



MAYOR DAVID J. NARKEWICZ

City of Northampton

Office of the Mayor

210 Main Street Room 12

Northampton, MA 01060-3199

(413) 587-1249 Fax: (413) 587-1275

TESTIMONY OF MAYOR DAVID J. NARKEWICZ 2018 Massachusetts State Rail Plan Submitted at MassDOT Hearing February 2, 2018

I want to thank Secretary Pollock and MassDOT for holding this western Mass hearing at the request of State Senator Stan Rosenberg and for allowing me to offer comments on the newly-released draft 2018 [Massachusetts State Rail Plan](#).

As you may know, I have been a strong advocate for expanding North-South passenger rail service from Springfield to Holyoke, Northampton, and Greenfield even before the first Amtrak Vermonter trains resumed service to my city at the end of 2014. I am extremely pleased to see that expanded North-South passenger rail has been prioritized as a Tier 1 project in the draft 2018 State Rail Plan.

This additional investment by MassDOT is fully supported by the ridership numbers. Amtrak Vermonter ridership figures for 2017 show that Greenfield, Northampton and Holyoke continue to attract an increasing number of riders for the 3rd consecutive year surpassing initial projections. Total 2017 Vermonter ridership for Greenfield, Northampton and Holyoke was 27,751, up 29% from 21,418 in 2015. The combined ridership of our three cities represents 30% of total Vermonter ridership.

Focusing in on my city, Northampton ridership on the Vermonter in 2017 was 19,974 passenger, a 16% increase from 17,197 in 2016. Northampton is now the leading stop on the Vermonter line, excluding Penn Station, and comprises 21% of total passengers. The leading "travel pair" on the Amtrak Vermonter line is Northampton and Penn Station.

It is important to note that these positive ridership numbers far exceed the ridership projections from the original [2009 Knowledge Corridor Study](#) by 107%. The study projected 28 riders per day at Northampton station, but current ridership is now up to an average of 57 riders daily. If you build it, they will ride and my city's experience is certainly proof positive of that.

Expanded North-South passenger rail offers many local and regional benefits, including:

- Better connecting Franklin and Hampshire County to Springfield Union Station, the Hartford Line, and the Northeast Corridor.
- Promoting increased transit-oriented economic development and housing
- Providing a critical transportation link for our many educational institutions and their students
- Opening up distant job markets to local job seekers.
- Elevating our region's ability to attract new residents and retain current ones.
- Promoting expanded tourism and supporting our vital arts and cultural economy
- Offering fast travel mobility for businesses to our regional cities and Bradley Airport
- Reducing car trips, traffic congestion, and carbon emissions.

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There has already been a significant investment in the North-South Knowledge Corridor line, which was the recipient of \$75 million in federal funds and \$40 million in state funding to completely upgrade the rail line, lay new tracks, install traffic switches, and improve bridge and vehicle crossings. These significant and important investments were made to support expanded rail service beyond the current single-trip Amtrak Vermonter service.

Finally, while I am pleased that the new rail plan supports funding of an expanded North-South rail pilot, I want to stress that any such pilot should be given at least a 3-5 year time period to successfully grow into a reliable and durable component of our regional transportation system.

Thank you again for holding this western Mass hearing and for the opportunity to comment on the 2018 Massachusetts State Rail Plan.