

Senate Bill S.1935
An Act to study the feasibility of high-speed rail access between Springfield and Boston.
Testimony Before the Joint Legislative Committee on Transportation
Rebecca M. Townsend, October 24, 2017

Good morning Members of the Committee.

Thank you for inviting public comment. I am Rebecca Townsend of Longmeadow, an assistant professor at the University of Hartford. My scholarship is in the field of communication, with specialty in community engagement on transportation policy. For this work, President Obama's White House gave me the Champions of Change Award for Transportation Innovation. I am a founding member of [Trains In The Valley](#), a rail advocacy group, and am a founder of Pioneer Valley Advocates for Commuter Rail. I share this professional and advocacy background with you so that you understand the context from which I speak.

In his February 22, 1955 letter to Congress, President Eisenhower promoted the development of a National Highway Program by writing,

Our unity as a nation is sustained by free communication of thought and by easy transportation of people and goods. [...] Together, the united forces of our communication and transportation systems are dynamic elements in the very name we bear - United States. Without them, we would be a mere alliance of many separate parts.

He recognized that people, ideas, and goods need to travel smoothly and swiftly, through an interconnected system.

The vision that guided him in the development of a transportation network was successful in many ways. It also caused numerous problems, not the least of which was dissecting cities across the country. People who lived in the cities cut open by highways did not have voices in what happened to them heard by decision-makers.

The bill before you today represents an opportunity to stitch our Commonwealth together in a sustainable way, and in a way that recognizes that you hear our voices. Beginning in 2006, I have heard people asking when West and East should meet by rail. The Senate's MassMoves report shows that people in this Commonwealth have clamored for rail. When I was advocating for the success of the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield rail line, I thought of it as a first leg toward Boston.

Our Commonwealth needs to be connected. We recognize our power when we act in concert with other states in our region. Going West is part of our American tradition. The Denver region is booming. Out in Western Massachusetts, our mountains are more manageable. When East meets West, we work as a region and our economic power is stronger. We can connect housing options, recreation options, and cultural options.

Our Commonwealth needs these options. Today, 54 people from the Springfield region can get to Boston in 3 hours by the sole private intercity bus available in the morning, on time for work, at the mercy of weather and traffic conditions. Rail extends and expands opportunities.

We need to look beyond small-minded monopolies with outsized influence.

Our Commonwealth needs bold leadership on this topic, like Eisenhower envisioned for highways.

You shall show the Commonwealth your broad leadership by acting favorably on this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Senate

Thomas M. McGee Chair, Joseph A. Boncore Vice Chair

Eric P. Lesser, John F. Keenan, Linda Dorcena Forry, Michael F. Rush, Donald F. Humason, Jr.

House Members

William M. Straus Chair, Carolyn C. Dykema Vice Chair

Thomas P. Walsh, Kenneth I. Gordon, Daniel M. Donahue, Daniel J. Ryan, Joseph W. McGonagle, Jr., Adrian Madaro, William Driscoll, Joan Meschino, Steven S. Howitt, Randy Hunt, Hannah Kane