.

In 2022, on a pilot basis, Massachusetts and New York sponsored the *Berkshire Flyer*, which initiated seasonal passenger rail service from New York to Pittsfield through Poughkeepsie and Albany.⁷ The route has a total trip time of 4 hours 5 minutes, with one train arriving in Pittsfield on Friday and one train departing Pittsfield on Sunday. The *Berkshire Flyer* is an extension of Amtrak's *Empire Service* route, which typically runs from New York to either Albany or Niagara Falls. The rail service is currently scheduled to terminate after the 2024 season.

C. Feasibility Studies Regarding Expanded Service

In recent years, MassDOT has completed or is in the process of completing three separate feasibility studies examining enhanced or restored passenger rail service along the three main corridors that historically have served western Massachusetts.

The 2018 Massachusetts State Rail Plan, a near- and long-term rail service and capital planning document periodically revised and published by MassDOT, included "Western

⁷ Schmid, Lindsey. "The Berkshire Flyer Returns." The Berkshire Edge. (May 22, 2023). <https://theberkshireedge.com/business-perspectives-the-berkshire-flyer-returns/>

Massachusetts to Boston Passenger Rail Service” as a “tier 2” project warranting further study.⁸

This was followed by an announcement by Governor Baker in June of that year that MassDOT would be conducting a feasibility study of the proposed rail service.

The resulting study and final report was released in January 2021 and remains the most in depth analysis and treatment of enhanced east-west passenger service west of Worcester. The study examined six preliminary alternatives, identifying the following three final alternatives for future consideration (as excerpted from the Final Report):

Alternative 3 would provide a new direct passenger rail service along the shared corridor between Pittsfield and Boston (South Station), with intermediate stops in Chester, Springfield, Palmer, Worcester, and Boston (Lansdowne and Back Bay). . . . [T]he service would include up to seven new weekday rail round trips between Pittsfield and South Station, with service provided at every rail station along the existing corridor. Between Pittsfield and Springfield, Alternative 3 would restore the missing double-track segment and upgrade signals to increase maximum permitted speeds from 50 to 70 mph west of Springfield in some sections. Relative to existing conditions, these improvements would save 10 minutes for journeys along the western segment.

Alternative 4 would offer a new direct passenger rail service between Pittsfield and Boston (South Station), with intermediate stops in Chester, Springfield, Palmer, Worcester, and Boston (Lansdowne and Back Bay). Beyond Alternative 3’s improvements along the western segment, Alternative 4 could enable faster travel times through the construction of a new passenger-only track between Springfield and Worcester within the CSX-owned rail corridor, but offset from the existing railroad alignment This exclusive track would provide speed and reliability benefits by separating passenger trains from freight movements along the CSX mainline. It would enable higher maximum permitted speeds, with construction of the new track designed for FRA Track Class 6 (110 mph). Three new passing sidings, each providing 3,000 feet of tangent track and spaced roughly 15 miles apart, would be installed along the south side to enable efficient train scheduling and safe passing of trains traveling in opposite directions. Extending the separate passenger track west of Springfield was evaluated and determined not feasible. The mountainous topography and significant sections of the route being located within environmentally sensitive lands effectively prevents construction along a separated alignment. Therefore, Alternative 4 assumes the same infrastructure improvements between Springfield and Pittsfield identified for Alternative 3.

⁸ Available at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/final-state-rail-plan-spring-2018/download>. Per the Rail Plan, tier 2 projects are non-priority projects that warrant further analysis to determine whether the project merits consideration in near-term planning. See Rail Plan, p. 102.

The hybrid alternative combines advantages of Preliminary Alternative 4 and Preliminary Alternative 5 . . . Final Alternative 4/5 provides the same direct rail connections west of Springfield, as well as at Palmer, as in Alternative 4. Final Alternative 4/5 would realize an additional 10-minute travel time savings between Springfield and Worcester by including the seven high-speed curve realignments (shortcuts) and grade crossing consolidations identified within Preliminary Alternative 5, offering Springfield – Boston travel times that approach 1:30 and Pittsfield – Boston journeys typically completed in 3:00 hours.

At the time the study was released, capital and operating costs for the service were projected to be \$2.4-4.6 billion and \$25-31 million,⁹ respectively. Though the federally mandated benefit-cost analysis for the service alternatives resulted in BCA ratios of well under 1 – scores that would have diminished the project’s chances of receiving federal funding – certain funding programs under the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA) appear to have lessened their reliance on BCA ratios.¹⁰ As discussed below, the route has been submitted for acceptance into the federal Corridor ID Program and a decision is forthcoming.

Prior to the East-West Rail Study, in 2016, MassDOT, together with the transportation departments of neighboring states, undertook the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (NNEIRI) study to examine and provide recommendations for new routes serving cities in Connecticut, Vermont and Massachusetts.¹¹ The NNEIRI study identified two preferred corridors for future study and development: the so-called Inland Route connecting Boston and New Haven through Springfield, and a route connecting Boston and Montreal through Springfield and north along the Connecticut River Valley line. As discussed below, applications for \$108 million in

⁹ Exclusive of \$2.95 million *Lakeshore Limited* operating subsidy.

¹⁰ The notice of funding opportunity for the Corridor ID Program, for example, does not make reference to or otherwise incorporate BCA ratios, unlike the NOFO for the FY2022 CRISI program.

¹¹ See NNEIRI Study Summary, available at https://vtrans.vermont.gov/sites/aot/files/planning/documents/2016NNEIRI_StudySummaryMassDOT.pdf.

federal funding for the Inland Route have been submitted under two separate programs, and the route has been submitted for acceptance into the Corridor ID Program.

In 2019, the Legislature included a provision in the FY2020 state budget directing MassDOT to conduct a feasibility study examining potential service along the Northern Tier route connecting Boston to North Adams through Greenfield.¹² In January 2023, MassDOT presented details concerning two service alternatives: a “lower investment” scenario providing service to Boston in 3 hours 55 minutes at an estimated cost of \$1.045 billion, and a “higher investment” scenario with service to Boston in 2 hours 48 minutes at an estimated cost of \$2.19 billion. Per recent updates, MassDOT is in the process of finalizing service plan alternatives that will then be subjected to cost-benefit analysis.¹³

D. Governance White Paper

The East-West Rail Study identified a number of “next steps” and action items, one of which called for further analysis of governance issues and the range of entities that might be capable of operating such service.

In November 2021, MassDOT published the “Massachusetts Intercity Passenger Rail Governance White Paper.” Having determined that service to Pittsfield would likely be characterized for federal funding purposes as intercity rail, and noting that the service would be operated within an active freight corridor, MassDOT concluded that Amtrak should be retained to operate the service.

¹² See section 84 of chapter 41 of the acts of 2019. The initial reporting date was June 1, 2021. Note that the section mandating the study had an effective date of June 1, 2020 (though the law was approved on July 31, 2019). See section 110 of said chapter 41.

¹³ Documents related to the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study are available at <https://www.mass.gov/lists/northern-tier-passenger-rail-study-documents#study-newsletters-2023->.

It further suggested that a new regional authority based in western Massachusetts be established to monitor performance, as MassDOT had not traditionally managed passenger rail operations and a regional authority could be well positioned to oversee operations at the local level.

E. Commonwealth Rail Program Initiatives

It is important to note that extensive work with the potential to benefit passenger service in western Massachusetts is currently being undertaken by MassDOT. The following provides a description of pertinent elements of the planned Commonwealth Rail Program. The focus of the Rail Program is to improve service along the East-West Rail Corridor (including services to Albany, NY), the Inland Route and the *Vermont/Valley Flyer* Corridor. FRA funding programs enacted as part of the IIJA will be key to advancing the program.

- The Springfield Area Track Improvement Project received a grant for preliminary engineering and environmental analysis of tracks, platform, and train storage capacity. Amtrak is using some of their own funds to help with track and signal improvements in 2023-2024. Additional funds will be sought in late 2024-early 2025.
- Amtrak is purchasing a new fleet of trainsets to replace the current fleet that operates along many of the routes in Massachusetts. Funding for the fleet will be 100% supported by the IIJA. The new fleet will be used for the *Vermont*, *Downeaster* and *Northeast Regional* trains to Springfield. Delivery is expected in 2027-2030. Discussions are underway regarding replacement of the *Hartford Line/Valley Flyer* fleet.
- In Pittsfield, the station is currently a single-sided station in a double-track section of railroad. The agreement with CSX to begin operation of the *Berkshire Flyer* included provisions requiring evaluation of the need to construct a station track, which would be

used to advance East-West Rail Service. It is anticipated that construction of any improvements would not occur before mid-2025.

- An FRA-supported Service Development Plan (SDP) for the Inland Route was developed by MassDOT in 2016 through the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative. To receive funding in the future, the SDP will need to be updated to address changed conditions and plans. MassDOT submitted the Inland Route as part of the FRA Corridor ID Program to receive funding to update the Inland Route SDP and improve the chances of securing future federal funding for services along the corridor.
- MassDOT advanced planning for improved intercity rail services along a portion of the Corridor between Albany, NY and Boston as part of the East-West Passenger Rail Study. Similarly, Amtrak identified interest in improving services between Albany and Boston as part of their Connects US Plan. MassDOT coordinated with the State of New York and submitted the Albany-Boston Corridor as part of the FRA Corridor ID Program to receive funding to update the AB Corridor SDP, which might improve the chances of securing future federal funding for services along the corridor. Through the SDP process, MassDOT will work with FRA, Amtrak, and the railroad owner (CSX) to determine the improvements required to add passenger rail service along the corridor.
- Vermont has been working on extending the *Vermont* to Montreal for the past decade. During the past few years, significant progress has been made. An extension to Montreal would likely require several operational changes to the *Vermont* and may impact the schedule in Massachusetts. As part of the ongoing partnership between Vermont, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, MassDOT supported an application to the FRA Corridor

ID Program to assess both the extension of service to Montreal and other ongoing improvements to service along the corridor.

- MassDOT is undertaking an update to the commonwealth's 2018 rail plan in order to reflect progress against the plan and to capture upcoming planned initiatives concurrent with the award announcements for the Corridor ID program. MassDOT intends to incorporate a Commonwealth-wide intercity passenger rail program that will be integrated into the plan.

F. Additional Background on Pending Applications for Federal Funding

In 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which provided \$66 billion for projects that improve and expand intercity passenger service in the United States. This funding amounts to the largest investment in intercity rail since the creation of Amtrak in 1970, and Massachusetts has a number of rail corridors that may benefit.

As noted earlier, in response to recent notices of funding opportunities under IIJA, MassDOT is now actively seeking federal support for both East-West Rail and the Inland Route.

With respect to the latter, MassDOT previously submitted parallel applications for federal funding under both the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program and the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program. The applications sought \$108 million in federal funding to support a \$135 million project for early action items along the Inland Route, including double tracking and improved track alignment along a 44-mile stretch between Worcester and Springfield that would serve East-West Rail, as well. On September 22, 2023, MassDOT announced that its application under the CRISI Program was successful.

In addition, shortly after the Commission’s inaugural meeting in December 2022, the FRA solicited applications and issued selection criteria for its Corridor Identification and Development Program.¹⁴ MassDOT has submitted applications for both the Inland Route and East-West Rail (terminating in Albany). If approved, MassDOT will receive federal funding needed to complete updated service development plans for these routes and, as funds become available, receive grants needed to advance the corridors to a stage where they are ready for final design and construction.

Importantly, corridors or portions of corridors that are ready for final design and construction will thereafter be included in a prioritized “project pipeline report” submitted by USDOT annually to Congress that is intended to guide intercity rail investment over successive 5-year horizons. Acceptance into the program would be a significant milestone; per the notice of funding opportunity, “[t]he Corridor ID Program is intended to become the primary means for directing Federal financial support and technical assistance toward the development of proposals for new or improved intercity passenger rail services throughout the United States.”¹⁵

III. UPDATES TO RIDERSHIP AND COST PROJECTIONS

Since completion of the East-West Passenger Rail Study in January 2021, MassDOT has continued to progress planning and design for certain components of the service. As discussed elsewhere in this report, MassDOT has worked with Amtrak to advance planning for the *Inland Route*, and this has involved updates to planning metrics such as ridership. The *Inland Route* would implement the Boston to Springfield segment of the service identified in the East-West Passenger Rail Study but also include a direct service connection along the *Hartford Line* to

¹⁴ See 87 FR 77920 (published on Dec. 20, 2022).

¹⁵ *Id.* at 77921.

Hartford and New Haven. Joint planning activities have included advancing concepts for an initial service phase that would be competitive for new funding programs initiated in the IJA, including and in addition to the CRISI grant that was recently awarded. The *Inland Route*'s initial service phase would include two new daily round trip trains between New Haven and Boston via Springfield. The service would be an extension of existing Amtrak *Hartford Line* service trains and provide improved service connections and travel times between Springfield, Worcester, Framingham, and Boston.

As part of the service planning process, Amtrak developed ridership estimates for the initial phase of *Inland Route* service. The ridership estimates were developed using Amtrak's well calibrated intercity passenger rail travel demand model. Amtrak utilizes the model to assist development of intercity passenger rail services across the country.

Though the Amtrak ridership estimates were developed incorporating several assumptions that differed from the East-West Passenger Rail Study, there are sufficient similarities between the two contemplated services that the ridership can be generally compared. The initial phase of the *Inland Route* most closely matches with Alternative 3 in the East-West Passenger Rail Study. The most notable differences between the two service plans for the segment between Boston and Springfield include service frequency (2 versus 8 round trips), station stops (Palmer and Lansdowne Stations not included in initial *Inland Route* service estimates), service extension (service extended to New Haven instead of Pittsfield), and incorporation of induced demand (no induced demand incorporated in Amtrak estimates). The travel times and type of service are generally the same.

When adjusting the two estimates to utilize similar assumptions, the ridership estimates were within 10% of each other, which is remarkably similar given the range of accuracy for

intercity rail ridership. Amtrak estimates the annual ridership during the inaugural year for the two *Inland Route* trips to be 69,600, which will shift over 15 million passenger miles from other modes. From a passenger demand perspective, it is important to note that the direct service from Boston and Worcester to Hartford and New Haven makes up a large portion of the ridership and is an important connection to consider in the development of the services to Springfield.

The capital and project costs for the final alternatives in the East-West Passenger Rail Study (expressed in 2020 dollars) ranged from \$2.4 billion for Alternative 3 to \$3.9 billion for Alternative 4 and \$4.6 billion for Hybrid Alternative 4/5. These cost estimates were developed based on a set of conceptual design and program development assumptions established as part of the study.

Although the assumptions may have been appropriate during the time the study was being developed, a number of those assumptions have already changed which may significantly shift the costs both up and down. Several items have increased in cost more dramatically than originally assumed, such as trainsets and steel. However, there may be changes to the base assumptions that will reduce costs, such as shared use of CSX tracks/right of way and utility relocation requirements. Until a more refined operating plan, design plan, and construction implementation schedule is developed, it is difficult to refine the costs more than what was included in the original study. The East-West Passenger Rail Study provide an appropriate range of costs (using 2020 dollars) based on the range of alternatives. Given that construction costs in general have increased by 30% since that time, it is reasonable to assume that any new cost estimate will be at least 30% higher, therefore ranging from \$3 billion to \$6 billion.

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Having reviewed the testimony provided to the Commission and the related reports and analysis conducted by public agencies and advocates, the Commission recommends that MassDOT should continue to serve as the agency responsible for the development, construction, procurement and oversight of both existing intercity passenger rail service in Massachusetts and any enhanced or new intercity passenger service connecting Boston, Springfield, Pittsfield and other cities and towns within the commonwealth.

There are many reasons in support of this recommendation, but the commission notes at the outset that any decision to establish a new rail authority – a resource-intensive undertaking not without risk – would require strong and convincing evidence of need in support of the creation of another layer of government in the transportation area; this is especially so where, as here, the project remains at an early stage of design and development and where an existing state agency is adequately functioning in the role envisioned for a new authority. Such evidence was lacking in the presentations and submissions to the Commission on both the capital and operating sides.

A. CAPITAL

As to capital planning, there were comments made by the Baker administration and western Massachusetts legislators in Spring 2022 reflecting an understanding that creation of a new authority was needed to take advantage of intercity rail funding provided by the federal government pursuant to IIJA; that belief, however, does not appear to be the case from a legal or statutory standpoint. State entities remain eligible to seek applicable federal funding,¹⁶ and

¹⁶ Notices of funding opportunities for major intercity rail programs that have been issued following the passage of IIJA have included “states” as eligible applicants, and this includes an instrumentality of the state within the executive office of the governor, such as MassDOT. See, e.g., Notice of Solicitation of

MassDOT, as the clear choice to develop, design and build East-West Rail, stands as the best applicant the commonwealth can put forth for the project, which current cost estimates place at up to \$6 billion.

MassDOT is an experienced project manager, evidenced by the agency's most recent 5-year capital plan, which contains programming for more than \$9 billion in transportation spending, including \$350 million in rail projects and two major projects directly related to East-West Rail.¹⁷

As discussed in presentations to the Commission,¹⁸ MassDOT also is responsible for the South Station Expansion project, a large, complex and important operational piece of East-West Rail, as well as a number of other western Massachusetts rail projects that will benefit intercity rail.

In fact, there is already significant project momentum with MassDOT at the helm. During the time the Commission held its public hearings, MassDOT submitted three separate applications for federal funding related to western Massachusetts rail projects,¹⁹ one of which has already resulted in an award of \$108 million. The Healey administration has also expressed an intent to hire a dedicated project manager for East-West Rail.

Further, MassDOT has a longstanding relationship with CSX – the private owner of substantial track and rail infrastructure affecting the entire state – and is in the process of

Corridor Proposals and Funding Opportunity for the Corridor Identification and Development Program, 87 FR 77920.

¹⁷ The FY24-28 CIP provides \$4 million for Palmer Station design and \$8 million for Pittsfield Station improvements.

¹⁸ See Appendix B.

¹⁹ As noted earlier, MassDOT has submitted two applications for federal funding for rail improvements in support of the Inland Route, including track work between Worcester and Springfield, and has submitted the Boston and Albany corridor for acceptance into the federal Corridor ID Program.

working with CSX to complete a rail capacity analysis for the section of track west of Worcester that will be an important step in completing an up-to-date East-West service development plan.

The Commission also notes that sections in MassDOT's federal grant applications succinctly describe MassDOT's substantial institutional expertise. The summary of the agency's relevant experience contained in the Inland Route CRISI application provides:

“[The CRISI] project is well within the realm of MassDOT's capabilities and is similar to many of the projects involving the Federal Railroad Administration that MassDOT has completed in the last decade, including:

- Restore Vermonter–Knowledge Corridor project
- Patriot Corridor Double-Stack Clearance Initiative
- South Station Expansion Project
- Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative
- Springfield Union Station Platform Improvement Project
- Closing the Gap in New England: Western Massachusetts Freight Rail Upgrade Project
- Springfield Area Track Reconfiguration Project

MassDOT has a robust legal staff with significant experience managing federally funded projects and rail-related projects. MassDOT legal staff are in regular communication with the legal staff of the railroad stakeholders on this project (Amtrak and CSX). The finance staff at MassDOT is also experienced in projects of this magnitude, as MassDOT coordinates the procurement of dozens of federally funded, multi-million-dollar infrastructure projects each year.”

Likewise, MassDOT's pending East-West Rail application to the Corridor ID Program contains a similar summary:

MassDOT has recent relevant experience managing and overseeing similar projects under oversight of FRA. Improvements along the Corridor will be managed by MassDOT's Rail & Transit Division staff with support from specialized consultant staff as required. As noted, MassDOT has advanced other intercity rail projects and corridors and has the necessary legal, technical, and financial capability to implement service along the Corridor. As evidence, in recent years MassDOT has undertaken the following intercity rail projects:

- Substantial improvements to the Amtrak *Vermont* by successfully completing a realignment of the service along a new corridor through the *Restore Vermont* project.
- Supporting the expansion of Amtrak service to Springfield with the *Amtrak Hartford Line* service by working alongside CTDOT, Amtrak, and other partners to implement the new service including restoring the Springfield Union Station and new high-level platforms.
- Leveraging the improvements along the Vermont Corridor by expanding daily service from Springfield to Greenfield, MA by implementing the *Amtrak Valley Flyer* service.
- Initiating the seasonal weekend *Amtrak Berkshire Flyer* service along a portion of the B&A Corridor.

MassDOT continues to work collaboratively with Amtrak and our other partner states and railroads to operate and improve the services listed above, which includes on-going financial operational support. The Commonwealth will continue to work with our partners to implement the Boston & Albany Corridor.”

There are, therefore, obvious advantages to pursuing development, design and construction for enhanced western Massachusetts passenger rail service through MassDOT. It is notable that the Governance White Paper included little discussion of the need for a new authority with respect to project management and capital programming. Testimony from key advocates likewise conceded that MassDOT is the best entity to oversee this aspect of the project.²⁰

Accordingly, the Commission has determined that MassDOT should continue in its role as lead agency overseeing and managing the development and build-out of intercity passenger rail service in the commonwealth.

B. OPERATIONS

As to operations, the primary aim of the Commission was to identify entities capable of implementing and maintaining passenger rail service in western Massachusetts. Central to this analysis is MassDOT’s determination – clearly laid out in its White Paper – that East-West Rail

²⁰ See WMPR Coalition written statement, reproduced and made available in Appendix C.

is likely if not certain to be operated as state-supported intercity rail service pursuant to an agreement with Amtrak. Accordingly, the primary responsibility of the service sponsor is expected to be the execution of an operating agreement with Amtrak, oversight of performance and asset maintenance, and payment of an operating subsidy (currently paid by the state as an expense within MassDOT's budget) determined in accordance with an established, federally-mandated cost-sharing formula.²¹

For the reasons discussed below, the Commission believes that at present, the commonwealth should continue to leverage expertise within MassDOT as to the procurement and oversight of existing intercity passenger rail service, as well as any enhanced service between Worcester and Pittsfield (and Albany) that may be operated in the future.

Comment on Testimony Provided to the Commission

Though the prior Governance White Paper may have quickly dismissed MassDOT as a possible governing entity, the charge of the Commission – to examine existing agencies in addition to hypothetical ones with the ability to build and operate passenger service west of Worcester – was clear, limited in scope, and read publicly by the chairs at the start of the first public hearing.²²

Much of the testimony before the Commission, however, spoke to the merits of increased passenger rail service as opposed to the proper agency to manage it. Understandably, many residents and stakeholders in western Massachusetts used the six hearings as an opportunity to

²¹ See Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA), section 209. Under PRIIA section 209, states sponsoring intercity service operated by Amtrak (outside of the Northeast Corridor) are required to cover the net costs of operating the service. IJA required re-examination of the formula to resolve inefficiencies and inaccuracies in determining the amount of required state support.

²² The Commission further notes that the Governance White Paper also dismissed the MBTA as a suitable entity to manage passenger rail service in western Massachusetts and the Commission received no testimony suggesting otherwise.

press for meaningful progress on implementation of the service, citing its importance to marginalized communities and its impact on the climate, regional economies, tourism, housing, and health care access.

As to those witnesses who did address governance, there were two recurring themes that emerged: the importance of local representation and expertise (the regional transit authorities were mentioned as a possible governance model),²³ and the need to prioritize and foster “interconnectivity.”

There is little question that these are important considerations and that local expertise and experience should be brought to bear on service development, including intermodal connectivity, and oversight. For the purposes of this report, however, there was a lack of (if any) evidence demonstrating a clear link between these priorities and the need to form a new rail authority.

It is likely that effective, formal channels for local input may be established short of establishing a new regional governing agency. Even less formal channels, such as local hiring preferences for oversight positions, raised as a possibility by at least one witness, may also prove effective. Indeed, as demonstrated by the local response to this Commission and the Rail Study, East-West Rail benefits from a large, active and informed advocacy community and is supported by effective and experienced federal and state legislative delegations that have won support from two successive governors. Indeed, local input has already played an effective role in advancing intercity service, even in the absence of such channels or a regional authority.²⁴

²³ In this regard, the regional transit authorities organized under chapter 161B of the General Laws are distinguishable, notably for their funding mechanism, which requires a local contribution from the member municipalities, and for the nature and levels of service offered.

²⁴ On this point, the Commission received written testimony from the Quaboag Region Coordinating Council, an affiliation of local businesses and local officials that played an active role in the creation of the Quaboag Connector, a demand-response van service providing transit options to underserved communities in central/western Massachusetts. Per the testimony, the Connector was the product of a

Ultimately, though the development of alternatives for regional participation and representation resides outside the scope of this Commission’s mandate, this report is not intended in any way to preclude future consideration of the matter, and the Commission believes on this front that an advisory framework can be considered to provide continuing input from individuals drawn from stakeholders and those elected in western Massachusetts.

MassDOT Expertise

As noted, the Commission was required to consider existing agencies capable of implementing intercity passenger service, and though there was comparatively little testimony addressing the capabilities of the executive branch, it is clear that MassDOT’s expertise in the area of intercity passenger rail extends beyond capital planning.

Simply stated, MassDOT’s role as the lead agency for development, procurement and oversight of intercity rail service in the commonwealth is already well established. In recent years, MassDOT has gained valuable experience in the planning and management of intercity rail in partnership with Amtrak and other stakeholders and has successfully negotiated and executed operating agreements for the *Berkshire Flyer*, *Vermont*, and *Valley Flyer*.

Prior to that, MassDOT worked with Maine’s Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) to establish and maintain *Downeaster* service, and the agency continues to oversee the commonwealth’s participation in *Northeast Regional* service connecting Springfield to the NEC. Relatedly, since 2015, MassDOT has represented the commonwealth as part of the State-Amtrak Intercity Passenger Rail Committee, which was established by federal law for the purpose of deliberating cost allocation policies for state-supported intercity service.²⁵

“community-driven collaborative approach to transportation solutions,” and as such is representative of the direct impact that local advocacy has had with respect to transit services in western Massachusetts.

²⁵ See Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act of 2015, Public Law 114-94.

MassDOT also has acquired and retains extensive institutional knowledge pertaining to East-West Rail and the Inland Route, having completed comprehensive feasibility studies of the proposed services. Additionally, as noted, the department jointly with CSX is in the midst of completing a rail capacity analysis along the Boston and Albany line and is in position to advance and complete service development plans.

In short, MassDOT is well positioned to continue to oversee operations. It has working knowledge of applicable law and the infrastructure, service plans and operating agreements that define existing and proposed intercity service in the commonwealth. The agency benefits from effective working relationships with CSX and Amtrak, and has shown a sensitivity to intermodal connectivity, which was a priority frequently cited by witnesses.²⁶

Further, the Commission observes that capital planning and operations are not distinct functions, as demonstrated by the turmoil and serious deficiencies currently experienced by the MBTA. Given that MassDOT functions as the primary allocator of state resources in support of the commonwealth's rail system, especially where intercity service is expected to continue to share track with freight, it follows that placing operations and capital planning under one roof within the state's Rail and Transit Division should lead to better coordination of these functions. At a minimum, policymakers should give pause before separating capital and operations in this instance.

A final word on MassDOT's qualifications. The Commission takes note of comments made by MassDOT Rail and Transit Administrator Slesinger, who remarked during the hearings that transit agencies draw from a limited pool of transportation planners and staffers with rail expertise. To the extent that MassDOT has expended resources to develop and retain rail

²⁶ For example, per statements contained in its applications for federal funding, MassDOT has actively consulted with CT Rail and the MBTA in order to coordinate intercity rail with commuter services.

expertise in-house, the Commission believes that leveraging institutional knowledge, rather than diluting it, is the most efficient and direct path to an effective governance structure. As service is expanded in the coming years, MassDOT should continue to review its staffing levels to ensure that it is appropriately equipped to provide the increased and expanded services.

Inter- and Intra-State Rail

The testimony provided strong evidence of the potential import of East-West Rail to residents of western Massachusetts. However, though the service may offer substantial benefits to a particular region of the state, the proposed service is not in fact regional. As proposed, it will run the length of the Commonwealth and is intended to connect western Massachusetts more closely to Boston.

Boston's importance to East-West Rail and passenger rail more generally is exemplified by presentations to the Commission concerning the existing bottleneck at South Station that will constrain the ability of the commonwealth to increase passenger rail service west and south of Boston. In the coming years, Boston is expected to be the hub for a number of rail initiatives, including South Coast Rail, Inland Route service, increased service along the Fairmount Line, and elements of the Rail Transformation Program, including electrification of the commuter rail network. Per testimony provided by Administrator Slesinger and Commission member Paul Lundberg, construction of additional platforms at South Station will be needed in order to accommodate some number of these enhancements. Absent expanded station capacity in Boston, East-West Rail will remain strictly conceptual.

These limitations raise questions concerning decision-making as to prioritizing and allocating resources for the entire state. In this sense, no one should characterize East-West Rail and intercity rail as only regional in nature. To the contrary, such service has statewide impact

and statewide consequences for transit service, which weighs in favor of consolidation of rail operations at the state level.²⁷

Further, existing and proposed intercity rail service crosses state boundaries, directly connecting Massachusetts to cities in Maine, Connecticut, Vermont and upstate New York. This has required extensive interstate coordination as to service planning and cost sharing. Presumably, such interactions should continue to occur at the state level under or subject to the direction of the commonwealth's chief executive.

MassDOT Governance White Paper

The White Paper authored by MassDOT in November 2021 provides a thorough analysis of the material factors that policymakers should consider when deliberating governance. However, MassDOT's prior observation in that document that these factors call for the formation of a new regional authority is ultimately unpersuasive.

That earlier analysis predates significant aspects of MassDOT's substantial and continuing involvement in intercity rail development, which, as already discussed, the Commission deems relevant and important. To the extent MassDOT might continue to claim, as it did in the White Paper, that service oversight is not in line with the Rail and Transit Division's historical role, the Commission notes that it is far more efficient and practical to staff up an existing agency that possesses both relevant expertise and substantial back office operations. This is especially true given the modest service levels involved, which contemplate 20-30 round trips per day across all intercity service lines, and where train operations, ROW maintenance and daily asset maintenance will be the responsibility of third parties.

²⁷ In this regard, the Commission notes that legislation filed this session by Co-Chair Straus would transfer responsibility for commuter rail operations to MassDOT. See House Bill No. H3452.

The Commission also finds that MassDOT satisfies all of the “Required Organization Capabilities” identified in the White Paper for any authority with future jurisdiction over intercity service. MassDOT has the requisite legal authority to enter into agreements with Amtrak and other stakeholders, the ability to apply for, receive and manage federal funds, internal support staff with the knowledge and expertise to perform capital planning and contract oversight, funding support in the form of state borrowing authorizations,²⁸ and the ability to manage liability exposure.²⁹ Indeed, as discussed, the agency is already performing these functions.

National Practice

Lastly, the Commission observes that the decision to retain MassDOT as the agency to oversee intercity passenger rail service is consistent with the vast majority of states that have confronted this issue. Nationally, regional rail authorities are the exception when it comes to management of state-supported intercity rail. As of January 2022, of the 17 states that have partnered with Amtrak to run intercity routes, 14 have done so through state DOTs.³⁰ Only Maine and California formed special-purpose regional entities, and Maine cited state liability exposure as a reason for creating NNEPRA as opposed to regional equity.³¹

A few examples:

²⁸ East-West Rail benefits from bond bill provisions authorizing MassDOT to borrow \$275 million for the project itself and \$1.75 billion for any state match needed in connection with discretionary grants awarded under IJJA. See chapter 176 of the acts of 2022.

²⁹ In fact, as to the liability exposure, the White Paper notes that MassDOT is actually in a preferred position versus any new authority.

³⁰ Including Massachusetts. Does not include Virginia, though Virginia does manage intercity service through the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit, a state-level entity that was split off from VADOT. See Memorandum of the Office of the Inspector General of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation dated January 31, 2022, pp. 7, 47.

³¹ See Maine Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability Brief on NNEPRA, available at <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/1270>.

In North Carolina, NCDOT has partnered with Amtrak to operate the *Piedmont*, which operates between Charlotte and Raleigh using state-owned equipment. The *Carolinian* uses Amtrak-owned equipment on the same route between Charlotte and Raleigh with extended service to New York City, though the state subsidizes only that portion of the route within its borders.

Michigan has contracted with Amtrak for three rail routes within the state, collectively known as the Michigan Services, all of which are overseen by MIDOT. The *Blue Water* runs from Chicago to Port Huron; *Pere Marquette* operates on CSX and Norfolk Southern tracks between Chicago and Grand Rapids; and the *Wolverine* service runs between Chicago and Pontiac.

Closer to home, CTRail, a division within CTDOT, operates the *Shore Line East* between New Haven and New London under contract with Amtrak. The service uses vehicles jointly owned by the state and Metro North railroad. CTRail also sponsors the *Hartford Line* using an Amtrak-owned corridor between New Haven and Springfield.

Notably, on occasion, planners and advocates from neighboring states have attempted to draw MassDOT's attention to the number of state DOTs that serve as sponsors of intercity rail. In comments submitted in response to the draft East-West Rail Study, for example, a representative of the New York Rail Passengers Association urged MassDOT to take the lead in seeking near-term enhanced service through Springfield to Albany, stating: "Discussions of how the Commonwealth might initiate and/or operate expanded east-west passenger service omitted or downplayed expansion of a Rail Division within MassDOT. Rail divisions are a fairly common practice for states with PRIIA Section 209 state-supported Amtrak service."³²

³² Comments on the draft East-West Rail Study are available and may be accessed at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/appendix-public-comments-received-throughout-study/download>.

Further, in December 2021, during a meeting of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission held in part to review governance issues, a Connecticut planner questioned whether a new rail authority was needed, noting that in Connecticut, “the state DOT simply writes a contract and the operator runs it.”³³

In light of national practice, MassDOT’s prior experience, and the levels of service contemplated, the Commission believes that question has merit and reflects the Commission’s conclusion that MassDOT is the proper governmental agency to continue to pursue this project.

V. CONCLUSION

Intercity rail in the commonwealth has been the beneficiary of increased attention in recent years, and Massachusetts, home to a number of priority intercity corridors, stands to benefit from increased federal support for such service. Fortunately for western Massachusetts rail proponents, the state is served by a transportation department that has devoted significant resources to service planning and has developed hands-on experience related to the build-out and execution of state-supported intercity rail. The Commission believes that MassDOT should continue to function in this role, and the Legislature should look to MassDOT as the best entity to receive and manage additional resources should expansion of intercity rail services continue in future years.

³³ A recording of the meeting has been archived at <https://trainsinthevalley.org/2022/01/>.

APPENDIX A

CHAPTER 176 OF THE ACTS OF 2022

SECTION 60. (a) For the purposes of this section, "operate" shall include, but not be limited to, the awarding, management and oversight of a contract with a third-party to operate the service.

(b) There shall be a commission to investigate and receive public testimony concerning public entities now in existence or that may be created by statute with the ability to design, permit, construct, operate and maintain passenger rail service that meets the standards of at least 1 of the Final Alternatives set forth in the East-West Passenger Rail Study Final Report issued by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation in January 2021.

(c)(1) The commission shall consist of: 4 members of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house, 1 of whom shall serve as co-chair and 3 of whom shall represent municipalities in Hampden, Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin or Worcester counties; 4 members of the senate appointed by the president of the senate, 1 of whom shall serve as co-chair and 3 of whom shall represent municipalities in Hampden, Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin or Worcester counties; the secretary of transportation or a designee, who shall serve as vice chair; the general manager of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority or a designee; the administrator of the rail and transit division of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation; the executive director of the Pioneer Valley planning commission, or a designee; the executive director of the Franklin Regional council of governments, or a designee; the executive director of the Central Massachusetts Regional planning commission, or a designee; the executive director of the Berkshire Regional planning commission, or a designee; 1 member appointed by the 495/MetroWest Partnership; 1 member appointed by the MetroWest Regional Collaborative; 1 member appointed by the minority leader of the senate; 1 member appointed by the minority leader of the house of representatives; and the executive director of the University of Massachusetts Transportation Center, or a designee.

(2) Members may attend and participate in meetings remotely, and the chair shall ensure that members are able to join the proceedings using video conferencing software and that the hearings shall be made available for viewing and participation by the public virtually.

(d) The commission shall examine and receive testimony on matters concerning the public entities described in subsection (b), including, but not limited to: (i) the feasibility of directing an existing public entity to design, permit, construct or operate the rail service; (ii) the operational and geographic jurisdiction of any newly-created public entity and any areas of potential conflict with existing public entities that may arise in connection with the operation of the rail service; (iii) governance, powers, assets and liabilities of any newly-created public entity; and (iv) funding sources for projected operating and capital budgets associated with the rail service.

(e) The commission shall consult with subject matter experts and stakeholders, including, but not limited to, representatives from the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, relevant departments and agencies within the United States Department of Transportation, freight rail entities, transportation advocacy groups, housing and environmental advocacy groups, regional planning agencies and municipalities. The commission shall be supported by staff from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

(f) The commission shall hold not less than 6 public hearings for the purpose of receiving public testimony; provided, however, that at least 1 meeting shall be in each of the following locations: (i) Hampden county; (ii) Berkshire county; (iii) Hampshire county; (iv) Franklin county; (v) Worcester county; and (vi) in a community along the proposed route in Middlesex county.

(g) Appointments to the commission shall be made not later than 14 days after the effective date of this act. The commission shall convene its initial meeting not later than 45 days after the effective date of this act.

(h) Not later than March 31, 2023 the commission shall file a report of its findings and any recommendations with the secretary of transportation, the joint committee on transportation and the clerks of the senate and house of representatives. The report and recommendations shall include, but not be limited to: (i) public entities now in existence or that may be created by statute with the ability to design, permit, construct, operate, fund and maintain passenger rail service in western Massachusetts; (ii) a section detailing projected costs identifying, by category, the project's design, permitting, land acquisition, utility connections, land and right of way acquisition, and capital equipment costs, as well as projected costs to operate the entity; (iii) updated ridership projections; and (iv) operations for possible levels of service. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation shall make the report publicly available on its website.

Advancing Intercity Passenger Rail across Massachusetts

Meredith Slesinger | Rail & Transit Administrator
March 21, 2023

Background

- Bipartisan Infrastructure Law signed on November 15, 2021
- Relevant new and enhanced rail funding programs established including:
 - Railroad Crossing Elimination Program (RCE)
 - Consolidated Rail and Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program (CRISI)
 - Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail – National Network Program (FSP-NN)
 - Corridor Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID)
- CSX completes acquisition of Pan Am Railways on June 1, 2022
- MassTRAC signed on August 10, 2022

Design & Construction Grant Applications & Awards

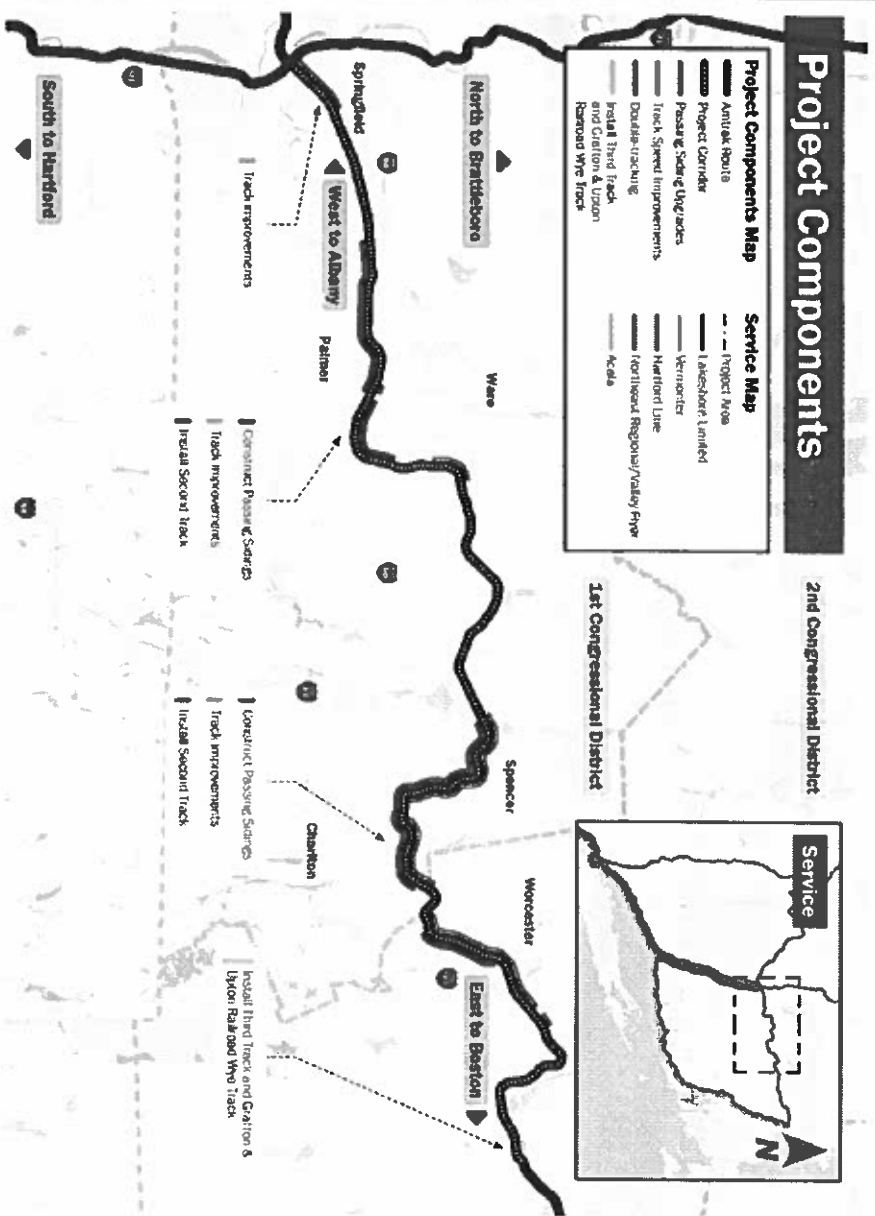
- MassDOT was awarded \$1.75 million from the FY22 CRISI program for preliminary engineering and environmental analysis for the Springfield Track Reconfiguration Project. (Underway)
- City of West Springfield, with MassDOT support, submitted an application for \$19.3M to the RCE Program for the *Front Street Grade Crossing Elimination Project* on October 11, 2022. (Awards expected to be announced in Spring 2023)
- MassDOT submitted an application on Nov. 21, 2022 for \$108M to the CRISI Program for the *Connecting the Commonwealth: Early Actions for the Inland Route* project. (Awards expected to be announced in May 2023)
- MassDOT will resubmit the *Connecting the Commonwealth: Early Actions for the Inland Route* project through the Fed-State Partnership- National Network Program - due April 21, 2023. (Awards expected to be announced in the Fall of 2023.)

Early Actions for the Inland Route Project

The goal of the \$135M *Connecting the Commonwealth: Early Actions for the Inland Route* project is to:

- Improve speeds and capacity on the Boston & Albany Line between Worcester and Springfield,
- Make corridor capacity improvements that support passenger service along with CSX and Grafton & Upton RR freight services, and
- Initiate 2 daily Amtrak round trips operating between Boston and New Haven via Springfield.

Early Actions for the Inland Route Project

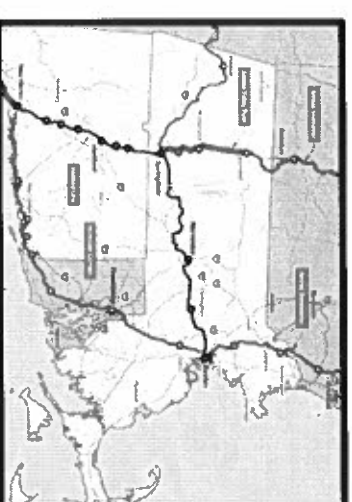
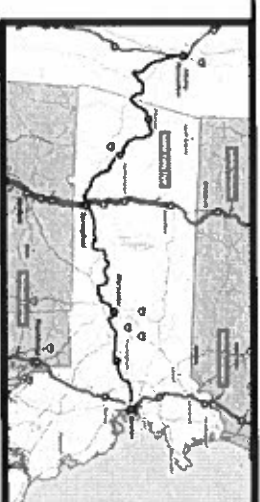


- Estimated Project Cost: **\$135 million**
 - MassDOT (\$18M)
 - Amtrak (\$9M)
 - FRA Grant (\$108M)
- Estimated Annual Ridership on Inland Route trains: **69,600**
- Estimated Travel Time Savings on the Lake Shore Limited between Boston & Springfield: **18 to 20 minutes**



Rail Corridor Planning Grant Applications

- CTDOT submitted an application to the Corridor ID Program for the *Hartford Line* Program (New Haven to Springfield Corridor).
- MassDOT will submit an application to the Corridor ID Program for the **Boston & Albany Corridor** and the **Inland Route** (Boston to New Haven via Springfield)
- MassDOT will be a joint applicant with Vermont to the Corridor ID Program for the *Vermont* Corridor (Springfield, MA to Montreal, QC)
- Governor Healy included ~\$12.5M in proposed budget for planning/design of Palmer Station & design/construction of Pittsfield Station improvements



**Advancing
Intercity Passenger Rail
across
Massachusetts**



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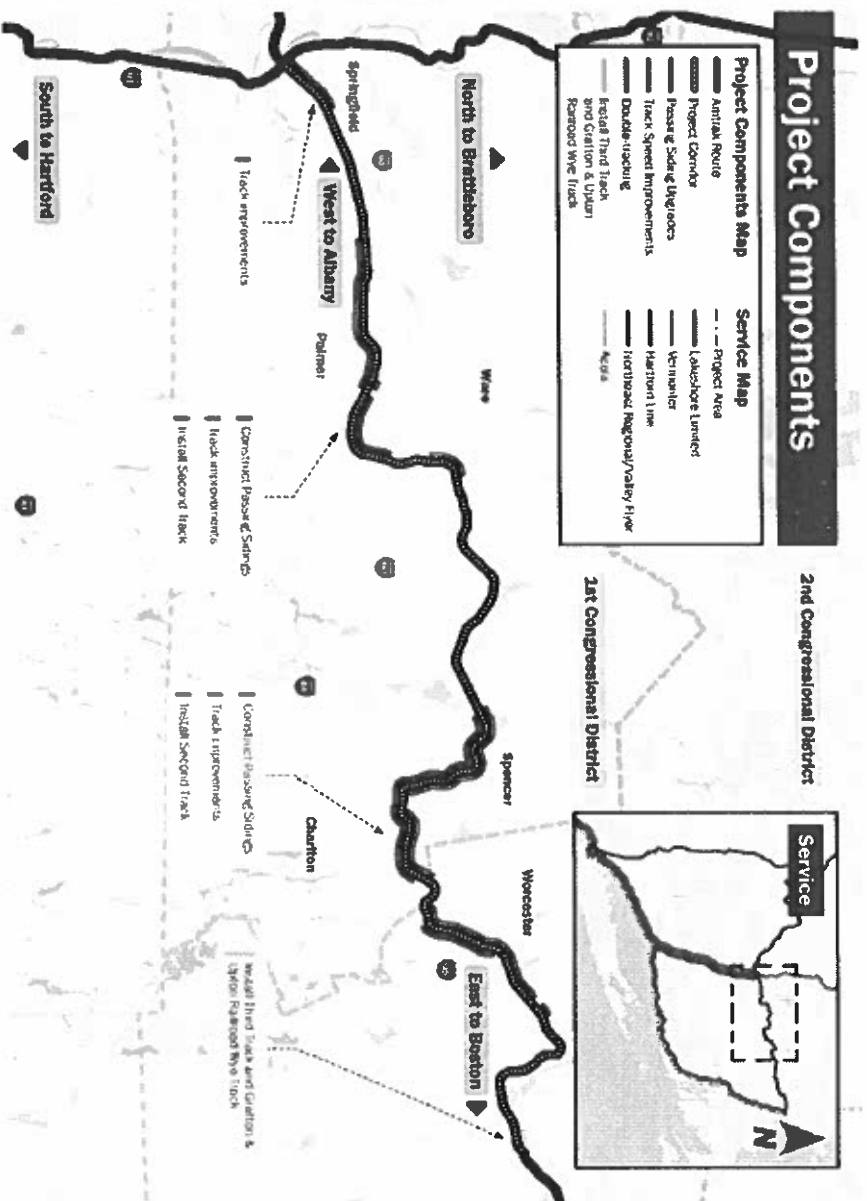
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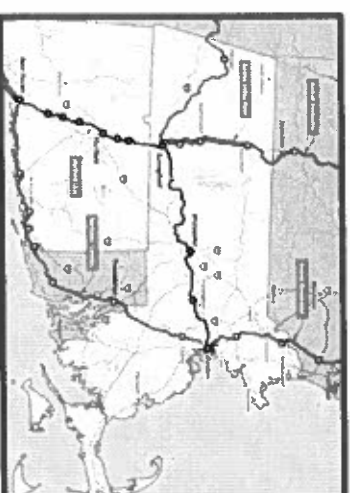
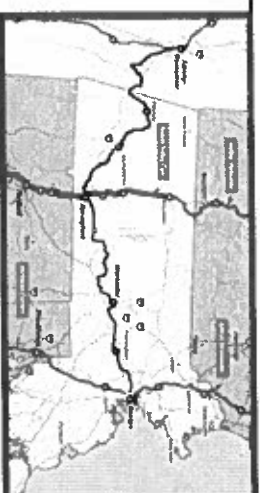


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- Governor Healey included \$18M in proposed budget for planning/design of Palmer Station & design/construction of Pittsfield Station improvements



South Station Expansion Project

**On Time Performance
Track/Station Capacity
Passenger Service Needs**

Station Requirements for Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail

Presented to the Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission

May 16, 2023

**Paul Lundberg
WMPRC Member**

Regional Intercity Passenger Rail Attributes

- **“Be On Time, and Make Sure the Windows are Clean!”**
- **Twin Cities 400 – Chicago to Twin Cities - 400 miles in 400 minutes**
- **Operational Capacity**
 - **Enroute Capacity (includes freight operations)**
 - **Origin/Destination Capacity**
- **South Station Role in Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail**
 - **Assumed Operational for E/W Passenger Analysis**
 - **Attributes at South Station**
 - **Train Arrival/Departure**
 - **Equipment Servicing**
 - **Equipment Management**

Current South Station Expansion Status and Planning

- **Passenger Rail Performance Standards Require Increased Capacity at South Station***
 - Acquire and Demolish USPS Facility
 - Reopen Dorchester Avenue and Extend Harborwalk
 - Expand South Station Rail Passenger Terminal
 - Construct/improve Train Storage and Maintenance Capacity
- **Current and Future Operations – Amtrak/Commuter Rail**
 - **Daily Ridership – 46,000. Projected 2035 – 65,000. 41% increase**
 - **Daily Trains – 450. Projected 2035 – 550. 22% increase**

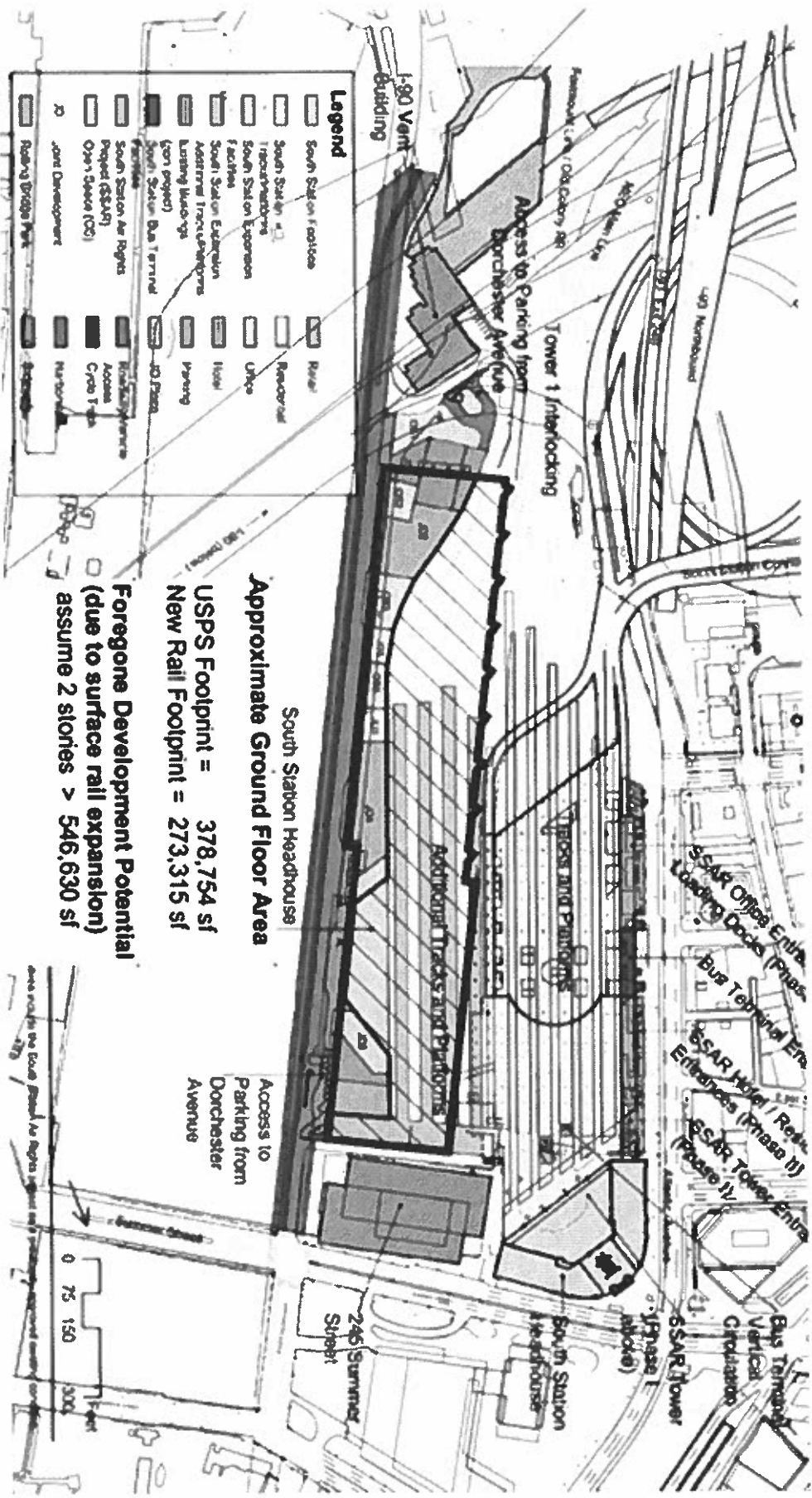
* South Station Expansion – Environmental Assessment and Section 4 (f) Determination – September 2017.

Existing and Future Passenger Rail Operations

- **Operating Attributes at South Station**
 - **Train Arrival and Departure – Dwell Time**
 - **Equipment Servicing**
 - **Equipment Management**
- **Additional Passenger Rail into and out of South Station**
 - **East/West, West/West/East, and Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail**
 - **South Coast Commuter Rail**
 - **Amtrak Inland Route through Springfield**
- **Competitive Customer Service requires Performance**
 - **Automobile/Mass Pike**
 - **Hybrid Alternative 4/5 from East-West Passenger Rail Report**
 - **SPG/BOS 98 miles/98 minutes; PIT/BOS 150 miles/150 minutes**
 - **OTP 95%**
 - **Train/station ambience**

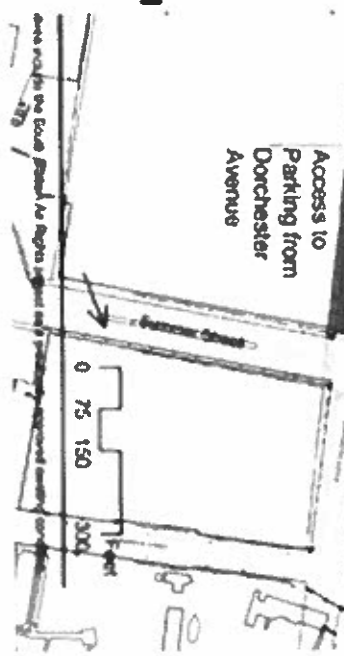
South Station Expansion Provides Necessary Infrastructure

- **South Station origin/destination for most western, central and southern train service in Massachusetts/New England**
- **Current MBTA Projects – Tower One Rebuilding and Widett Circle purchase – provide critical track infrastructure for South Station Expansion**
- **Successful customer service for existing service and growth through 2035 requires increase in track, platform and station capacity**
- **Current infrastructure of 13 tracks and 8 platforms increase by 7 additional tracks and 4 additional platforms**



USPS Footprint = 378,754 sf
New Rail Footprint = 273,315 sf
Foregone Development Potential
(due to surface rail expansion)
assume 2 stories > 546,630 sf

Approximate Ground Floor Area
 South Station Headhouse



APPENDIX C

Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission – Meeting #1

11:00 AM, December 9, 2022

Berkshire Innovation Center, Pittsfield MA

Attendance

Representative William Straus, Senator Brandan Crighton, Representative Natalie Blais, Representative Lindsay Sadosa, Representative Bud Williams, Representative Todd Smola, Senator Jo Comerford, Senator Eric Lesser, Paul Lundberg, Hayes Morrison (designee of Secretary of Transportation Jamey Tesler), Jeffrey Gonville (designee of MBTA General Manager Steven Poflak,) Meredith Slesinger, Kimberly Robinson, Linda Dunlavy, Janet Pierce, Thomas Matuszko, Jason Palitsch, Leah Robins, Michael Knodler.

Minutes

Senator Brendan Crighton, co-chair of the Commission, opened the meeting by reading language from the Commission's enabling act and noted that the Commission will issue a final report at the conclusion of its mandated hearings. Sen. Crighton then noted that MassDOT just that week had submitted an application to the FRA FY2022 Consolidated Rail and Infrastructure Safety Improvements Grant Program for \$108 million for corridor improvements between Worcester and Springfield. Sen. Crighton directed the members to introduce themselves.

Representative William Straus, co-chair of the Commission, welcomed the members of the Commission and the attendees. Rep. Straus mentioned that the mandate of the Commission extends beyond the concept of East-West Rail and entails all potential rail proposals for western Massachusetts. They also referred to the recent grant application, stating that the future of passenger rail in western Massachusetts relies on Amtrak and CSX, noting that it is a positive sign that CSX attached a supportive letter alongside that application.

Rep. Bud Williams stated that the initial conversation surrounding East-West Rail centered around Springfield, but the efforts of representative of the Berkshires expanded the conversation of extending rail service to Pittsfield. Rep. Williams lauded Rep. Pignatelli for being a part of such efforts.

Sen. Eric Lesser thanked the chairs of the Commission. They stated that a combination of support from the Congressional delegation, including Congressperson Richard Neal, and the Commonwealth have created an opportunity to get the East-West Rail project started. Sen. Lesser thanked the entire Western Massachusetts delegation, but specifically credited Rep. Pignatelli for their relentless advocacy for including rail service to the Berkshires as part of the project. Sen. Lesser said that holding the first meeting of this Commission in Pittsfield signaled that this project will benefit the entire state. They further stated that eastern Massachusetts will specifically benefit from the project as it would ease the housing and transportation crises in the metropolitan Boston area.

Meredith Slesinger, Administrator of the MassDOT Rail and Transit Division, thanked everyone who helped put together the grant application to the FRA for the Worcester to Springfield rail corridor improvements.

Michael Knodler, Director of the Transportation Center of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, stated that he was excited to be a part of the Commission and to hear from the public.

Hayes Morrison, designee of MassDOT Secretary Jamey Tesler, echoed the sentiments of Meredith Slesinger and stated that she was looking forward to hearing public comments.

Paul Lundberg, appointee of Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr, described their experience in the private sector in railroad management. They noted that many of the tracks that would be required for an East-West Rail project are owned by a private corporation, CSX.

Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, welcomed the members and attendees to Berkshire County and thanked the commission chairs for holding the first meeting in Berkshire County. They also said that they look forward to the technical aspects of the proposals and testimony.

Rep. Todd Smola stated that it was fortunate for the membership of the Commission to have a broad cross section of stakeholders, not just members from the political arena, and that they were looking forward to hearing from the network of advocates who support this project. Rep. Smola mentioned that passenger rail has long been discussed in western Massachusetts and was a matter of discussion early in their career as a selectperson. They also stressed that everybody should have a voice in this process and that the Commission wanted to hear from a diverse array of stakeholders. Rep. Smola mentioned that it was important to note the possibilities for rail that extend beyond state borders.

Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, said that the Vermonter, the Valley Flyer, and the Berkshire Flyer are proof that passenger rail can be transformative.

Rep. Natalie Blais stated that a partnership of state, local, and federal entities is required to make passenger rail to western Massachusetts happen. They noted that the freight railroads are also an important partner and welcomes their support of passenger rail initiatives. Rep. Blais noted the importance of the opportunity presenting itself with possible federal funding, and pointed to the success of the Valley Flyer as an example of what can be accomplished.

Sen. Joanne Comerford noted that holding this meeting in Pittsfield is indicative of the strength of the four-county partnership of the western Massachusetts legislative delegation that pushed for the creation of the Commission in the Transportation Bond Bill. The Senator also noted the success of the Valley Flyer, stating that it was a regional effort requiring the work of state, local, and federal partners with the help of the regional planning agencies. Sen. Comerford also mentioned the Northern Tier and the need for achieving regional equity.

Kim Robinson, Executive Director of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, stated that bringing passenger rail to the western part of the state is important for improving quality of life, achieving regional equity, and enabling economic development and presents an opportunity to transform the entire state.

Janet Pierce, Executive Director of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, stated that central Massachusetts stands to benefit from the expansion of passenger rail.

Jason Palitsch, Executive Director of the 495/MetroWest Partnership, noted that the MetroWest region is not served by MBTA bus or rapid transit service despite being a part of the metropolitan area and would be well served by increased rail service.

Leah Robins, on behalf of the MetroWest Regional Collaborative; Jeffrey Gonneville, Deputy General Manager of the MBTA and designee of GM Steven Poftak; and Rep. Sabadosa, expressed their excitement for the commencement of the WMPR Commission.

Rep. Smitty Pignatelli testified that it is important that the Commission is holding its first hearing in the Berkshires, noting that the Massachusetts Turnpike started in West Stockbridge. They stated that the Berkshires was built on the back of rail. Rep. Pignatelli also said that they have never seen the western Massachusetts delegation work together more strongly than on the issue of East-West Rail. The Representative asserted that passenger rail to Boston from the Berkshires will be transformative and produce immediate economic opportunities and that continuing rail connectivity further west to Albany would provide additional economic opportunities for the Berkshires, including connectivity with New York City. Rep. Pignatelli urged the Commonwealth to begin constructing East-West Rail in the western portion of the state and noted that rail service is an important amenity for retaining the recent population increase seen since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Rep. John Barrett credited Sen. Lesser for their advocacy for East-West Rail. They said that the population in Berkshire County has been in decline and that the only way to reverse that trend is through passenger rail service. Rep. Barrett also requested the Commission to consider the Northern Tier Passenger Rail project, saying that it could begin service within 18 months.

Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier testified that passenger rail connecting Pittsfield with Boston and New York is a long-time dream of the community and praised the goal of examining passenger rail within western Massachusetts in addition to connectivity outside of the region. Rep. Farley-Bouvier then told a story about an attempt to get a crossing guard in place near a school, in which local planners stated that there did not need to be a crossing guard due to a lack of students walking to school. The community created a new study which measured potential pedestrian demand, after which a crossing guard was put in place that led to increased numbers of children walking to school at that location over time. The representative also strongly stressed the importance of including Pittsfield in any discussion of East-West Rail and of considering the needs of the potential riders of the service (noting also that the ridership of similar projects like the Berkshire Flyer tend to be higher than projected.) Rep. Farley-Bouvier also stated that a dedicated funding source for East-West Rail needs to be considered, mentioning that sales tax money collected in western Massachusetts is directed to the MBTA.

Liz Quigly, from Congressperson Richard Neal's office, read a statement on behalf of the Congressperson. The statement noted that the Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Law makes new federal funding available to Massachusetts and Amtrak and that per the Congressman's recent discussions with Amtrak, the track between Boston and Springfield is part of the agency's vision for the future. The statement mentioned that the Big Dig project went over budget and resulted in priorities in western and central Massachusetts being deprioritized, and that this project is an opportunity for achieving regional equity.

Jonathan Butler, on behalf of the economic development organization 1Berkshire, testified that regional equity disparities for the Berkshires with respect to public transportation are significant and that the county is geographically located between major economic centers like Albany, New York, Springfield, and Boston without rail connections. They stated that rail service to Pittsfield would improve quality of life in the Berkshires and alleviate the housing crisis in the eastern part of the state. They further stated that the tourism industry is the backbone of the economy in the Berkshires and that the industry is at possible risk due to the travel preferences of younger generations who prefer rail travel. His organization is supportive of the Berkshire Flyer and the Northern Tier project and offered that Amtrak should operate western Massachusetts passenger rail services as any rail authority needs to be able to handle service across state lines. He also supported a dedicated and reliable funding source.

Sen. Lesser asked Jonathan Butler about the economic effects on the region created by the Berkshire Flyer service. Butler responded that it would be difficult to provide precise data because the sample size of passengers using the service is too small (in the hundreds), but anecdotally some businesses in downtown Pittsfield have seen increased business.

Michael Leary, on behalf of Berkshire Health Systems, said that there are many patients seeking healthcare in the Berkshires that need to travel to Boston for certain health services. They also stated that the staffing shortages that health care providers are experiencing are exacerbated by the lack of connectivity to major metropolitan areas.

Robert Malnati, Administrator of the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority, expressed their support for the East-West Rail project and for extending service further west to Albany.

Alice Bojanowski, a resident of North Adams, described their experience as a transportation planner in Florida and noted the implementation of the Tri-Rail and Brightline rail services.

Eddie Sporn, a resident of West Stockbridge, suggested that the state look into opportunities to cooperate with other states and expand intra-regional options to increase rail ridership in the region and noted that the Amtrak website could benefit from user interface improvements.

Ben Hood, a resident of Palmer, suggested that Palmer and central Massachusetts are similar to the Berkshires in that they both need transportation to address social needs.

Richard Holdman, a commissioner of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, noted the historical importance that the Town of Chester has had on rail and stated that it is

environmentally important to slow demand for population growth in dense urban areas like Boston instead of less dense regional areas like the Pioneer Valley.

Alyssa Costa, a Pittsfield resident, decried the automobile-centric planning in western Massachusetts and stressed the importance of considering disenfranchised individuals in transportation planning, especially those who cannot afford an automobile. Rep. Blais thanked Alyssa for their comments and advocacy.

Melissa Rosen, a resident of Pittsfield, mentioned that the existence of East-West passenger rail service would entice more trips to Boston and keep younger people like their daughter more interested in staying in western Massachusetts.

Jay Green, the town administrator of the Town of Adams, discussed their participation in the Berkshire Flyer Working Group and the success of that service. They also noted the operational benefits of connecting service to Albany.

Ben Hecksher, co-founder of the advocacy group Trains in the Valley, discussed that organization's role in helping to form the Western Massachusetts Rail Coalition and pointed to the recent grant application from MassDOT to improve rail between Springfield and Worcester, urging MassDOT to also apply for grants to improve rail between Springfield and Albany, through Pittsfield.

Andy Hoagland, member of the Williamstown Select Board, stated that the other western Massachusetts rail projects, like the Berkshire and Valley Flyers and the Northern Tier project are also important and should not be overshadowed by East-West Rail, especially because those projects can be implemented in such a short amount of time.

Steve Straus, Executive Director of the Empire State Passengers Association, highlighted the success of the Berkshire Flyer and urged Massachusetts to cooperate with the state of New York on western Massachusetts passenger rail.

Kamar Taliaferro, a resident of Pittsfield, testified that they are excited for passenger rail so that western and eastern Massachusetts residents can more easily experience each other's communities but also noted that there is an incongruity in the scale of housing development between the two halves of the state. Kamar stated that there needs to be significant investment in housing in the western part of the state so that diverse communities are not left behind in westward migration for lower housing costs after passenger rail investments. Senator Comerford thanked Kamar for his comments.

Alana Steinhauer, Executive Director of Volunteers in Medicine Berkshires, stressed the importance of passenger rail in providing access to health centers in other parts of the state, as many services are not provided in the Berkshires, and the public health benefits of improved air quality from more sustainable transportation.

Ned Capone of the organization Neighbor to Neighbor and the Tenants Union of Western Massachusetts, noted the rising costs of housing in the region, especially the costs of rents, and

the effect those costs have had on displacement. Ned also stated that passenger rail investments threaten rent-burdened individuals in western Massachusetts without significant investments in housing.

With no other member of the public wishing to testify, the meeting adjourned.

Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission – Meeting #2

10:00 AM, January 24, 2023

John W. Olver Transit Center, Greenfield MA

Attendance

Representative William Straus, Senator Brendan Crighton, Senator Joanne Comerford, Representative Natalie Blais, Meredith Slesinger, Senator Anne Gobi, Paul Lundberg, Michael Knodler, Hayes Morrison (designee of Secretary of Transportation Gina Fiandaca), Leah Robins, Senator Adam Gomez, Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, Linda Dunlavy, Tom Matuszko, Janet Pierce, Jason Palitsch, Kim Robinson, Representative Bud Williams, Mike Muller (designee of Acting MBTA General Manager Jeffrey Gonneville), James Doran (on behalf of Rep. Todd Smola)

Minutes

Senator Brendan Crighton, co-chair of the Commission, began the meeting by introducing new Commission member Senator Anne Gobi and by thanking former Commission member Eric Lesser.

Representative William Straus, co-chair of the Commission, stated that this is the second of six meetings that will take place in six different regions of the state and stressed the importance of receiving comments from disparate regional populations, as each region would have its own unique expectations of what increasing passenger rail service would mean. Rep. Straus read the authorizing language for the Commission and observed that while the Commission was formed to investigate administrative and political structures for executing East-West Rail, they view the work of the Commission as looking more broadly at all possible rail services operating in western Massachusetts.

Sen. Crighton directed the members of the Commission to introduce themselves. After the introductions, Rep. Straus opened the meeting to public comment.

Kristen Elechko, regional director for U.S. Senator Ed Markey, read a statement from Senator Markey in support of passenger rail efforts such as the East-West Rail, Northern Tier, and Berkshire-Housatonic projects. Per the statement, public transit investments are important for the environment, the workforce, and for economic development, with every \$1 invested in public transit returning \$4 in economic returns.

Joe Kurland, a former select board member from the Town of Colrain and the town's current delegate to the Franklin Regional Transit Authority advisory board, stressed the importance of

making any passenger rail service convenient for riders in terms of connectivity to different destinations and schedule frequency.

Andrea Freeman of the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts stressed that any entity in charge of East-West passenger rail service must consider public health and health equity. After reviewing health impact assessments from around the country, they had four areas related to public health and equity that any entity should be required to consider: affordability, accessibility, air quality, and station design. Regarding affordability, Andrea Freeman stressed the need to consider discounted fares and noted that traditionally fare-box recovery metrics have interfered with properly evaluating services, especially with an equity lens. Regarding accessibility and station design, they said that any passenger rail entity needs to widely promote rail service and ensure that stations are safe and accessible for bicyclists and pedestrians. Regarding air quality, the entity should engage with the Pioneer Valley Air Quality Network and invest in electric or alternative fuel sources to run cleaner train service.

Rep. Straus asked if there were any examples of other regions that succeeded on implementing public health factors into rail transportation service. Andrea Freeman responded that they would share the list of health assessments that they had examined.

Sen. Comerford inquired about the external monitoring system that would best hold the rail entity accountable. Andrea Freeman responded by explaining that the Pioneer Valley Air Quality Network is funded jointly by the EPA and the Attorney General's office. Sen. Comerford followed up by clarifying that they meant to ask more broadly about oversight and accountability of any agency executing rail service in the region. Andrea Freeman responded by referring to the advisory boards of the local RTAs and suggesting that any board have a number of community members and riders to accommodate disparate stakeholders.

Rep. Blais asked about investments in RTAs. Andrea Freeman responded by stating that they agree there needs to be more investment and that investments should be coordinated with passenger rail services. Sen. Adam Gomez echoed those comments.

Scarlet Lamothe, a member of the Palmer Rail Steering Committee, advocated for a rail stop in the Town of Palmer, suggesting that the Commission hold a public hearing in the town at Palmer Union Station, and indicated that they would submit written materials to the Commission. Sen. Gobi thanked Scarlet for their comments.

Rep. Straus paused the public comment period to solicit comments from the Commission membership, specifically on either the governance question (the form of oversight or administration that the proposed rail service would operate under) and also on the question of the kind of service that will be proposed, noting that large capital projects need to be well advanced to receive significant sums of capital funding.

Linda Dunlavy said that public comment so far has been strongly in favor of East-West passenger rail service and that any governance model chosen to operate such service should oversee a master comprehensive plan. Rep. Straus transitioned the meeting back to the public comment period.

Peggy Davis spoke about their personal experience with public transit systems and the importance of coordination between rail service, bus service and parking.

Gregory Cox, Fire Chief of the Town of Hawley, discussed their experience working on a legislative working group and having difficulties finding parking in the Boston area, as it was not feasible to leave early enough to find parking while accounting for the travel time from the western part of the state. Fire Chief Cox compared it to a family member's relatively easier experience taking a train from upstate New York to New York City. Fire Chief Cox also discussed Amtrak's Vermonter service and the need to coordinate north-south rail travel with east-west rail travel.

Sen. Comerford echoed the comments made earlier by Commission member Linda Dunlavy and discussed a remark from Susan Collins, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, suggesting that investments in rural communities was essential for the state's economy to rebound from the pandemic due to housing and labor shortages. Sen. Comerford continued by stating that funding for any entity operating East-West rail service should take into consideration regional equity, noting that the eastern portion of the state will benefit just as much as western Massachusetts due to access to the region's resources. Sen. Comerford concluded her remarks by raising the need to think about local transit, both the RTAs and micro-transit, as well as bicycling and walking, in any larger western Massachusetts transportation governance discussion.

Tom Matuszko echoed Sen. Comerford's comments concerning RTAs and micro-transit.

Rep. Straus observed that RTAs already have the purview to interface with rail service. Rep. Straus also stated that the governance structure of the RTAs benefits from the participation of local officials, despite some prior Gubernatorial administrations preferring to look at transportation issues strictly from a statewide perspective.

Paul Lundberg noted that the Commission is not only tasked with examining what entity will fund and operate passenger service but also has a responsibility to design the type of service. Lundberg stated that the Commission has a unique opportunity to design that service in a way that truly makes an impact.

Rep. Blais noted Rep. Straus's comments regarding local control of RTAs and stated that some of their constituents fear that a transportation governance entity for western Massachusetts could be coopted by the state and local control could be lost.

Sen. Crighton closed the meeting by stressing the importance of public comment and receiving testimony that informs the Commission of local perspectives. The meeting adjourned.

*Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission – Meeting #3
1:00 PM, March 21, 2023
Northampton Senior Center, Northampton MA*

Attendance

Representative William Straus, Senator Brendan Crighton, Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, Senator Joanne Comerford, Senator Adam Gomez, Senator Anne Gobi, Linda Dunlavy, Representative Natalie Blais, Jason Palitsch, Tom Matuszko, Kimberly Robinson, Sujatha Kirshnan (designee of Janet Pierce,) Hayes Morrison (designee of Secretary of Transportation Gina Fiandaca) Michael Knodler, Paul Lundberg, Meredith Slesinger, Representative Bud Williams, James Doran (designee of Representative Todd Smola,) Mike Muller (designee of Acting General Manager Jeffrey Gonneville)

Minutes

Representative William Straus, co-chair of the Commission, opened the meeting by introducing Rep. Sabadosa of Northampton. Rep. Sabadosa stated that there has been substantial work at the state-level in providing support for passenger rail, especially in western Massachusetts, and thanked Rep. Straus for their part in those efforts.

Rep. Straus then introduced Northampton Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra. Mayor Sciarra welcomed the Commission members to the City of Northampton and thanked Rep. Sabadosa, the Western Massachusetts Rail Coalition, and Trains in the Valley for their advocacy on rail issues. Mayor Sciarra noted past successes in advocating for north-south rail service and referenced a report commissioned by the Greater Hartford Capital Region Council of Governments and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission stating that a restoration of the inland route between Boston and New York through Springfield would result in a 10-to-1 return on investment in GDP in the region over 30 years. Mayor Sciarra also noted how important western Massachusetts rail projects are to the state's decarbonization goals.

Sen. Brendan Crighton, co-chair of the Commission, made opening remarks thanking the public for their advocacy on western Massachusetts rail issues and asked the Commission members to introduce themselves.

Sen. Comerford thanked the Northampton Senior Center and Mayor for making the hearing possible and thanked the chairs for their commitment to East-West Rail. The rest of the Commission membership offered brief introductions.

Mayor Roxann Wedegartner, Mayor of the City of Greenfield, declared their support for east-west passenger service, noting the economic gains their community made during the pandemic when people moved to smaller communities to work remotely and pointing to Greenfield's municipal high-speed internet and connection to passenger rail. The Mayor endorsed the idea of a regional rail authority with local stakeholders from central and western Massachusetts.

Jen Healy, Program Manager of the Quaboag Connector of the Quaboag Valley Community Development, stated that development of east-west passenger service through western and central Massachusetts would be beneficial for transportation access in the Quaboag Valley, which has been overlooked by RTA service. Jen Healy further stated that the Quaboag Connector is a lifeline for its rural community and can increase transportation access for rural communities by

conducting last-mile trips to a passenger rail stop in Palmer. Healy also asked the state to consider rural voices and needs when deliberating east-west passenger service and to incorporate rural stakeholders in governance positions. Healy concluded by requesting the Commission to consider forthcoming analysis that the QVCD has worked on in conjunction with the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts and Tufts University's Center for State Policy and Analysis.

Ana Devlin Gauthier, on behalf of the Amherst Town Council, noted the unique public policy challenges of hosting a large, seasonal student population, with the population of the Town of Amherst changing by about 24,000 people depending on the time of the academic year. They noted that 70% of these students do not obtain parking permits and that 75% of students travel to the college from other communities in the state. Gauthier observed that increased east-west rail service with attention paid to last-mile trips would positively impact student transportation and encourage participation in the Town's burgeoning cultural economy. Gauthier stated that any governance structure overseeing east-west passenger rail should primarily consider regional equity in its composition, with special attention paid to not overrepresenting larger, urban communities and with guaranteed representation from each of the four western counties. Gauthier also supported the idea that infrastructure work should begin in the western portion of the state to avoid the project being shelved before improvements can reach western Massachusetts. Gauthier stated that the future governing body should consider and focus on affordability, last-mile trips and partnerships with RTAs, with funding from the Fair Share amendment being used to support last-mile transit in the region.

Alex Jarrett, Ward 5 City Councilor for the City of Northampton, extolled the current north-south passenger service offered by the Vermonter and Valley Flyer but observed that passenger rail needs to be both frequent and appropriately priced. Jarrett also stated that connections between rail and bus service is imperative and encouraged increased funding for RTAs.

Ben Heckscher from the Western Massachusetts Rail Coalition and co-founder of Trains in the Valley referenced the four questions posed by the Commission's enabling legislation. Heckscher stated that MassDOT is the logical choice to design and construct the infrastructure, Amtrak is currently the logical choice to operate the service and that a rail authority should be established to oversee the service, with special attention to including local stakeholders as in RTA governance. Heckscher further stated that a rail fund should be created to pay for operations, as current MassDOT rail service operated by Amtrak is funded by MassDOT's Capital Improvement Plan and any long-term service should have dedicated revenue instead of being funded by capital dollars. They stated that it is important for the state and any proposed governance entity to work with other states, particularly with interstate rail compacts.

Rep. Straus thanked Ben Heckscher for their remarks and noted that, in regard to comments about operational funding and the creation of a dedicated rail fund, questions about the source of operating revenues are always prevalent in such policy debates.

Ken Dolan-Del Vecchio, a member of Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, praised the potential for a rail stop in Palmer to revitalize the downtown and decrease automobile dependence.

Zane Lumelsky, co-founder of Trains in the Valley, stated that the governance entity for east-west passenger service should have a board composed of local stakeholders and that service should be funded by a dedicated source of revenue.

Anne Miller, a member of Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, noted the incongruity of Palmer having a rail station but no service to destinations like Vermont and Connecticut. Anne Miller also noted that passenger rail service can encourage more people to move to western Massachusetts and that there is a real need to consider equity for the communities in which rail service is run through.

Paul Goodrich, a member of Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, observed that Palmer is a walkable community that would benefit from more service.

Gina Norton Smith, a citizen of Northampton, testified that they work in Boston and are concerned about their commute changing, as they recently received a promotion that will require more travel to Boston. Norton Smith stated that the fees and schedule for current rail service are not consistent and that any new service would need to be affordable with a consistent schedule. They also noted that current north-south and east-west rail services are not adequately coordinated.

Henry Rosenberg, a citizen of Northampton, stated that passenger rail is important to increase transportation access for those who cannot drive and is environmentally beneficial.

Marcia Pelletier, a citizen of Northampton, said that they served in the state legislature when the Downeaster service was proposed and recalled people saying that the service would only be used for tourism purposes. Pelletier noted that ridership on the Downeaster has continually increased. They also pointed to the difficulty of making connections between different rail services.

Meredith Slesinger, Administrator of the MassDOT Rail and Transit Division, gave a presentation on statewide efforts to advance intercity passenger rail.³⁴ Rep. Straus thanked Administrator Slesinger for their presentation, noting that it provided helpful information as many of the programs and grants available for passenger rail have changed in recent years.

Sen. Comerford thanked Administrator Slesinger for their presentation and inquired about Governor Healey's \$12.5 million proposal for East-West corridor improvements, specifically if the proposal included funding for staff or for improvements in Palmer and Pittsfield. Administrator Slesinger replied that there is funding for additional staffing needs. They also noted that most of the work is occurring on CSX property. MassDOT is an interested stakeholder funding the project but is still a level removed from the project itself.

Rep. Straus stated that it is important to remember that any progress on East-West Rail will rely on key partners, especially Amtrak and CSX because of their property rights. With no other Commission member wishing to comment on the presentation, Sen. Crighton re-opened the meeting to public comment.

³⁴ A copy of the PowerPoint is contained in Appendix B.

Amy Wang, Chair of the Selectboard of the Town of Worthington, testified that concerns about last-mile transit service are unlikely for rural communities such as Worthington and that passenger rail stops should be placed so that people in rural communities can drive to them within 15-20 minutes.

Jay Flynn from Transit Matters discussed the development that has occurred in Worcester in recent years and attributed the city's resurgence to its access to passenger rail service to Boston. They also stated that 90-minute service from Boston to Springfield is possible with track upgrades and electrification and that those upgrades can unlock economic benefits similar to those in Worcester. Flynn further stated that the South Station Expansion project is not necessary to increase expansion for any east-west service and additional capacity can be gained from operational improvements. They also advocated for cost control on infrastructure projects, noting that the \$4 million in the budget for study and design for a Palmer train station costs more than the \$3.2 million for construction of the Holyoke train station, and urged passenger service to be negotiated with CSX upfront.

Jan Whitaker testified that east-west passenger service would be beneficial not only for the western portion of the state but the eastern portion as well, and that improved transportation would unify a currently disunified state.

Susan Edelstein, a resident of Northampton, stated that train service from New York City is very expensive and noted that Connecticut subsidizes service.

Jonathan Kilborn expressed support for increased north-south and east-west rail service and pointed to the success of the Downeaster service.

Michael Suprenant, a former Selectboard member from the Town of Sturbridge, testified that Sturbridge is strongly in support of increased east-west service. Regarding South Station capacity, they stated that the infrastructure on the approach to the station is more important than the number of platforms, and they support South Station improvements and the relocation of the South Boston post office.

Debin Bruce, a resident of Northampton, discussed safety concerns with rail in the area and urged oversight over Class One railroads in the region so that safety and proper access to tracks by passenger rail service is maintained.

Sandy Ward, a resident of Holyoke, noted the disparity between the quality of rail service in western Massachusetts and the quality of rail service overseas and urged progress in developing quality rail and transit service.

Theodore Kozak, a resident of the Town of Monson, noted that the Selectboard of Monson voted in support of east-west passenger service and expressed support for a rail stop in the Town of Palmer.

Sarah Hogan, a resident of Northampton, stated that passenger rail service would be of great benefit for the region, especially for those who do not drive.

Jessye Deane, the Executive Director of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and the Executive Director of the Franklin County Regional Tourism Council, testified that the lack of access to reliable transportation is a major impediment to accessing services, particularly for those in poverty. They also noted the region's declining population and the potential economic benefits of better connecting the state's communities.

Una Fonti, a resident of Northampton, testified that they are blind and noted the importance of rail in disability equity. They also raised the environmental benefits of decreasing automobile transportation and urged rail service to other states.

Nathan Chung, a resident of Holyoke, warned that increased east-west travel could cause gentrification if people in the eastern part of the state are encouraged to occupy housing in the western part of the state with improved transportation access. They urged more funding to the RTAs and intraregional transit.

John McElduff, a resident of eastern Massachusetts and a business owner in the Town of Palmer, recommended that any governing entity hire local residents and urged improved connectivity between the east-west and north-south corridors. They also suggested that Amtrak operate the service, that the project be built according to the design-build procurement method, and that the Commission consider the shovel-readiness of projects in its findings.

Rebecca Rom-Frank, a resident of New York City, stated that they have parents living in Northampton and that faster and more reliable service would increase travel from New York to western Massachusetts.

Nina Fisher, a resident of the Town of Amherst, highlighted the disparity in transportation options between the eastern and western regions of the state and discussed a bus route that formerly connected Northampton and Amherst with the Leominster Commuter Rail station. They also noted the difficulty of commuting by train on the MBTA Commuter Rail with a bicycle, as it is prohibited at certain times to board with a bicycle.

Ben Hood, a member of Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, urged any rail governance entity to coordinate with local and regional transportation entities on last-mile connections.

An unidentified member of the public asked about the status of the deadline for the Commission's report. Sen. Crighton replied that the deadline for the Commission to submit its findings has been extended to June 30.

With no further comments or questions from the public, Sen. Crighton adjourned the meeting.

*Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission – Meeting #4
6:00 PM March 21, 2023
Springfield Technical Community College, Springfield MA*

Attendance

Representative William Straus, Senator Brendan Crighton, Representative Bud Williams, Senator Joanne Comerford, Senator Anne Gobi, Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, Representative Natalie Blais, Leah Robins, Kim Robinson, Linda Dunlavy, Meredith Slesinger, Tom Matuszko, Paul Lundberg, Michael Knodler, Sujatha Krishnan (designee of Janet Pierce) Hayes Morrison (designee of Secretary of Transportation Gina Fiandaca)

Minutes

Representative William Straus, co-chair of the Commission, begins the meeting by explaining the context of the Commission as a product of the prior year's transportation bond bill and by noting that the Commission has a mandate that encompasses rail service beyond the East-West Rail project. Rep. Straus then introduced Commission member Representative Williams of Springfield.

Rep. Williams thanked the supporters of East-West Rail for their advocacy and urged regional equity in transportation spending between the eastern and western portions of the state. Rep. Williams stressed the importance of providing public testimony at these hearings in order to make an impression on political leaders in Boston.

Rep. Straus stated that the South Coast has been in a position similar to western Massachusetts and had worked for 30 years to get a passenger rail connection to Boston. Rep. Straus also noted that in order to get passenger rail service up and running cooperation and work is required in all parts of the state, noting the need for capacity upgrades at Boston's South Station. Rep. Straus opened the meeting to public comment from local elected officials.

Rep. Orlando Ramos noted the rise in demand for remote work and observed that passenger rail service could allow Springfield to compete for the placement of remote jobs due to its cheaper real estate.

Rep. Aaron Saunders testified that East-West Rail represents a transformational economic development opportunity for western Massachusetts. Rep. Saunders thanked Congressperson Richard Neal for their advocacy for the project and noted that east-west connectivity is not only a connection to Boston but also a beneficial connection to the resurgent city of Worcester. Rep. Straus echoed that last point, stating that rail connections provide economic development in additional ways that are not always anticipated.

Rep. Mindy Domb stated that both the northern and southern routes for east-west passenger service would benefit the Representative's district. Rep. Domb stated that western Massachusetts needs more investment not only in passenger rail but also regional transit and that connecting the state via rail would be economically and environmentally beneficial. They further testified that western Massachusetts rail needs a dependable funding stream and questioned whether there could be additional sales tax surcharges or a division of the current sales tax surcharge with funds directed to their respective regions of the state. Rep. Domb argued in favor of a governance entity that is regional in nature.

Rep. Straus responded that Rep. Domb makes a great point on the issue of regional governance and referred to the structures of the state's RTAs.

Sen. Crighton thanked the public for attending the hearing and introduced fellow Commission member Sen. Adam Gomez of Springfield.

Sen. Gomez thanked the public for attending the hearing and stated that their focus is on the impact of any governance structure on communities of color, rural communities and the RTA system. Sen. Gomez also thanked Congressperson Richard Neal for their advocacy on the East-West Rail Project and welcomed the Commission members to the district.

Commission members Sen. Gobi and Sen. Comerford introduced themselves. Sen. Crighton then invited testimony from Sen. Jacob Oliveira.

Sen. Oliveira remarked on the inclusion of funding in the Governor's proposed budget for rail station improvements in Pittsfield and Palmer. The Senator stated that Palmer is the gateway to western Massachusetts and is the best location for a rail stop that best connects to the communities around the Five Colleges.

Rep. Straus requested that the remaining members of the Commission introduce themselves. After brief introductions, Rep. Straus noted that there will be a presentation later in the meeting by Commission member Meredith Slesinger, Administrator of the MassDOT Rail and Transit Division, and opened the meeting to public comment.

Chloe Soto, manager of communications and special projects for the City of Chicopee, testified that communities in the Pioneer Valley are ready to provide housing stock to relieve the state's housing crisis, but the region has suffered with slow job growth, aging housing stock, and widening inequalities in opportunities and income due to a lack of transportation connectivity. Soto quoted a study by the Greater Hartford Capital Region Council of Governments that projected a ten-to-one return on investment in regional GDP over a 30-year period resulting from the restoration of the Inland Route. They also stated that increased passenger rail service is important for meeting the state's environmental goals and the promotion of the Valley Flyer from a pilot to a permanent service indicated the appetite for passenger rail in the region. They also urged any rail governance entity to incorporate local input.

Tim Sheehan, Chief Development Officer for the City of Springfield, thanked the Commission for holding the hearing in Springfield and stressed the importance of mass transit infrastructure and regional prosperity. CDO Sheehan also noted the inclusion of funding for east-west passenger rail service improvements in the Governor's budget and thanked Congressperson Neal for their advocacy for the East-West Rail project.

Amanda Pham, executive director of the Springfield Redevelopment Authority (owner and operator of Springfield Union Station,) testified that they are encouraged by the progress being made on east-west passenger rail and emphasized the economic benefits from the \$94 million renovation of Union Station. They stated that East-West Rail would unlock important economic

benefits including transit-oriented development and urged support for increased funding for passenger rail.

Bob Daley, a Chester Railway Trustee, noted that the station in the Town of Chester is a National Historic Landmark and recommended that any rail governance entity be independent and composed of regional stakeholders. They also touted the environmental benefits of increased passenger rail and the potential for housing development due to increased connectivity with the eastern portion of the state.

Richard Allen, a resident of the City of Springfield, pointed to the governance structures of the MBTA, the Fiscal Control and Management Board and the MBTA Advisory Board, and stated that they could envision a similar structure in western Massachusetts. Allen advocated for an advisory board structure that would represent all communities, especially smaller, rural communities, and recommended a strong governing board of five to nine people with significant representation from the western Massachusetts region. They also stressed, in regard to the selection for a governance board, the importance of subject matter expertise on matters such as operations, finance, real estate, and engineering.

Rep. Straus thanked Richard Allen for touching on the governance issue and noted that there have been a variety of governance models used in Massachusetts and it is the Commission's job to provide advice to the Legislature and Governor.

John Garret, a resident of the City of Greenfield, testified that the economy in the western portion of the state has not recovered from deindustrialization and has not had the same technology renaissance from which the eastern portion of the state's economy has benefitted. They support any rail governance model that makes a commitment to running as frequent service as possible at the lowest price possible. Garret noted the recent news from the United Nations regarding the climate emergency and believes that the 30 years it took to get South Coast Rail is too long of a time frame to accomplish East-West Rail with environmental constraints in mind. They also recommended that any entity work to keep infrastructure costs under control, noting recent reporting from New York City on construction costs, and suggested that regional ballot initiatives may be implemented to provide funding for construction and maintenance.

Sheila Cuddy from the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation stressed the importance of considering the voices of potential riders.

Nikki Sauber, a resident of the City of Greenfield, stated that better connecting the state can help people become more independent, noting that those that apply for state public housing often turn down the affordable housing opportunities in Franklin County because of the lack of transportation and the lack of access to opportunity and communities.

Kareem Kibodya, Senior Policy Co-Lead for the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts, testified that when he was a youth, there was a sense that finding success would necessitate leaving the community, but there is currently potential for economic opportunity in Springfield. They also noted the impact of transportation equity on housing, job availability, the environment, and traffic. Kibodya also stated that east-west passenger service not only presents economic

benefits for western Massachusetts but also presents opportunities for communities statewide to discover new ways of living and working.

Dave Pierce, President of the Chester Foundation (operators of the Chester Railway Station and Museum,) stated that the Town of Chester stands to be a source of revenue for east-west passenger service as a tourism destination, with three National historic landmarks within ten miles of the railway station.

Meredith Babcock, a resident of the Town of Becket, advocated for increased passenger rail service in order to increase access to the state's natural resources and cited the environmental benefits of increased rail transportation.

Daniel Harter, a college student, advocated for the construction of Alternative Five from the East-West Rail project study with as much electrification as possible and noted that current service is slower than rail service between Springfield and Boston from 100 years ago. They also advocated for increased service along north-south rail corridors and to locations outside of the state.

Catherine Nordstrom, a resident of Springfield, testified that they recently moved from eastern Massachusetts due to housing affordability. They also stated that historically, infrastructure projects like the Quabbin Reservoir and the Massachusetts Turnpike have been built to transport resources from western Massachusetts to the eastern portion of the state, and that east-west passenger service could reverse that relationship. They also expressed support for high-speed service and believes that ridership would increase over time.

Peter Miller, the Director of Community Development for the City of Westfield and speaking on behalf of Westfield Mayor Mike McCabe, noted that the Mayor has expressed strong support for East-West Rail and understands the need for connectivity throughout the Commonwealth.

Tracy Whitfield, the executive director for the Coalition for an Equitable Economy and a city councilor for the City of Springfield, expressed support for east-west passenger rail service and stressed the importance of considering equity with regard to any procurement processes that emerge from east-west passenger rail projects.

Erica Swallow, a realtor, remarked that western Massachusetts is an attractive place to live.

Angela Rivera, a resident of the City of Springfield, expressed interest in the logistics and construction of the East-West Rail project.

Rail Administrator Meredith Slesinger then gave a presentation on intercity rail efforts and projects in the commonwealth.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Rep. Straus noted that what is considered to be the "East-West Rail" project could actually be made up of many different individual projects and that is partly why the Commission is named more broadly after the concept of western Massachusetts passenger rail.

Sen. Crighton clarified for the public in attendance that the report of the Commission, given an initial deadline of March 31, has been granted an extended deadline to June 30.

With no additional comments or questions from the public or members of the Commission, the meeting adjourned.

*Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission – Meeting #5
10:00 AM May 16, 2023
Worcester State University, Worcester MA*

Attendance

Representative William Straus, Senator Brendan Crighton, Paul Lundberg, Representative Todd Smola, Representative Natalie Blais, Linda Dunlavy, Kim Robinson, Jason Palitsch, Tom Matuszko, Meredith Slesinger, Mike Muller (designee of MBTA General Manager Phil Eng,) Representative Bud Williams.

Minutes

Representative William Straus, co-chair of the Commission, began the meeting by explaining the context of the hearings as a consequence of legislation in the prior year's transportation bond bill and by noting that the final hearing of the Commission would take place later that day in Natick. Rep. Straus noted that the Commission has a deadline by which to deliver a report on its findings of June 30.

Rep. Straus stated that the Commission will be hearing two presentations at this meeting: one from Commission member Paul Lundberg and another from Commission member Meredith Slesinger, Administrator of MassDOT's Rail and Transit Division, regarding the South Station Expansion project. Rep. Straus informed the Commission that this project has implications for passenger rail in the western portion of the state despite being located in Boston due to capacity issues which affect the operability of the entire state's rail system.

Senator Brendan Crighton, co-chair of the Commission, made introductory remarks and directed the remaining Commission members to introduce themselves as well.

After introductions, Paul Lundberg presented on railway operations relating to South Station capacity and the proposed expansion project.³⁵

At the conclusion of the presentation, Administrator Slesinger gave a presentation regarding required investments for enabling more rail service to the western portion of the state, focusing on South Station and the Worcester triple track project.³⁶

³⁵ A copy of the presentation has been included in Appendix B.

³⁶ A copy of the presentation has been included in Appendix B.

At the conclusion of the second presentation, Rep. Straus thanked Paul Lundberg and Administrator Slesinger for their presentations and solicited comments from the remaining Commission members.

Commission member Dunlavy inquired about the current status of the South Station Expansion project, particularly if negotiations with the Postal Service are underway and if funding is secured. Rep. Straus replied that they are not directly involved in the negotiations with the Postal Service and thus not affecting the discussions by speaking to the matter. Rep. Straus stated that negotiations have been a longstanding issue for many years, that they have involved several agencies, and that a land deal was almost completed approximately ten years ago. The representative also stated that the current Secretary of Transportation and the local United States Congressperson have indicated an interest in restarting negotiations. Rep. Straus noted that the project is vitally necessary and that the assumptions of the East-West Rail study rely on the project being completed.

Commission member Matuszko asked how long the South Station Expansion project would take to be completed and how much would the project cost, assuming the Postal Service property could be purchased. Administrator Slesinger replied that there are several factors that would force MassDOT to reevaluate the length of time and cost of the project; for example, portions of the project are already underway, such as the Tower One project. Commission member Muller stated that the prior estimate for South Station Expansion was in excess of \$2 billion and any current estimate would be significantly higher.

Commission member Lundberg stated that the Postal Service property should not be a barrier for continued planning or advocacy for South Station Expansion or any passenger rail service that would require those capacity upgrades, noting progress on capacity enhancing projects at South Station such as the Tower One project and the purchase of Widett Circle.

Rep. Straus reiterated comments from the Commission hearing in Springfield that the “East-West Rail Project” is really 10 to 15 different individual projects across the state. Rep. Straus also referenced the pending federal application, which has support from Amtrak and CSX. Rep. Straus stated that the preference is to refer to “Western Massachusetts” rail as opposed to the phrase “East-West Rail” due to the broader array of projects and stakeholders involved. Rep. Straus referenced the South Coast Rail project, noting that with SCR there was no service one day and one day there will be service, and states that passenger rail to western Massachusetts will not be so binary of a proposition, as there is currently service to western Massachusetts and many different ways of modulating and improving that service over time.

Sen. Crighton raised the question of how rail electrification might affect South Station expansion projects. Commission member Muller responded that the MBTA is planning on converting the Commuter Rail system into a decarbonized and high frequency regional rail system and that that will require increased frequencies. They stated that all previously discussed capacity projects would be required in order to run that increased frequent service for the Commuter Rail.

Rep. Straus opened the meeting to public comment.

Daniel Harter, a student from the Town of Longmeadow, advocated for regional transit service and passenger rail to coordinate schedules and for trains to include space for bicycles. They also advocated for better walkability in Springfield to make utilizing transit more accessible, for east-west passenger service to coordinate scheduling with the Cape Flyer service, and for interim east-west passenger service to begin operations soon.

Anne Miller thanked Rep. Smola for their advocacy for the Palmer and Quaboag Valley and responded to comments from Rep. Straus about the differences between South Coast Rail and east-west passenger service, saying that it is unfair to suggest that western Massachusetts currently receives rail service because the service is infrequent and unreliable. Miller also stressed the importance of increased connectivity between the rural and urban parts of the state and noted the political implications of unifying such regions in this era of political divisiveness.

Rep. Straus clarified that despite prior statements indicating the existence of east-west passenger service, that they do believe that current service is insufficient.

With no more members of the public wishing to testify, Rep. Straus adjourned the meeting.

*Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission – Meeting #6
2:00 PM May 16, 2023
Morse Institute Library, Natick MA*

Attendance

Representative William Straus, Senator Brendan Crighton, Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, Meredith Slesinger, Mike Muller (designee of MBTA General Manager Phil Eng,) Hayes Morrison (designee of Secretary of Transportation Gina F,) Tom Matuszko, Paul Lundberg,

Minutes

Representative William Straus, co-chair of the Commission, began the meeting by stating that this is the final public meeting of the Commission and that a report on the Commission's findings is due on June 30.

Senator Brendan Crighton, co-chair of the Commission, invited the remaining Commission members to introduce themselves.

After introductions, Commission member Lundberg presented on railway operations relating to South Station capacity and the proposed expansion project.³⁷

At the conclusion of that presentation, Commission member Dunlavy asked if the increased ridership figures included in the presentation assume operation of either East-West Rail, South

³⁷ The presentation was identical to the presentation given during meeting 5 and is included in Appendix B.

Cost Rail, or the restoration of the Inland Route. Lundberg answered that the ridership figures consider South Coast Rail but not East-West Rail or the Inland Route.

Meredith Slesinger, Administrator of MassDOT's Rail and Transit Division, gave a presentation regarding required investments for enabling more rail service to the western portion of the state, focusing on South Station and the Worcester triple track project.³⁸

Rep. Straus reiterated that any east-west passenger service would require work in the eastern part of the state, especially capacity upgrades at South Station.

With no member of the public wishing to testify, the meeting adjourned.

³⁸ The presentation was identical to the presentation given during meeting 5 and is included in Appendix B.

APPENDIX D

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Francis Ryan
Sent: Monday, March 20, 2023 11:54 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU); Allard, Danielle (SEN); Gomez, Adam (SEN); Jackson, Lamari (SEN)
Cc: T.J. Plante; tashe@springfieldcityhall.com
Subject: Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] : is important

May I suggest each government entity and its residents, interested in this endeavor, be encouraged to support state and municipal bonds to support the development of such an addition to our public transportation system.

Frank Ryan, East Forest Park Civic Association President

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Gabriel Quaglia [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 20, 2023 11:07 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: Train service in Western Mass

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [s is important](#)

My name is Gabriel Quaglia and I own a home in Holyoke.

I just wanted to send a brief letter to express my enthusiastic support for east west rail.

First I want to say as a resident of Holyoke I hope there would be some ability to take east/west rail from the Holyoke station.

I often (every month or two) have meetings in the greater Boston area and think it would be great if I could take the train and have a longer working commute rather than having to make up hours of lost work time from the drive on days I have to do that.

I also take frequent flights out of Logan airport to save money. I usually have to drive out to Framingham to park and then take Logan Express to the airport. I usually have to do this very early in the morning to ensure I get to the airport on time because I fear if I drove anytime after 6am I would risk missing my plane in the event of traffic. I think having a frequent, reliable train would open up more options of flying out of Boston without having to commute by car.

I also wanted to point out that service farther west desperately needs to be improved. The trip to Chicago was interrupted by having to take a bus for one leg last I checked. I have also had staff at the train station tell me that the Lake Shore Limited is one of the least on time trains in the network. Modernization and improvement would hopefully improve the trip from Boston to Chicago as this is an overnight route people currently do take, and I think it could attract more ridership if it was more reliable and there were no transfers to and from a bus to worry about and was more reliable.

This is all without even mentioning the two giant benefits that come from rail:
Lowering greenhouse gas emissions and reducing traffic on I90.

East/west rail is a win for so many reasons and I urge any and every action that can expedite it.

Thank you for taking these comments under consideration.

Sincerely,
Gabriel Quaglia

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

To: the East-West Passenger Commission
By: Gus R. (Sunderland Resident)
Re: Thoughts on East-West

03/21/2023

I am writing you to express my experience and thoughts regarding the East-West Rail Commission. Throughout 2022 I went on to document a selection of towns that contain MA Route 2, these towns being: Greenfield, Charlemont, North Adams, Athol, and Leominster. Something that I wasn't aware until researching these towns was the strong influence RailRoads had to the development of these towns, and how their slow removal was a sign of a quick economic change that is still occurring to many towns to this day. A town that made me see this was Athol, which I believe it had a prosperous future ahead until two things happened. The realignment of MA Route 2 and the closure of the Train Station. I believe that these changes derailed Athol and many other towns. Looking at Census Records it seems like a close correlation between the quick population change and the availability for commuters to use the rails. I think this connection is emphasized by the current usage of the North Leominster Station by Athol residents and highlights the mistakes made by B&M and later MBTA in the last century. (Such as slowly shortening the Fitchburg Line to its present state.)

My personal experience with the Trains in the area has been more limited, growing up in Amherst I can recall seeing the Amtrak train stop at the station but not yet old enough to ride it myself. Once old enough the Train moved to Northampton, I have taken the Vermonter, to NYC often and to Burlington once from Northampton. While I have also taken the Lakeshore Limited from Boston to Springfield, I think the experience I had from Chicago to Springfield emphasizes the issues that need to be resolved and echoes comments from the Woman from Northampton who spoke earlier today.

I was in Chicago after taking a train from Texas, I had visited after taking a flight from Connecticut (a shuttle train from Northampton/Springfield to Windsor would be great too). Once I arrived to the Springfield Station I was waiting for my ride, I walked around the desolate station with soon-to-be passengers waiting for the late night train to Greenfield. The problem that I noticed was the lack of a "seamless connection"

To: the East-West Passenger Commission
By: Gus R. (Sunderland Resident)
Re: Thoughts on East-West

03/21/2023

similar to the one I had in Chicago. Trains in Springfield are currently too spaced and infrequent and for those who can wait can find themselves in an empty station with nothing to do to pass the time.

My wishes is that one day I can go to the Amherst Station in the morning take a train to either Palmer or Greenfield and find myself in Boston within hours and have enough time and confidence that I can make it back home the same way. That I can go to work by going to the Northampton Station, taking a train to Springfield then a train to Stockbridge (or) Pittsfield and find myself within minutes away from work. I will now condense my points to summarize:

- The East-West Rail would provide more accessibility to all Commonwealth Residents and provide economic opportunities that were lost due to their removal/downsizing.
- In my opinion, The Northern Tier of the East-West Rail (Fitchburg to Albany/North Adams) will bring back life to areas that have been forgotten since their closure in the mid-20th century.
- Avoid Drive-By Towns: There are reasons why these Small Rural Towns had a Station that are now abandoned and forgotten. They had utility to the people, and needs to be brought back.
- Increase Train Shuttle Services (example, North Wilbraham to Springfield, Amherst to Palmer, North Adams to Pittsfield)
- Do not be Bullied by Large Railroads (Freight), and do not be afraid of using your powers to regain the Rights of Way in a matter that would benefit the People of Massachusetts.

For any feedback or followup feel free to contact me at gus@grstudios.net thank you for your time and my best wishes to the success of this project.

Best Regards,

Gus R.

-Resident of Sunderland, MA-

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Janice Rowan [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 5, 2023 10:45 AM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: W Mass Passenger Rail

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [important](#)

I am writing to encourage support for passenger rail access in Western Massachusetts.

I support upgrades to enable East-West rail to add Pittsfield as a destination.

But I am most excited to have a Northern Tier Corridor along Rt 2.

I'm 62 years old. I love train travel. More importantly I envision increased need for a comprehensive rail system both because I am aging and can see a day when driving won't make sense and because of the necessity to address climate change imperatives.

In addition, I'd like to see some thought about connectivity to rural towns as an adjunct to planned and existing rail hubs. Like most people, I like where I live. Moreover, I can't afford to relocate! This means car use remains a necessity. Greenfield (Or Northampton) is nearby but long term parking is limited and in the long run not green or close enough in terms of travel. So let me also request consideration of transportation options to these rail hubs. If the rail system is such that I can walk or ride a bike to a sub-hub, then the system approaches a needed long term resilience.

Thank you,

Janice Rowan
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Jocelyn Chapman [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, December 5, 2022 4:51 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: Rail

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [is important](#)

Hello!

My name is Jocelyn Chapman and I moved from San Francisco to the Berkshires 6 years ago. I am still trying to figure out how to get to the various airports in the region.

I am hoping that you consider this difficulty when making decisions about transportation planning. I think it would make sense to be able to at least take a train to one of the airports in New England, especially since there are tracks and stations all over the place.

Thank you for your work on this need.

Jocelyn Chapman, Pittsfield MA

--

Jocelyn Chapman, EA
Enrolled Agent

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: John Boothroyd [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 20, 2023 9:53 AM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU); Domb, Mindy - Rep. (HOU); Emmett, Shannon (HOU); Ciccarello Stephanie; Russ Vernon-Jones Blog; Darcy DuMont; Adrienne Terrizzi; Lynn Griesemer; Cinda Jones; Andy Fisk; Andrea Donlon; crwc@ctriver.org
Subject: Public Transportation; Mindy has indicated that meetings are happening in NHPTN and Springfield.

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [this is important](#)

We have a hard time maintaining routes "that are not used enough" Rather than shut them down; please address the lack of use. Planning your days and work schedules around bus times requires both parties cooperation and detailed planning vs. numbers and costs determining closure of that which we need more of (Eventually reduce our overall dependency on private transport). Rural Private Transport(Almost mandatory)has to change; we should reduce demand on fuel, including the embedded portion in all that we do, grandiosely.

Envision a complete web, trains buses and covered bike and low impact transport connecting all frequently adequate tables and chairs for longer an short commutes. Way better than it needs to be (Minimum cost won't fly) if we wish to change the way we do what we do. Costs vs. Private Transport at \$5,000 per year per family plus fuel?

Limited travel; local holiday spots such as once was around here places Paradise Pond. Hordes from the cities overwhelm what's left of local recreation spots. Forcing closure and access limitations to what is publicly owned in a state trust; making overall issues worse. Easement cannot be denied; however many a county road (Farm Roads) and public access has been shut down.

Rural and Urban requirements and what should go where is poorly coordinated as we remake a massive archaic and far from optimal unsustainable infrastructure.

John

Good afternoon, my name is John McElduff and I have operated a business in Palmer, Massachusetts since 2005. I live in eastern MA within walking distance to this rail line, and can't wait to board the new train, to work in WMASS, hopefully in 5 years time. I am so excited that the study is "over", and the commission is starting the process to manage, operate, design and build it.

I would like to express my support for the **people** of Western Massachusetts to **staff** the entity that would **manage** the new service perhaps calling it the **Western New England Passenger Rail Authority**. I have met many talented people in this region that can recommend and staff such an entity. A local team will be best suited as managers as they will be transparent in a sort of organic way because they will be reporting to their neighbors, as well as government officials on Beacon Hill, and will be able to focus on this single project, versus busier entities like Regional Transportation Entities and MASSDOT.

Connectivity to adjacent passenger rail is important, so we must insure that the **Knowledge Corridor** and the **Central Corridor** are intelligently reunited with East –West rail at the existing **Union Stations** (where tracks crisscross) in Springfield... and also in Palmer.

As a matter of trust and simplicity, during the early days, I recommend that Amtrak be the operator.

Since this project will only affect a few train stations and will be simpler than similar efforts in Eastern MA, I suggest the project be delivered by the design build method, rather than a design-bid-build deliverable.

Lastly, in yesterday's Boston Globe, past MA Sec of Transportation, Fred Salvucci reminded all of us that the Commonwealth needs to have all its major projects "shovel ready". I hope that the commission can make shovel readiness a gigantic component of their final report.

Thank you and good afternoon to all.

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Joseph Blumenthal [REDACTED].com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 7, 2023 10:43 AM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: Passenger Rail in Massachusetts

You don't often get email from [REDACTED]. [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Representative Morrissey:

In a newsletter from Senator Comerford I learned that you'll be soliciting views from citizens on improving rail transit in Massachusetts.

I am an occasional user of the Valley Flyer service to New York and points south, and love going by train, but it is a disappointment that the service is so slow. If I drove from Northampton to New York I could spend a full hour stuck in traffic on the Cross Bronx and still beat the train.

If you want to have East-West rail, please spend enough that it could be real high-speed rail. If one could go from Springfield to Boston in 75 minutes with a stop in Worcester, you would see really good demand for the service and you'd be a lot more successful in getting people out of their cars.

Thanks for considering my views.

Joseph Blumenthal

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Karen Foster <kfoster@northamptonma.gov>
Sent: Sunday, March 19, 2023 10:05 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Cc: Comerford, Joanne (SEN); Sabadosa, Lindsay - Rep. (HOU)
Subject: Testimony for Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission

You don't often get email from kfoster@northamptonma.gov. [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Siobhan,

I unfortunately will not be able to attend the Tuesday, March 21 public hearing in Northampton due to a work commitment. However, I did want to take a moment to express my strong support for passenger rail in Western Massachusetts with local oversight.

Many of my constituents in Northampton's Ward 2 are very interested in local passenger rail and have been enthusiastic supporters of the Valley Flyer. Having passenger rail service to New York City and, hopefully Boston, is a game changer for Western Massachusetts. People want and need to travel to bigger cities for work, family, and cultural opportunities, and they will take the train if the schedules are realistic and the tickets are affordable.

Local oversight and dedicated funding are critical to making this work. It is important that any rail service in Western MA have regionally led oversight to ensure that schedules, routes, marketing, and ticket prices are in line with our region's needs.

As a Northampton City Councilor, I am excited for the possibility of expanded passenger rail service in Northampton, regional oversight, and the economic and cultural benefits this can bring to Western Massachusetts. I - and many others in local government - look forward to supporting local passenger rail service in any way that I can.

Thank you,
Karen

--

Karen Foster

City Councilor, Ward 2
City Council Vice President

she/her/hers
413.341.0503
kfoster@northamptonma.gov

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: leslie nyman [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 20, 2023 4:17 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU); Domb, Mindy - Rep. (HOU)
Subject: trains in Massachusetts

Some people who received this message don't often get email from [REDACTED] his is important

I am writing in support of developing a reliable rail service across the Commonwealth, east-west,west-east. As a resident of the Pioneer Valley, and as I age I find that the thought of driving into Boston is daunting. So, I do not visit old friends, go to museums or restaurants that are interesting and available. We are a relatively small state and it should not difficult to develop a system that serves to eliminate increasing car traffic and increases our ability to enjoy all the benefits of Massachusetts.

thank you, leslie nyman, [REDACTED]

-
- Read my latest blog post at <http://soundofherownvoice.wordpress.com>

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Mark Shapp [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 19, 2023 3:03 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: Comments for the 3/21 WMRC hearings

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [his is important](#)

Greetings Representative Straus, Rep. Crighton, and members of the W. MA Passenger Rail Commission:

My name is Mark Shapp. I live in Lenox and I am retired after a 35-year career, all of it in train operations, as one of the contract/union employees at Metra, Chicago commuter rail. My wife, who rode Metra to/from her job as a librarian at Chicago Public Library, is a Pittsfield native.

Massachusetts finds itself, primarily because of decades of neglect of its transportation systems and infrastructure, in a trifecta of transportation messes. There is the need to replace the Bourne and Sagamore Bridges account their structural deficiency. Then there is the need to re-configure and replace the MassPike alignment at Allston, also account structural deficiencies. And so far, the federal government has refused to offer funding for part or all that will be necessary to complete those projects

And then we have the mess that is the MBTA, not the least of which is the seemingly near, if not actual, collapse of the Orange and Red Lines subway cars procurement. I predicted, back when the Patrick administration let the contract, that the T would be forced to curtail service on those lines before the new cars would ever be ready for revenue service. And I was right although not, as we, have seen, only because of construction delays at the builder.

Most in the passenger rail advocacy community say the Democrats are for funding public transit and the Republicans are not. Like all stereotypes, there is a kernel of truth to that. But we are a state that is, and has been for a long time in the vise-like grip of the party that is supposedly friendly to mass transit. That the mass transit systems serving metropolitan Boston could have been let to fall so far into disrepair and disrepute is a disgrace. And "fixing the T" ain't gonna come cheap. And neither will the other two transportation crises.

My point is that a safe, efficient, attractive, and reasonably-priced at the farebox T is the very foundation of an interregional (and actually interstate-more on this below) passenger rail service across the state. Folks are not going to leave their cars at an outlying railroad station and ride the train to Boston if the T isn't reliably there to provide the "last mile". Building "East/West" before the T is well on its way to regaining the stature it had as late as the early 1960s is like building a house without a foundation. And I don't believe we can afford to accomplish both at the same time. Governor Healey cannot even find a new GM for the T because the truth is no one in their right mind, given the local politics and current condition of the T, would want the job.

If you will permit me another subject, that of governance over "East/West". It has been proposed by Congressman Neal and others that we need to form yet another public agency, a Western MA Passenger Rail Authority, before anything can happen. Now there is precedent. Virginia, who has done far more to advance passenger rail than we have, and has plans for a lot more, did form the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) even though it already has a Department of Rail and Public Transportation. I do not know what was behind that. But our DOT has a Division of Rail and Transit, headed up by Ms. Meredith Slesinger. Someone needs to explain exactly what is the role of Ms. Slesinger's organisation if not to do East/West. They certainly haven't done much to fix the T. So what do they do?

But if we do form a WMPRA, what is envisioned to be the geographic limits of its jurisdiction? Will it be the entire route (Boston) Worcester to Pittsfield? Or is it only for Springfield west? And if not the entire route, then who manages (Boston) Worcester-Springfield? Are we to have a division of management agencies for this?

Then there is the matter of Pittsfield being the western terminal. There are no support facilities at Pittsfield; No layover yard, no set up to do even light mechanical repairs or car cleaning between runs. And Amtrak's crew base for this line, as well as all the above things I cited, are at Albany/Rensselaer. I contend Amtrak will want the latter as the western terminal for "East/West". But the line capacity, track and signal systems, are as much constricted between Pittsfield and Albany/Rensselaer as they are between Springfield and Worcester. But only 12 of those 50 route miles are in MA! So what then? Are we going to try to drag NYState DOT into this? Because if the track and signal systems capacity constraints are not addressed west of Pittsfield, MA passengers waiting for their early morning train to Boston could wind up with their train arriving considerably later than the train schedule shows.

Meanwhile everyone, MassDOT has made it perfectly clear for all those willing to see it that they are fixated on Boston-Springfield and then not across the wide Connecticut River but rather south to Hartford and New Haven. That \$108 million CRISI grant application pretty much says it all. So what are we to make of that?

Respectfully submitted:
Mark Shapp
Lenox, MA

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Maureen Flannery [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2023 3:37 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Cc: Sabadosa, Lindsay - Rep. (HOU); Karen Foster
Subject: east west passenger rail comment

Thank you for offering opportunities for public comment on the development of east-west rail routes across Massachusetts. I appreciated the information provided at the Northampton Senior Center on March 21 and am grateful that I could participate by Zoom. I enthusiastically support expansion of rail routes through central and western Massachusetts.

I am a Northampton resident who really appreciates the north-south trains through Northampton. I use them for trips to NYC, New Haven, Greenfield, and Vermont. I am so glad to be able to walk to and from the Northampton station (with part of my walk parallel to the train tracks, along the Northampton Bikeway and Manhan Rail Trail.) I am planning a much longer trip this summer to Kentucky, ether down the east coast through Charlottesville or through Albany to Cleveland/Chicago and then south. (Both routes would require bus trips as well.)

At this point, I have several health conditions that limit my ability to drive safely. (While I still use my hybrid car for local trips, I am unable to travel on highways or long distances.) There is no one in western Massachusetts who provides the specialty health care I need. I originally was going to Boston for care, taking the bus or hiring a driver. Several years ago, I changed to a physician at U Mass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, closer to Northampton but not easily accessible. What I need is a reliable train connection from Springfield to Worcester, I would be able to get to and from medical appointments.

I know many other residents here in the Connecticut Valley and in the hilltowns to the west with similar needs. In particular, I work with Northampton Neighbors, an organization that supports people over 55 who wish to "age in place" and for whom transportation is a critical need. Many are seeking "greener" and more sustainable ways to get around than driving in individual vehicles.

I urge you to use available monies and to solicit more funding to make east-west passenger rail a reality in Massachusetts. I am 73 years old and I hope to ride trains to Boston, Worcester and Albany in my lifetime! There is no time to lose for me or for the environment which is so much in need of alternatives to traveling in gas-powered vehicles.

Maureen Flannery
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



THE CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

MAYOR DOMENIC J. SARNO

HOME OF THE BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

March 21, 2023

The Honorable Representative William Straus
The Honorable Senator Brendan Crighton
Co-Chairs of the Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission
Joint Committee on Transportation
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony for Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission Meeting #4

Dear Representative Straus and Senator Crighton:

Please accept this letter as written testimony in strong support of advancing the Commonwealth's East-West Rail Service. A viable East-West Passenger Rail service that connects Western Massachusetts to Central and Eastern Massachusetts, utilizing our iconic and historic Union Station here in the city of Springfield, will significantly enhance economic development opportunities in the region while also providing a key component that would also connect key rail ports of the North-South rail lines running from Penn Station in New York City, through Union Stations in New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, and into northern Vermont and Canada.

Key passenger rail stops along the East-West passenger line would provide a catalyst for economic growth throughout the area. The iron is hot, and now is the time to strike. This project would open up a myriad of positive possibilities, including opportunities for economic development, jobs, and housing.

I want to also applaud Governor Healey for realizing the potential of this transformational project. By committing vital funding to support this project as part of her proposed FY24 budget, the Healey-Driscoll Administration is committed to growing our state and local economies, while enhancing our transportation infrastructure so that we have a comparable rail system that is on par with our brother and sisters in Europe and Asia.

Thank you for your time on this important matter and for your continued dedicated efforts and leadership on behalf of the City of Springfield and the Commonwealth.

Respectfully,

Domenic J. Sarno
Mayor

"Good health 4 GodBless."

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Dambrosio, Michael <mdambrosio@townofware.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 17, 2023 8:48 AM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: East-West Passenger Rail

You don't often get email from mdambrosio@townofware.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Hello

My name is Michael Dambrosio, I am the Transportation Operation Supervisor for the Town of Ware. Transportation in rural areas such as Ware and Palmer and many small towns in Western Massachusetts is often overlooked. However, the sad fact of the matter is that there are thousands of people of all age groups that have no means of transportation. They rely completely on the limited amount of public transportation that is available.

Walking to the store is not an option for a majority of the population. There are major roads that do not have walkways, stores are miles apart from each other, the terrain of western Massachusetts. Many people choose to not go out, to not get their groceries or prescriptions or see their doctor because it is nearly impossible to do so on one's own.

Everyday my drivers bring as many people as they physically can to work, doctors' appointments, grocery shopping and more and we are barely scratching the surface. We run at full capacity every day. We now offer a Palmer to Work Program to help reduce the cost of rides for Palmer residents that are going to work, and we have seen an increase in ridership for those residents since the program started.

The Quaboag Connector in conjunction with the PVRTA has been running the B79 bus line from UMass Amherst to Worcester. The numbers show the clear need for the service. College students head to Boston for the Weekend and vice versa. Our vans are at capacity every weekend and we have to turn people away. People want to travel but there are not a lot of options.

I grew up in downtown Boston where every type of transportation was easily accessible and affordable. Here in Western MA transportation is not easily accessible nor affordable. In many places the average cost to take an Uber to a grocery store is almost \$20 in each direction. I ask you, how many elderly or disabled individuals on fixed incomes can afford to go out and back once a week at almost \$160/month? How many teenagers can afford to get a ride to work when they only make \$15/hr? Luckily there are resources such as the connector which make it possible for some, but not for all.

The reason I mention all of this is because Palmer and other local towns should be able to reach out for better opportunities. Giving more transportation options to the residents will give them hope. We need to get people to work. We need people to go to their appointments. We need people to go out and shop and help the economy but how can we expect them to do so without the means. Opportunity is growth and Western MA needs that opportunity to grow.

"If you build it, they will come." Field of Dreams 1989

Michael Dambrosio
Transportation Operations Supervisor

Town of Ware
126 Main Street, Ware MA, 01082
(413)667-7196



Ware, MA

Someplace Worth Seeing



**Quaboag Valley
Community Development Corporation
& Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation**

June 28, 2023

Dear Chairman Straus and Chairman Crighton,

The Quaboag Region Coordinating Council (QRCC) encourages the Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission, in its consideration of potential public entities with the ability to operate and oversee passenger rail service proposals from the East-West Rail Study Final Report, to prioritize transparency and representation in its selection or design for such an entity.

The QRCC, a state-recognized transportation planning and advocacy group, meets monthly and is Chaired by the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC). Its participants include representatives of local town governments, senior centers and COAs, social service agencies, regional hospitals, regional transit authorities (RTAs), regional planning commissions, representatives from local school systems, community representatives, and MassDOT. After years of developing and supporting the Quaboag Connector van service, the QRCC understands the transportation needs of residents throughout the Quaboag Region as it provides essential travel to daily destinations including employment, medical appointments, job training, educational institutions, and vital grocery store and supply venues. The Quaboag Connector is a lifeline service for many, and has emerged in the region as a model for rural transportation.

Our region, which went many years without public transportation options, has seen first-hand the benefits of a community-driven, collaborative approach to transportation solutions. The Quaboag Connector was developed and has evolved from community feedback about transportation needs. Since its start in 2017, it has provided over 58,000 rides and expanded services through collaborations with PVRTA, Baystate Health, the Town of Palmer, and the Ware Council on Aging. This expansion was possible and powered by meeting residents' directly expressed transportation needs. For passenger rail to meet the needs of rural areas in Massachusetts and gain the trust of residents, the public entity that oversees the service must be transparent in its deliberations and decision-making, and should be accountable to a representative advisory board, with members who can speak to the experience of rural residents in places like the Berkshires and Quaboag Valley.

Connectivity and frequency of service are essential qualities for passenger rail to be a viable option for rural residents. The Quaboag Connector dispatch and scheduling team spends significant amounts of time helping residents plan their travel across multiple transit services like the Connector, RTAs, and on to commuter rail service, depending on destinations. Coordination with Regional Transit Authorities and local/regional organizations providing public transit services is essential to ensure that train service connects seamlessly to bus and van services all along its routes. Further, to effectively serve the needs of our expanded geographic region, train service must be frequent, with schedules timed to enable single-day return trips. Lastly, train service must be affordably priced or subsidized in order to guarantee use by all potential riders, regardless of their income.

23 West Main Street, Suite 1 · Ware, MA 01082 · (413) 967-3001 · Fax (413) 967-3008 · qvcdc.org

Serving: Belchertown, Brimfield, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Holland, Monson, New Braintree, North Brookfield, Palmer, Spencer, Wales, Ware, Warren, West Brookfield

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Passenger rail presents enormous opportunity to connect residents across the Commonwealth and increase residents' access to resources within their own communities. Train service that directly serves rural and suburban areas, such as Central Massachusetts between Worcester and Springfield, will create improved connections to employment, training and education, healthcare, and shopping for residents. In six years of operation, the Quaboag Connector has grown to provide about 1,100 rides every month. About 60% of these rides take community members to and from employment; Several of our regular riders have noted that their ability to maintain regular employment is due to the Quaboag Connector's service. About 10% of our rides bring community members to healthcare appointments and about 17% of rides are to the grocery store and/or pharmacy, providing access to food and medication. On average, 35% of our rides are for residents over 60, and 22% are for people with disabilities. In many cases, the presence of an affordable, accessible transportation services that makes steady employment, accessing regular healthcare, or visiting friends and family possible.

Transportation needs in rural areas are challenging, but a service that meets those needs has the potential to vastly expand opportunities for residents in employment, education, healthcare, and other vital services. With this in mind, the QRCC encourages the Commission to keep transparency and representation at the forefront of considerations for a public entity to oversee and operate passenger rail across the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

The Quaboag Regional Coordinating Council:

Jen Healy, Rural Transit Program Manager, Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation

Sheila Cuddy, Project Director, Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation

Melissa Fales, Executive Director, Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation

Stuart Beckley, Town Manager, Town of Ware

Baystate Wing Hospital

Warren Council on Aging

Linda, Leduc, Town of Palmer

Brenda Palmer, Holland Community Center

Michael Dambrosio, Operation Supervisor – Quaboag Connector, Town of Ware

Doug Albertson, Town of Belchertown

Patricia Ranner, Community Member

Aniko Laszlo, MBTA/System-Wide Access

Ben Hood, Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop

John Zienowicz, Ware Council on Aging

Quaboag Hills Community Health Improvement Plan

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Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Rabbi David Weiner <rabbiweiner@outlook.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 6, 2022 8:21 AM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: Support East-West Rail Project

You don't often get email from rabbiweiner@outlook.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Rep. Straus and Sen. Crighton,

I am a 14-year resident of Pittsfield and a leader of one of its religious congregations. Pittsfield's economy would benefit greatly from reliable and efficient East-West rail service to Boston. There is significant potential for growth in this region - as a place to live year-round, as a weekend retreat, and as a tourist destination. Regular rail service to Boston might help employers choose to locate facilities and headquarters here, driving population growth and therefore the prosperity of this beautiful but struggling region of the Commonwealth. A new train could also help ease the difficulty and expense of reaching Logan Airport from this area.

To my mind, a reasonable travel time, affordable tickets and passes, and a schedule convenient for those who would take the train regularly are very important.

I am looking forward to hearing more about plans to create East-West rail service in Massachusetts.

Thank you,

Rabbi David Weiner

Knesset Israel
16 Colt Rd
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 445-4872
rabbiweiner@outlook.com
male pronouns

Join KI Livestream Services - Shabbat Morning, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

<https://knessetisrael.org/livestream> or on Roku/Apple TV/Kindle Fire TV on the Boxcast App, Knesset Israel channel

Attend & support our online Berkshire Jewish Film Festival! www.berkshirejewishfilmfestival.org

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Statement from U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey and Representative Jim McGovern to the Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission

December 9, 2022

We thank the Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission for exploring the myriad opportunities for passenger rail proposals in the region. We must ensure that we are building a rail system that works for all Massachusetts constituents and one that includes East-West Rail and the Berkshires-Housatonic Line.

Passenger rail is essential for a strong economy, clean environment, and thriving workforce. Studies consistently show that expanding passenger rail improves mobility, enhances safety, promotes economic development, generates new jobs, and helps protect the environment.

Cities like Pittsfield and Springfield will be the crossroads for all of the activity that will arise when we help connect our transportation systems to the Northeast.

Every \$1 invested in public transportation generates \$4 in economic returns, and every \$1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates more than 50,000 jobs. Simply put, investing in passenger rail is one of the smartest, most economical choices we could make.

High-performance passenger rail service will enhance transportation capacity, travel times, reliability, and efficiency. These projects will also pay special attention to historically and persistently unconnected and under-connected communities.

We encourage a comprehensive and regional network of affordable, safe, and climate friendly transportation options. With sufficient resources, we can make sure that Western Massachusetts is at the hub of a new regional rail network.

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Steve Polom [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 19, 2023 9:10 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: Written Testimony For East-West Rail

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [is is important](#)

To whom it may concern,

As a life long Springfield resident, this project has my family's full support. While this project will not help my wife and I in our daily commutes, it will give us a new option to get to Worcester and beyond to Boston. We have driven to Worcester to pick up commuter rail to Boston for Red Sox games/long weekends in Boston and have been very happy with the experience.

The successful Valley Flier, CT Rail and long standing Amtrak operations in Springfield are great examples of the support that exists locally for rail travel within in the Valley. I see this project as the best opportunity to better connect Springfield to the rest of the state.

For too long Springfield and the rest of the Pioneer Valley have felt disjointed from the eastern part of the state. From a transit point of view Springfield has been better connected to Hartford and New York City than it has been to our own Capital. East-West Rail can correct this.

Furthermore, I feel it is it is very important that the state looks into a solid, one seat ride from the Worcester Line to North Station. As people who frequent the New Hampshire Seacoast and Portland Maine, it would be fantastic to be to able to board a train in Springfield, transfer at North Station and then use the Downeaster north.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

--

Steven Polom

Polom Electrical Service, LLC
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)

From: Theresa Perrone [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, December 8, 2022 9:43 PM
To: Morrissey, Siobhan (HOU)
Subject: Written Testimony - Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission Meeting

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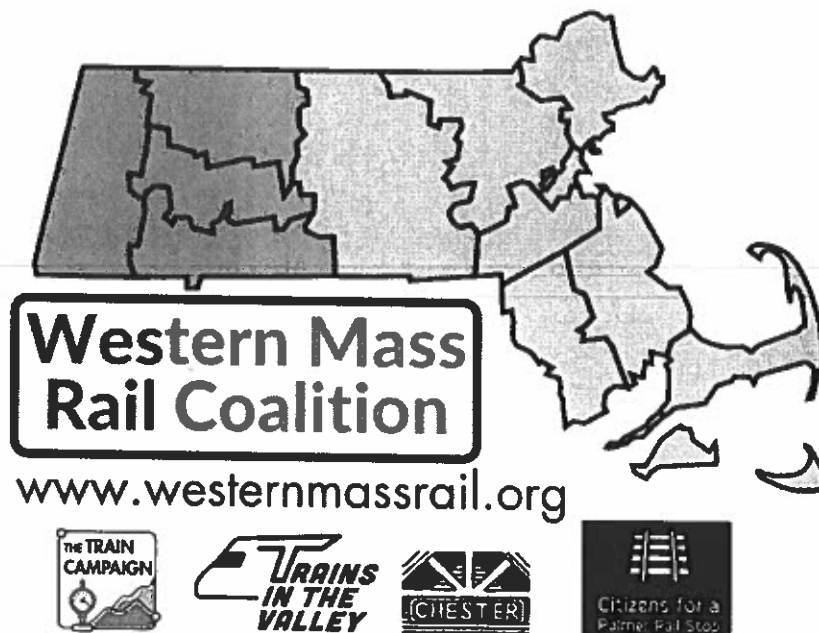
RE: PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE
Public Hearing Notice Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail
Commission Meeting
December 9, 2022

Hi there - I'm unable to attend tomorrow's meeting, but would like to submit the following comment:

Thank you to the commission for its work. East-west rail service can and will be remarkably transformative for the western region. Now is the time for a transportation alternative to vehicle travel. In addition to the obvious transportation benefits, our region will benefit from land use and economic development activity around stations; we've seen this happen around the country with both light- and heavy-rail projects. Mass transportation is vitally important for sparking and supporting denser, more sustainable development. As someone who works remotely for an agency based in Cambridge, MA, east-west rail — especially with a station in Palmer — will be life-changing! I am so grateful to Eric Lesser and all the other people working so hard to make this happen.

Thanks!

Theresa M. Perrone Poe
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



March 19, 2023

Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission
Chair Brendan Crighton
Chair William Straus

Dear Co-Chairs Crighton and Straus,

The Western Mass Rail Coalition member organizations have been advocating for East-West passenger rail service since 2013 and we as a coalition are pleased to offer this written testimony in support of the Commission's work.

Before commenting on the topic of passenger rail governance we would like to draw your attention to the diagram labeled "Passenger Rail Service in Western Massachusetts" that you will find attached as page 8.

We prepared this diagram so that commission members could more easily understand the existing and planned passenger rail service in our region.

We think there are five basic questions that need to be answered at this stage.

- 1. Who should design, permit, and construct the necessary infrastructure?**
- 2. Who should provide the passenger rail service?**
- 3. Who should oversee the passenger rail service?**
- 4. Who should fund the ongoing provision of service?**
- 5. How should Massachusetts promote and develop intercity passenger rail service with neighboring states?**

On the following pages we will outline what we feel are reasonable ways for the Commission to address each of these questions.

1. Who should design, permit, and construct the necessary infrastructure?

We believe that the **Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)** is the logical public entity to design, permit and construct the necessary infrastructure for the ongoing provision of passenger rail service in Western Massachusetts.

MassDOT performs these functions today in support of the existing passenger rail service in Western Massachusetts, and they also should perform these functions for the East-West rail project.

MassDOT has the necessary technical expertise and knowledge to manage such large and complex projects.

Furthermore, MassDOT has the ability to tap the technical expertise that exists today within the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Commuter Rail division — as it did during the Knowledge Corridor-Restore Vermonter project between 2012 and 2015.

MassDOT also has the “standing” as a peer organization to work with the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the New York State Department of Transportation, and/or the Vermont Agency of Transportation on infrastructure projects that necessarily affect passenger rail service that crosses state lines.

With that said, MassDOT’s design, permitting and construction work in support of passenger rail in Western Massachusetts must be closely and transparently coordinated with any regional entity — for example, a Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Authority — that may be created by the legislature to oversee the passenger rail service in our region.

2. Who should provide the passenger rail service?

For all the reasons detailed in MassDOT’s Massachusetts Intercity Passenger Rail Governance White Paper dated November 12, 2021, we agree that Amtrak should be the provider of all intercity passenger rail service in Western Massachusetts at this time.

3. Who should oversee the passenger rail service?

We believe that passenger rail service should be overseen by a new government entity known as the **Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Authority**.

The creation of an authority would ensure that passenger rail service directly serves rural, suburban and urban areas of western Massachusetts to meet the needs of all residents for improved connections to employment, training and education, health care, social services, food, and affordable housing.

The creation of a rail authority would also allow for more effective and focused local and regional oversight of the passenger rail services that are provided in western Massachusetts.

Such an authority would be similar to the existing Regional Transit Authorities (RTA) that exist across the Commonwealth for the provision of local and regional bus service.

An authority would allow for rail fares to be set at levels that would allow for use by all potential riders, regardless of their income.

The authority should coordinate its work with the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) and Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) so that passenger rail services work seamlessly with public and private transit services across the region.

We note that public passenger rail authorities have been established in many areas across the country, including these three notable examples:

Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA)

NNEPRA, based in Portland Maine, oversees the Amtrak Downeaster service between Brunswick, Portland, and Boston.

Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA)

SRPRA is overseeing and implementing the restoration of passenger rail service between Reading and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VRPA)

VRPA is responsible for promoting, sustaining, and expanding the availability of passenger and commuter rail service in Virginia.

4. Who should fund the ongoing provision of service?

The retention, maintenance, improvement, and development of intercity passenger and freight rail-related infrastructure improvements and operations are essential to the Commonwealth's continued economic growth, vitality, and competitiveness.

To fund the ongoing operation of the state-supported intercity passenger rail service the legislature should identify a dedicated funding stream.

One source of funding could be a percentage of the income tax revenues that are produced by the additional 4 per cent income tax levy on very high incomes, or by redirecting the 1% of the sales tax in Western Massachusetts that currently is used to fund the MBTA.

With this in mind, we believe that the legislature should create a "**Commonwealth Rail Fund**" that would be used to fund both the capital costs and operating costs associated with developing and continuing intercity passenger and freight rail operations and the development of rail infrastructure, rolling stock, and support facilities to support intercity passenger and freight rail service in the Commonwealth.

5. How should Massachusetts promote and develop intercity passenger rail service with neighboring states?

All of the existing and planned intercity passenger rail services in Western Massachusetts operate across state lines.

This means that these services are supported by MassDOT in cooperation with the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the New York State Department of Transportation, and/or the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

We believe that the Commission's final report should endorse the establishment of an Interstate Rail Compact¹ between Massachusetts and the states of Connecticut, New York and Vermont.

Examples of existing Interstate Rail Compacts include:

Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission

Members include: Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, and Wisconsin

Southern Rail Commission

Members include: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Interstate Rail Compacts have a history of promoting intercity passenger rail projects within their regions and encouraging policies that foster the efficient development of intercity passenger rail projects.

Importantly we note that Rep. Lindsay Sabdosa has filed House Bill HD.2977 and Sen. Paul Mark has filed Senate Bill SD.1919, two bills which call for the creation of an Interstate Rail Compact between the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and Vermont.

We stand ready to answer any questions that the Commission may have regarding this testimony.

Sincerely,

Western Mass Rail Coalition

The Western Mass Rail Coalition

Attachment

Rev 2

¹ Interstate Compacts were created pursuant to section 410 of the Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act.

Western Mass Rail Coalition

An association of rail advocacy groups working together to expand the use of passenger rail in Western Massachusetts.

westernmassrail.org

Member Organizations

Trains In The Valley

An advocacy group focused on improved and expanded passenger and freight rail service in the Pioneer Valley region of western Massachusetts.

Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop

An advocacy group working to restore passenger rail service to the "Town of Seven Railroads" at the junction of the Inland Route (Boston to NYC) and Central Corridor (New London to Brattleboro) rail lines, and to improve mass transit options for residents of the Quaboag Valley region.

Chester Railway Station & Museum

Advocates working to expand rail passenger service in Western Massachusetts.

The Train Campaign

A rail advocacy organization for Berkshire and Litchfield counties and the surrounding region, sharing a vision for passenger rail as the essential framework for efficient, sustainable transportation in the 21st century. The Train Campaign supports passenger rail initiatives including the East-West Rail, the Pownal line, the Berkshire Flyer, and the Housatonic Line.



Vermont (Montreal)

Passenger Rail Service in Western Massachusetts

BOSTON SOUTH STATION

SPRINGFIELD UNION STATION

NEW HAVEN UNION STATION

Greenfield
Northampton
Holyoke

Pittsfield
Chester

ALBANY-RENSSELAER

Windsor Locks CT ✈️

HARTFORD CT

Worcester

Palmer

Framingham

- Berkshire Flyer (Amtrak)
 - Hartford Line (Amtrak & CTTrail)
 - Lake Shore Limited (Amtrak)
 - Northeast Direct (Amtrak)
 - Valley Flyer (Amtrak)
 - Vermonter (Amtrak)
 - Framingham/Worcester Line (MBTA)
- Existing Service*

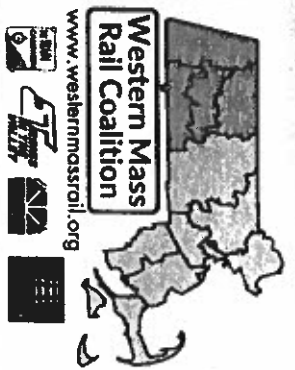
- - - East-West Inland Route (Amtrak)
 - - - East-West Boston - Albany-Rensselaer (Amtrak)
- In Planning*

- Existing Amtrak station stop
- ⊞ Proposed Amtrak station stop

NY PENN STATION

Washington & Virginia

Note: This diagram is not drawn to scale.
Not all stations are shown.

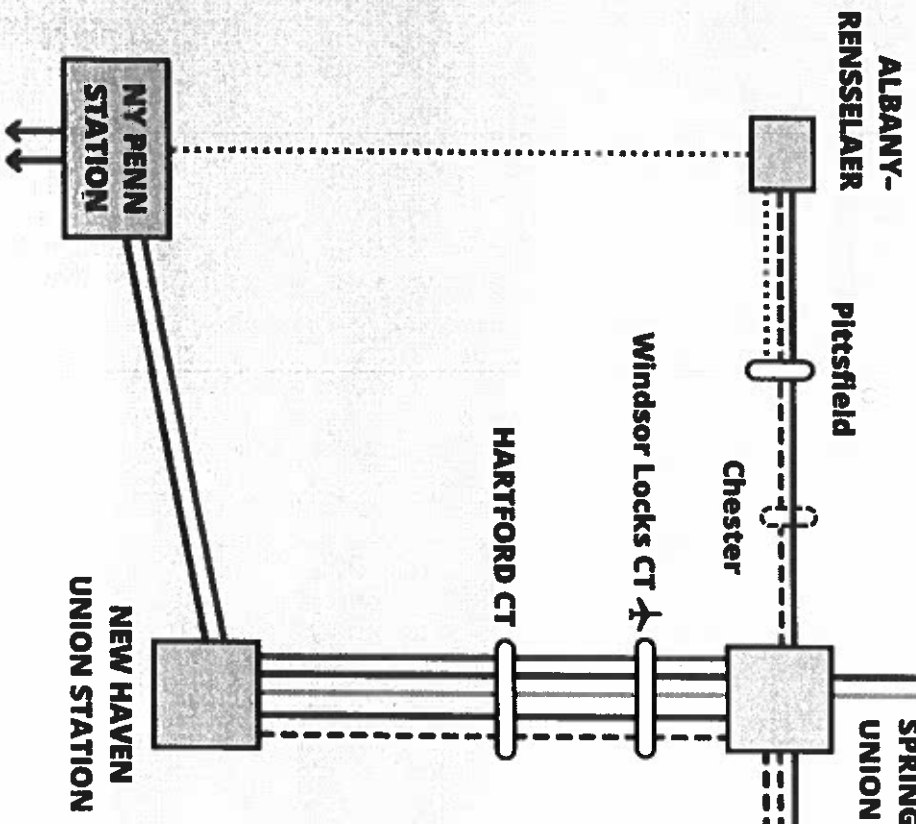


Vermont (Montreal)

Greenfield
Northampton
Holyoke

SPRINGFIELD
UNION STATION

Worcester
Palmer
Frammingham
BOSTON
SOUTH STATION



Washington & Virginia

Passenger Rail Service in Western Massachusetts

- Berkshire Flyer (Amtrak)
 - Hartford Line (Amtrak & CTraill)
 - Lake Shore Limited (Amtrak)
 - Northeast Direct (Amtrak)
 - Valley Flyer (Amtrak)
 - Vermont (Amtrak)
 - Frammingham/Worcester Line (MBTA)
- In Planning*
- - - East-West Inland Route (Amtrak)
 - · - East-West Boston - Albany-Rensselaer (Amtrak)
- Existing Amtrak station stop
- ⊞ Proposed Amtrak station stop

Note: This diagram is not drawn to scale.
Not all Stations are shown.



TOWN OF
AMHERST
MASSACHUSETTS

Amherst Town Council
4 Boltwood Ave. Amherst, MA 01002
Tel. (413) 259-3333
towncouncil@amherstma.gov

March 21, 2023

Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission
Chair William Straus
Chair Brendan Creighton

Dear members of the Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission,

The Town of Amherst is thrilled at the prospect of expanding rail service to serve a greater variety of residents across the Commonwealth. I am pleased to be here today to offer our perspective. In fact, we have a bit of a history of advocating for state-wide transit. In 1838, Edward Dickinson, father of Emily Dickinson, was elected to represent Amherst in the state Legislature. Edward was elected primarily to secure Amherst the advantages of the Massachusetts Central Railroad. Even in the mid 1800's, we knew the importance of rail for the residents of Amherst and the importance of access to western mass for all residents of the Commonwealth.

As the home of our commonwealth's flagship institution, UMASS Amherst, we see significant shifts in our population when campus opens for the year, when students leave and return from breaks, and at the end of the academic year. At these points, the population of Amherst ebbs and flows by up to 24,000 people. The impact of this cannot be understated. Of their full student population, roughly 75% are in-state, coming to campus from other cities and towns in the Commonwealth. 70% of the students who live on campus do not get a parking permit. When we consider the impact of West/East rail on Amherst, this is perhaps the largest element. The ability of our student community members to access campus via rail, and the impact of this population on potential ridership should not be underestimated.

Additionally, Amherst is quickly emerging as a leader in and destination for arts and culture, with museums such as the Emily Dickinson Museum and the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, performance venues such as the Drake, and cultural institutions such as Amherst Cinema. Expanding rail access with attention paid to last mile transportation not only allows for people across the state to share in the joys of these experiences, but also allows increased access to bring in artists, performers, and others to share their talents fully across our commonwealth.

With regards to governance, while the town of Amherst will not make a recommendation regarding which specific entity should be responsible, we believe that there are critical elements to bear in mind, which we ask you to hold as you are making these important decisions. We ask that whichever authority is chosen does the following:

Regional Equity in Governance - The promise of a rail network which connects the commonwealth is a wonderful one. And thus far, the commission should be applauded for crossing the commonwealth to gather input. We would like to see this effort to engage across the state cemented in the governance structure, without a membership imbalance favoring large cities, and with specific board membership from each of the four western Massachusetts counties, Berkshire, Franklin, Hamden, and Hampshire.

Infrastructure Process - We ask that this project begin in the part of the state which has been most neglected with regards to public transportation infrastructure, the western part of the state. By starting infrastructure work in Berkshire county and then moving towards Boston, you would be promoting regional equity and ensuring that the



TOWN OF
AMHERST
MASSACHUSETTS

project does not get shelved before reaching communities who stand to benefit tremendously from increased access to all that they have to offer.

Stops - If we create high speed rail that only has a few stops, are we recreating the problems that were brought about with the introduction of interstate highways? We need to ensure that care is given to not creating the train version of drive through towns. Seen only through a window, and for the residents, a train cutting through their community that is inaccessible to them without a long drive to get there. We recognize that it is a fine balance between travel time and number of stops, but there must be intentionality in the process of determining where stops would be. Ensuring that stops are accessible to communities who have been otherwise left out of larger transportation conversations, and that people wouldn't need to travel long distances by car, simply to catch a train that travels right through their community.

Last Mile Transportation and Regional Transit - While it would be wonderful to have a stop that goes directly to Amherst, we also recognize that we are part of the larger ecosystem. We would like to see the future governing body consider partnerships across types of transportation to include regional transit authorities such as the PVTA or FRTA. For Amherst, including last-mile transit from stops such as Northampton or Greenfield would be highly utilized. It would be more efficient to include representatives from an RTA from the get-go, instead of needing to add it to an existing system. If RTA's are supported and invested in, there are significant partnership opportunities in ensuring access.

Pricing - A future rail authority should consider access and reality in determining pricing structure, and we hope this committee will consider the realities of what different entities are able to do with offering discounted tickets to certain groups, such as students or seniors. Having a governance authority who understands the realities of our populations is critical.

Funding - Amherst had the largest percentage of support for the Fair Share Amendment state-wide at nearly 85%. We recognize that a percentage of that funding is allocated to transportation. While we recognize that it is not the purview of this committee, we would like to see funds from fair share be utilized for last-mile transportation support in partnership with regional transit authorities such as the PVTA or FRTA. Ensuring that that funding, which was supported significantly by communities in Western Mass returns to Western Mass, especially in supporting transportation access, would be only appropriate.

There is incredible promise in this initiative, for all of our communities. The benefits for access, meeting climate goals, supporting engagement and building economies are plenty. We look forward to this group continuing to cross the commonwealth, seeking input, and to a final product which celebrates the potential and present benefits to Amherst and our surrounding western Massachusetts communities.

Thank you for your consideration and the work you do.

Sincerely,

J:\Lynn Griesemer (Mar 20, 2023 20:57 EDT)

Lynn Griesemer, President

On behalf of the Amherst Town Council

G&H Collaborators

GHCollaborators@gmail.com

August 24, 2023

Representative William M. Straus
Room 134
24 Beacon St.
Boston, Ma 02133

Re: East-West Passenger Rail Service

Dear William Straus,

The decision to establish a railroad hub in Palmer was made many generations ago. In 1971, passenger rail service in Palmer was discontinued. Residents of the 21 towns of the Lower Quabbin Region are anticipating the restoration of passenger rail service, leaving their vehicles in Palmer, and riding to Boston without contributing to traffic congestion and parking. Weighted by city size, the INRIX Scorecard reports Boston is second only to Chicago in the amount of wasted time drivers spend in congested traffic.

A new modern 21st century railway station could be built at 1181-1189 Park St., Palmer at a tenable capital cost. Some of the amenities of this location include an existing rail siding on both sides of the tracks, ease of public access, ample parking, handicap accessibility, and public safety afforded by the open-air location. A station at this location would be operational, viable, and meet the needs of the railroad and passenger demands, for the next one hundred years.

The rationale that the entire rail infrastructure must be built out before the first ticket is sold is misguided. With the existing rail sidings, a station built at this location today would allow passengers to board on day one, while improvements to the rails and South Station can be phased in as ridership and passenger demands increase.

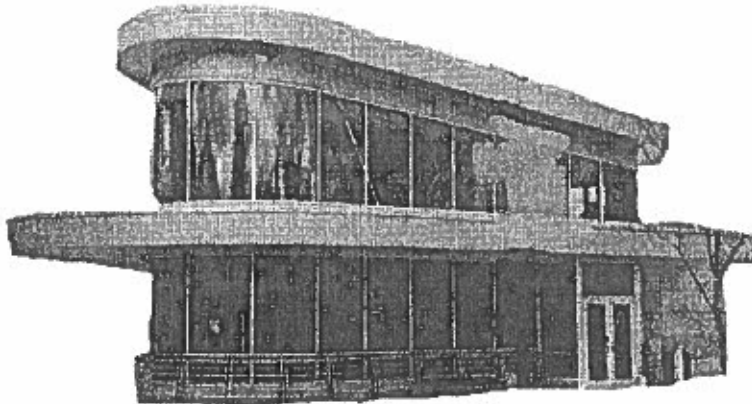
Restoring passenger rail service to Palmer and Western Mass has been in public debate for many years. There have been numerous committees, meetings, studies, and proposals made, and an untold number of dollars spent. Another study is now being planned. This new 4 million dollar study is expected to take two years to complete. Insurmountable deficiencies in planning and design may be found in the four locations previously proposed. The Mass DOT should consider the location and design in the attached draft site analysis. It would be a major step in restoring passenger rail service across the State

Sincerely,



Cordelia Hageman
For G&H Collaborators
hagemancordelia@gmail.com

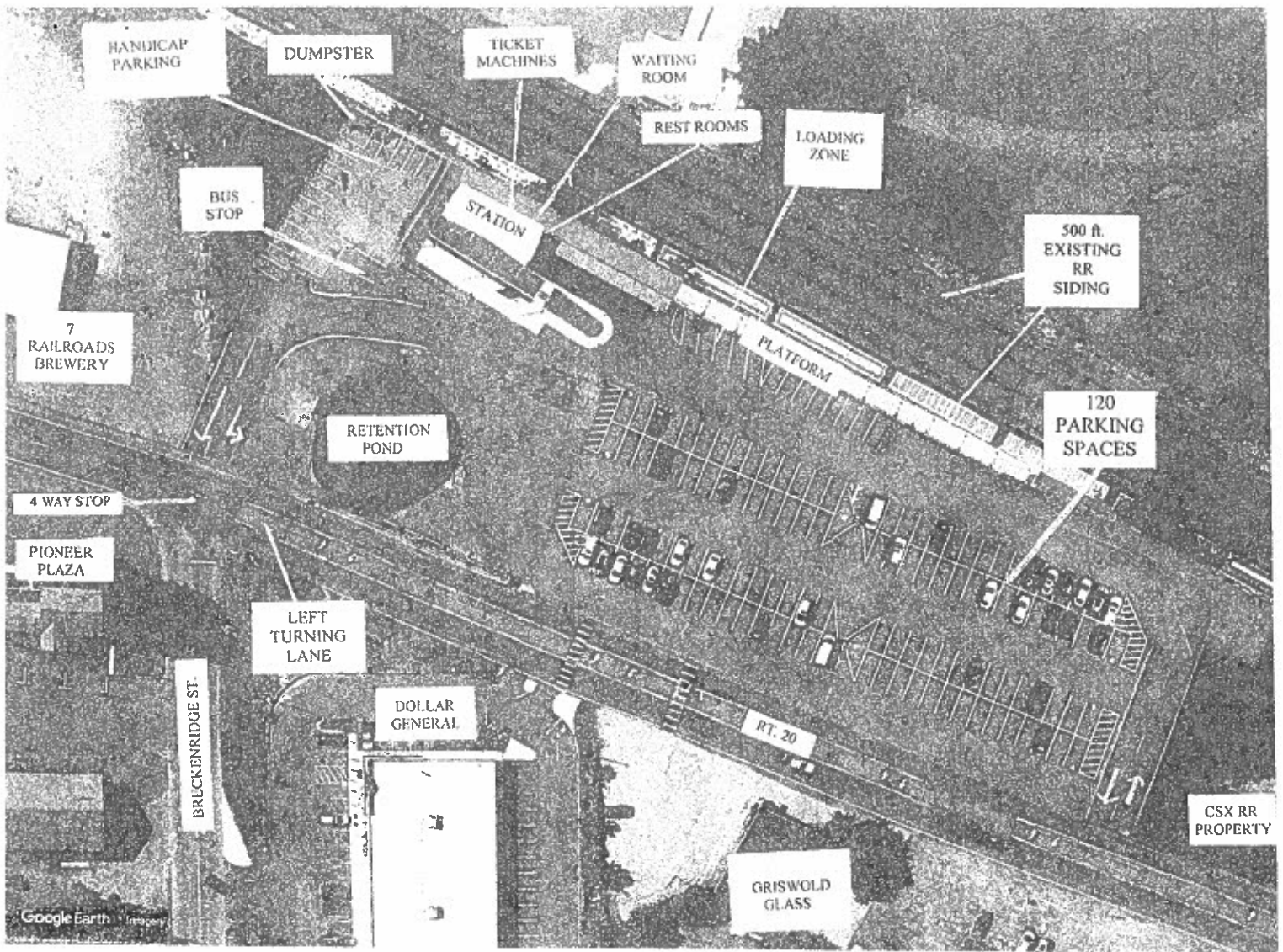
IF WE BUILD IT THEY WILL COME



Alternate Location #5 Proposed Palmer Railway Station

Prepared by
G&HCollaborators
GHCollaborators@gmail.com

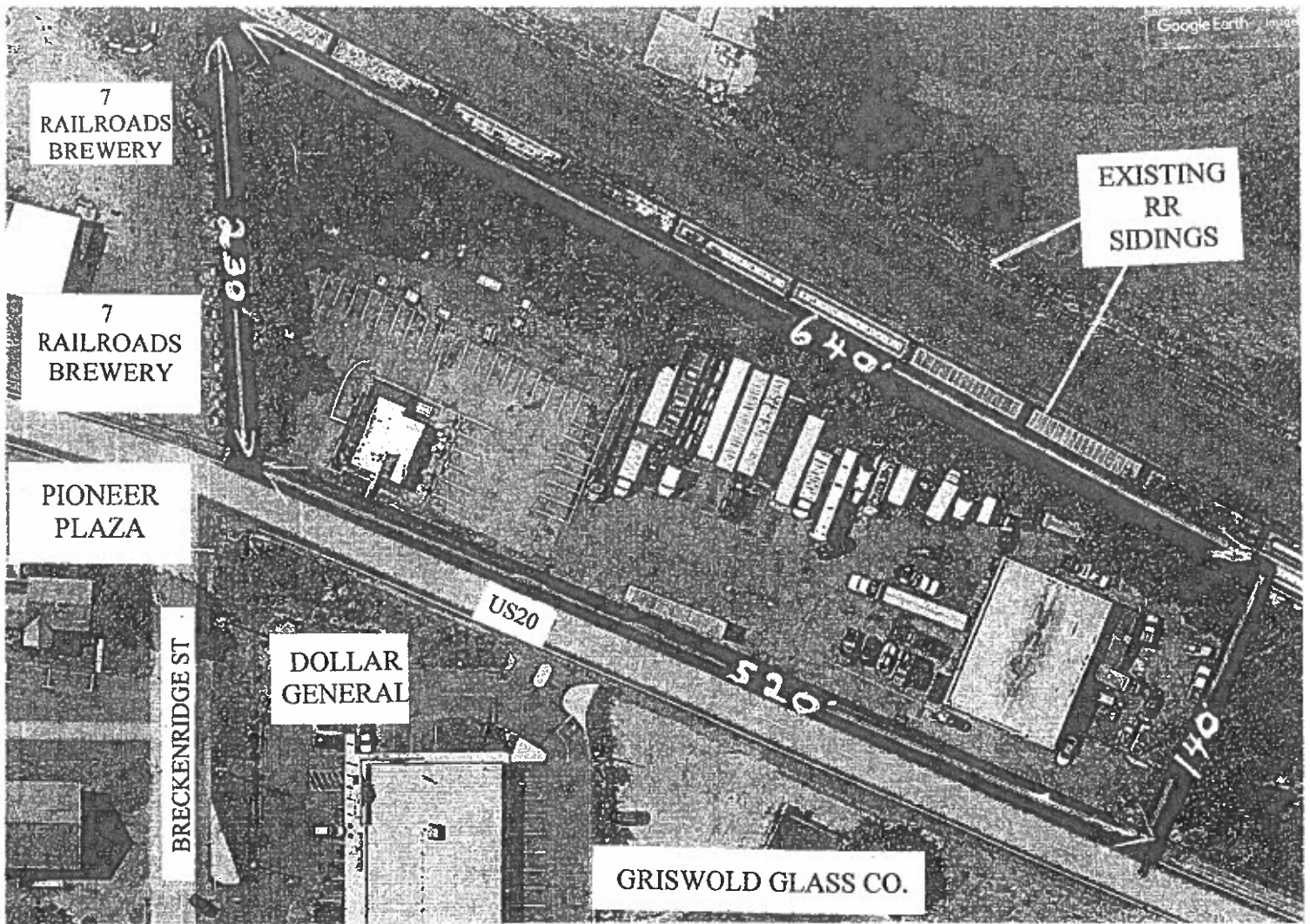
Construction of a rail station in Palmer is quickly becoming an inevitable necessity. Traffic on the Mass Turnpike is increasing exponentially. The INRIX Scorecard reports Boston is second only to Chicago in the amount of wasted time drivers spend in congested traffic weighted by city size. In not so many years even the slowest train will be faster than driving. For your site review and consideration, this unsolicited draft site analysis is 5th and subsequent to the 4 locations addressed in a 2017 report by Fuss & O’Niell for the Palmer Redevelopment Authority.



Proposed Land Use- Palmer Railway Station

1181-1189 Park St.

- Central location on Rts. 20 & 32
- 500 ft. frontage on each side of the tracks
- Easy access for vehicles including PVTAs buses and a bus stop
- Ample parking 100+ vehicles and loading zone areas
- Commercial zoned and site ready
- Ample space for baggage handling
- Ample space for Handicap facilities
- Ample space for construction of waiting areas with ticket machines and restrooms
- Flexibility for future expansion
- Minimal environmental impact
- Public safety and security afforded by an open air location



Current Land Use

1181-1189 PARK ST, PALMER, MA.

Acreage - 1.55 acre

Zoning - Commercial

Neighborhood – Mainly commercial w/a single family residential neighborhood on the North side of US20

Accessibility – Easily accessible with 500+ ft. frontage on US20

Traffic – Moderate

Utilities – Water, sewer, electric, cable available on street (US20)

Topography – Flat, Level

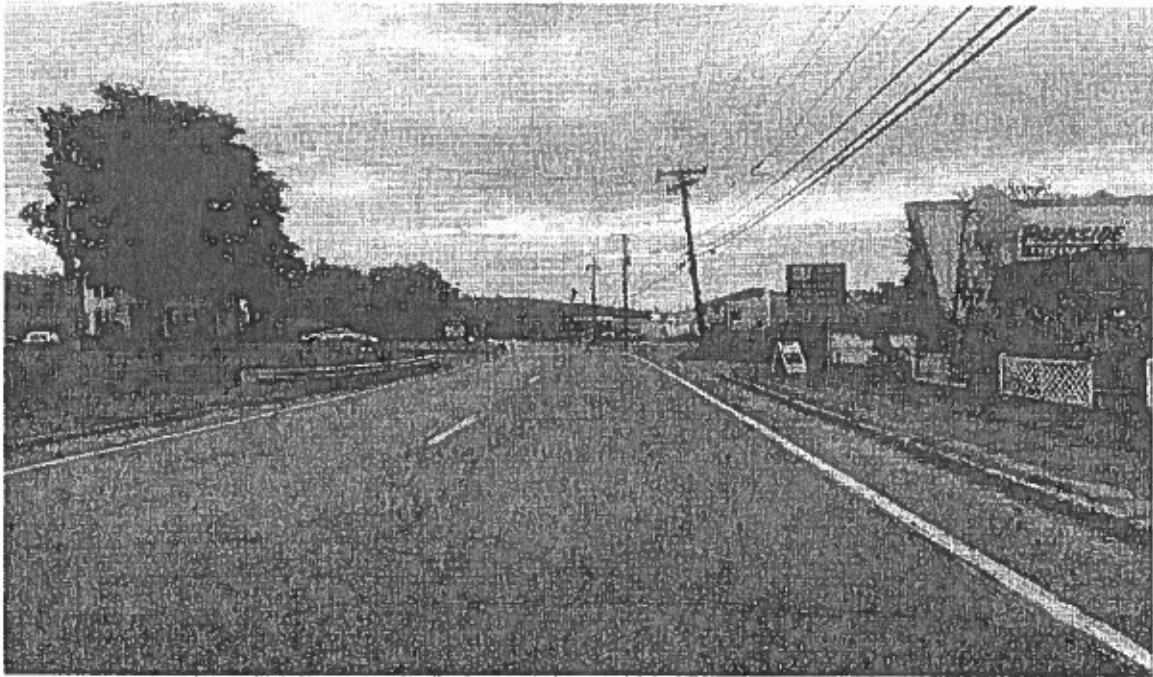
Current Land Use – 1181 Park St.- Chacon Trucking office and parking (rented)

1189 Park St.- Ricks Parkside Drive-In

Restaurant, seasonal, hot dogs, Hamburgers, ice cream (owner occupied)

Proposed Land Use – Palmer Railway Station

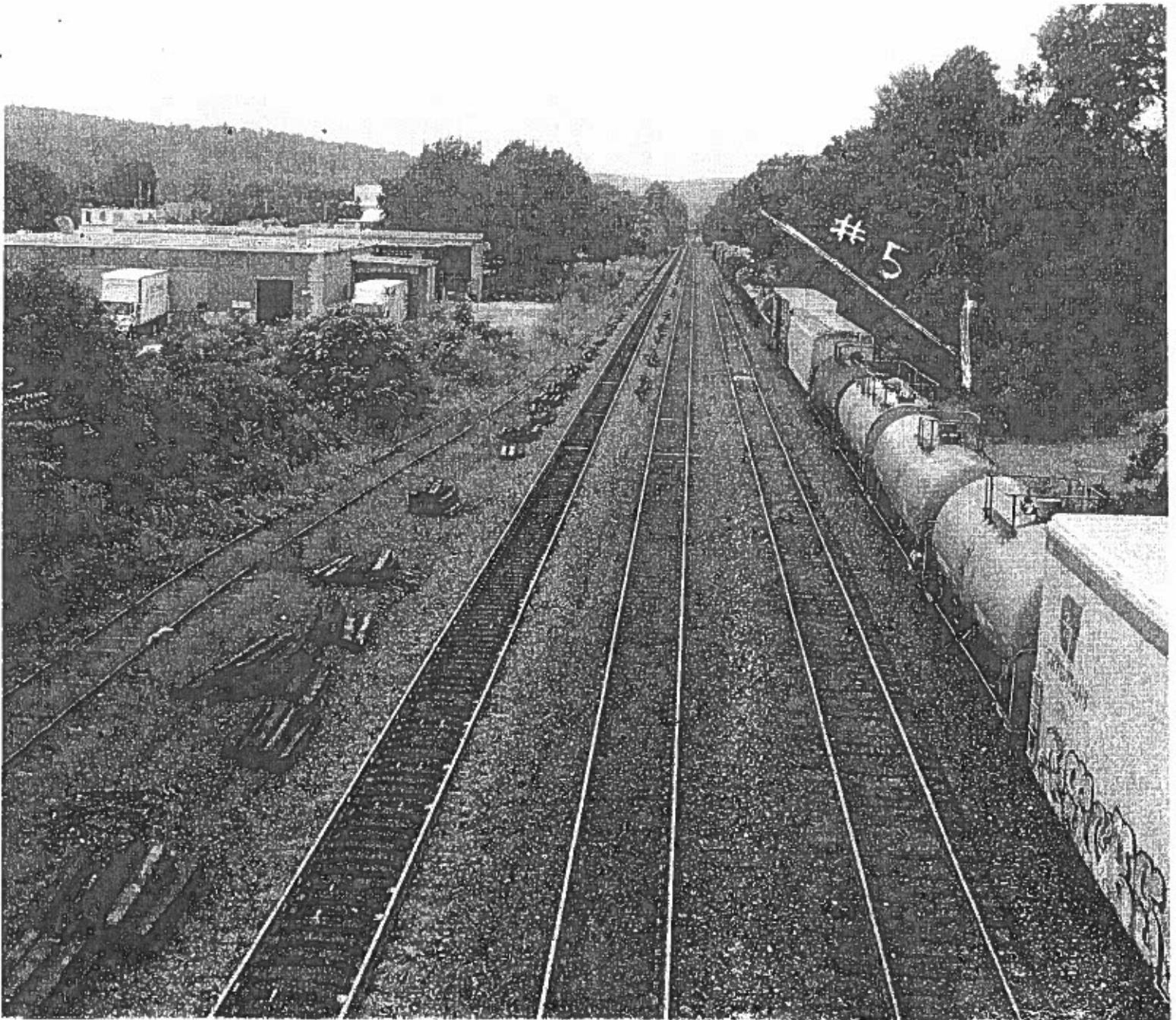
1181-1189 St. Palmer, Ma



US 20 Looking East



US 20 Looking West



Palmer Railway Station Proposed location #5

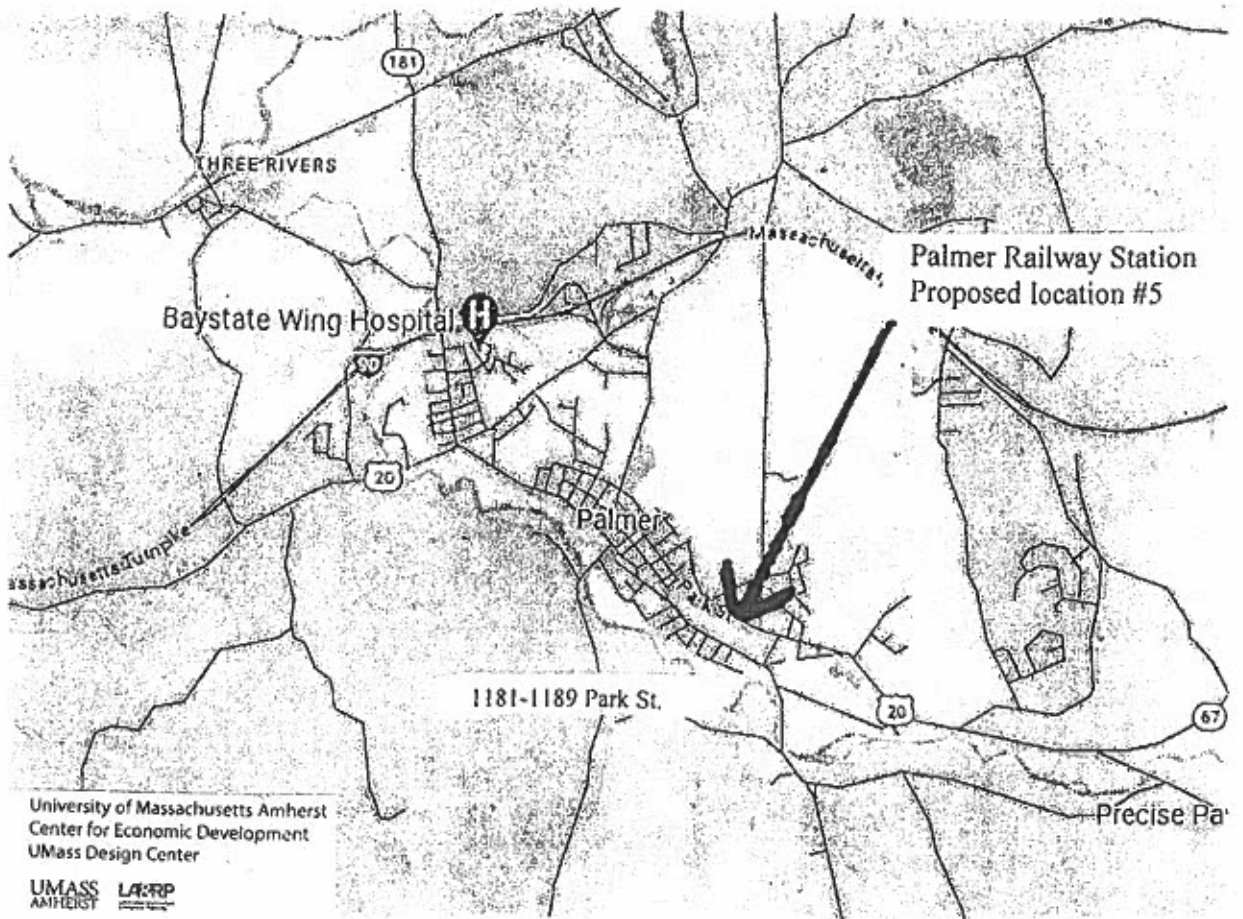
Looking West

1181-1189 Park St. on Right

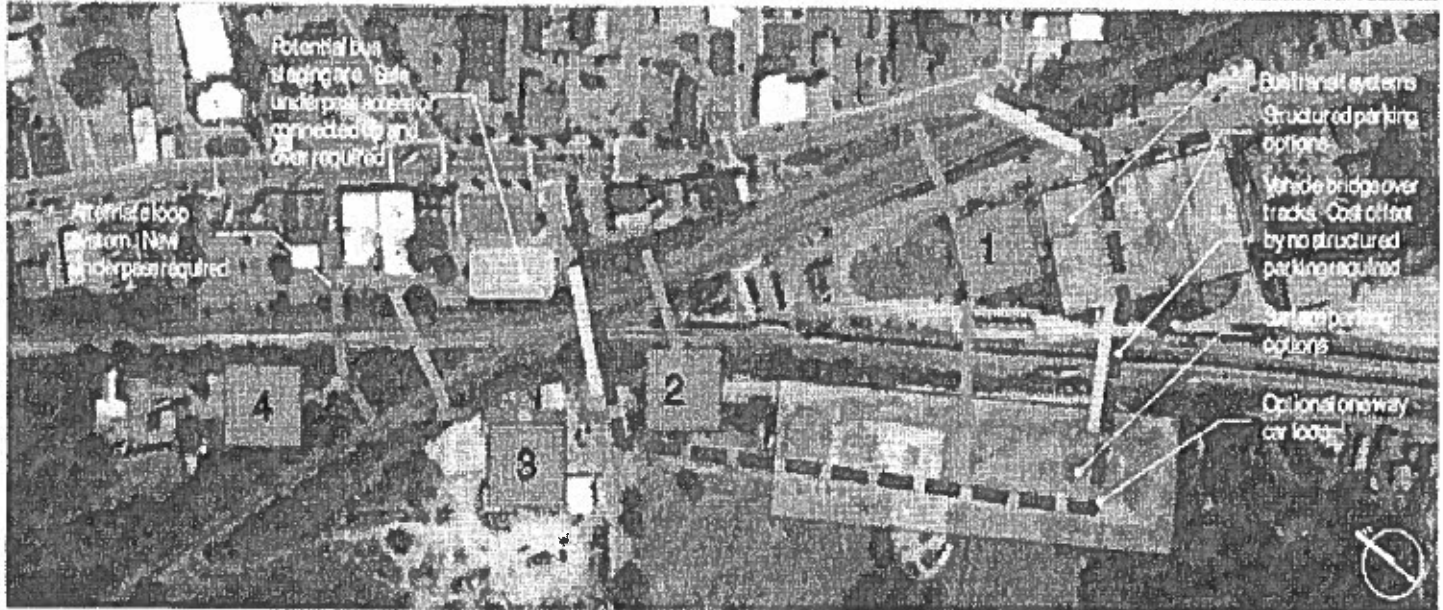
Service Area







Service area includes Northern Connecticut 9.7 miles South



Palmer Mass

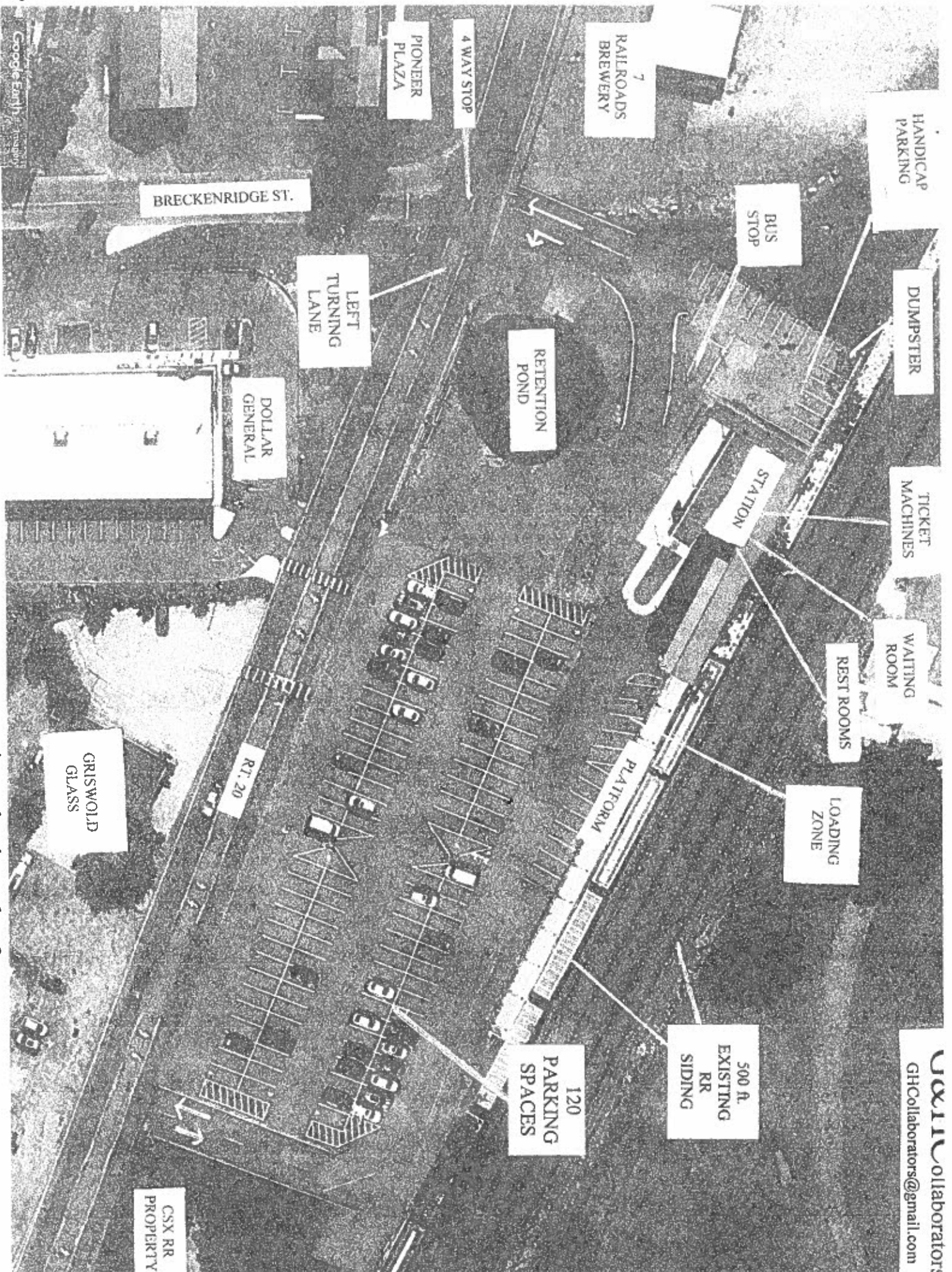


-  Facility Options
-  Parking Field Options
-  Existing Track Crossings
-  Up And Over Options

Issues

- Site # 1: Difficult pedestrian access, furthest from downtown core
- Site #2&3: Difficult bus access. Additional bridge or expanded underpass required. One way loop recommended to provide pedestrian access.

Slide showing draft station site alternatives. From Palmer Transit Oriented Development Draft Conceptual Downtown Plan, prepared by Fuss & O'Neill for the Palmer Redevelopment Authority, 9/26/17.



Proposed Palmer Railway Station design draft