

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

February 28, 2017

Acting Administrator Patrick Warren
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, Southeast
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Acting Administrator Warren:

The rail network from Washington, DC to Boston is an immensely important contributor to our national economy and a vital part of the daily lives of countless numbers of our constituents. Much of the network was built over a century ago, and it now withers in disrepair as it strains and struggles to support the growing population that depends upon it. We appreciate the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) effort to evaluate ways of rebuilding the rail infrastructure as outlined in a recently unveiled proposal from the FRA's NEC FUTURE team. We are committed to rebuilding the corridor, and while the FRA's plan holds great promise for the state of Connecticut, it also creates major consternation among several communities across our state. As champions for our constituents – and for robust rail service – we write in strong support of the positive elements but in staunch opposition to several impractical and ill-conceived ideas in your agency's proposal. We also write to urge you to carefully consider the many thoughtful comments provided by Connecticut residents in response to the NEC FUTURE plan and ensure that they are heeded and incorporated into any final rebuilding plan your agency selects.

This 457-mile transportation spine is known commonly as the Northeast Corridor, and it allows millions of Americans to get to work and school and access other vital opportunities. We need to plan and prepare for the future and bring the Northeast Corridor into the twenty-first century, rebuilding the rail network so it can meet the demands of today and tomorrow. In December 2016, the FRA's NEC FUTURE office unveiled its preferred plan for a revitalized network. In technical terms, the FRA and NEC FUTURE officials have put forward a plan in the form of a Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that lays out what is formally considered its Preferred Alternative of service changes between Washington, DC and Boston. The FRA is now accepting comments on the Preferred Alternative before finalizing the FEIS in the form of a Selected Alternative in a Record of Decision as soon as next month. The FRA would then use that document to create a service development plan later this year that moves the Selected Alternative closer to reality. We understand the FRA cautions that any final decision about service changes and realigned routes will be made at the state and local levels. Still, the Selected Alternative would be the product of an eight-year, \$40 million undertaking by your

agency, and it could hold significant sway with federal, state and local officials for decades to come. It is imperative that any Selected Alternative reflect that reality and contain only proposals that are worthy of further consideration, excluding disconcerting concepts that will hang like a cloud over communities.

One idea that should remain prominently in any Selected Alternative is the FRA's vision for robust enhancements to the Hartford Line. The line is currently under development from New Haven, Connecticut through Hartford to Springfield, Massachusetts. The Preferred Alternative correctly recognizes the importance of the investments now underway and the transformative, game-changing effect they will have throughout New England. The Preferred Alternative proposes even greater long-term enhancements to this portion of rail line, leveraging the investments that have already been made, proposing the addition of more tracks and technology – including electrification of the track to support non-diesel trains, further ensuring safe, reliable, high-speed rail through Connecticut's central spine. This vision would improve opportunities for access to New York City and Boston and improve connectivity to Bradley International Airport as well as other transportation hubs throughout New England. This vision would also help address many of the problems the NEC FUTURE effort hopes to tackle, including greater resiliency in the face of climate change and better access to jobs, housing, and economic opportunities.

Two ideas that should be scrapped in any Selected Alternative include a proposal in southeastern Connecticut that has become known as the Kenyon bypass and a separate proposal in Fairfield County in southwestern Connecticut to build two new tracks through several dense communities.

The first misguided idea, the Kenyon bypass, would split rail off from the current line at Old Saybrook, establishing a new alternative route that plows through many communities before rejoining the current route just west of Kingston, Rhode Island. If constructed in a trench, as a tunnel, as an aerial structure or as a mix of all three, the bypass would cause massive disturbance to the lives and livelihoods of tens of thousands of residents who now live in the proposed route's path. It would decimate the unique charm and historic character of several centuries-old towns like Old Lyme. It would disrupt major job centers and tourist attractions like the aquarium and historic seaport in Mystic. It would result in significantly reduced rail service to several towns and cities on the current line like New London, rendering as out of the way important attractions like the Thames River Heritage Park – just blocks from the current Amtrak station, which would have to be moved under this plan. It would harm the sensitive ecological treasure of the Connecticut River Estuary. And even though it just exists on paper so far, this proposal has reportedly already impacted property values in our state; if included in a Selected Alternative, it would continue to hang like a dark cloud over southeastern Connecticut, having dire and dramatic effects no matter how remote its chances are of ever becoming reality. Its exclusion from a Selected Alternative would eliminate this ominous threat and allow us to focus on what we know is the region's choice for improving service: rebuilding the infrastructure we currently have, ensuring it meets new and increasing demands.

The second poorly conceived provision entails dramatically modifying the current route to create a new double-track route that would cut through and across many existing communities,

including Greenwich, Stamford, Norwalk and Westport. Some of this would be parallel to Interstate 95, but much remains unclear. Regardless, this would be an unprecedented level of upheaval in a densely populated area that could – like the Kenyon bypass – have disastrous cultural, economic and environmental consequence for many communities in our state. This plan would also ignore the clear preference our constituents have for rehabilitating current infrastructure instead of starting new projects that bring more harm than benefit.

We are confident our constituents will provide additional support and raise additional concerns regarding the key issues we bring to your attention. Their thoughts and feedback must be given great weight and deference before your agency chooses a Selected Alternative. Few states have been engaged as vigorously as Connecticut has been or would experience as many impacts from this plan, as evidenced by the fact that more than half of the 3,200 comments submitted to the FRA during an earlier round of proposals came from our state. We certainly appreciate the agency's engagement with our state so far. As FRA officials have seen and heard firsthand, anything that undermines our state's character, economy, or environment will be opposed fiercely by our constituents – as well as by us in Congress.

We appreciate your attention to these important matters and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress