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November 19, 2020

Stephanie Pollack, Secretary of Transportation  
Ethan Britland, Project Manager, East-West Study  
MassDOT Board of Directors

***Via email***

**RE East-West Passenger Rail Study**

Dear Secretary Pollack et al.:

The Massachusetts Sierra Club simply urges you to commit to East-West Passenger Rail and to develop and implement a plan to achieve it as soon as possible.

Our highways are operating at overcapacity. Massachusetts is home to the first, second and fourth largest cities in New England all of which are located along the congested I-90 corridor. Yet vehicles are the overwhelming mode choice along this route because other mobility options barely exist west of Worcester. Worcester and Springfield must be well connected by rail for reasons of equity and economic development. Finally, given the enormous volume of travel on the Mass Pike, we should be using this project as an opportunity to help meet the Global Warming Solutions Act by reducing intercity travel by private vehicles.

The Draft East-West Passenger Rail Study has so many limitations that it is not a strong basis for making a decision. It would have been better if the East-West Study had more closely resembled the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (NNEIRI).

The Sierra Club instead suggests that you reverse the goal and find a solution with a combination of ridership and costs that will make the project's Benefit-Cost Analysis sufficiently attractive to the US DOT so that it will receive approval for Federal funds. This could be done through a wide range of options that could include:

- Include ridership synergies with other routes such as the Vermonter, Hartford Line, Valley Flyer and Berkshire Flyer.
- A marketing plan to increase ridership.
- Extend East-West service to Albany, which would enable travellers from Boston to Pittsfield to enjoy numerous new destinations such as Montreal to the North, Buffalo and Toronto to the West and New York City to the south.
- Improve the Worcester Line to reduce the trip time and increase ridership on the East-West service (e.g., triple-tracking, level boarding, electrification). These costs should *not* be allocated to this project since these improvements should already be done for MBTA regional rail.
- Phasing of the implementation.
- Benefits of infrastructure improvements to existing Amtrak service starting with the Lake Shore Limited and to restoring the Inland Route via Springfield and Hartford that was



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dropped in 2004. The Boston-Springfield segment should be developed as the first leg of an alternative spine for the NEC as was outlined in the NEC Future study.

- Add a station in Westfield that can serve that important Western Massachusetts city and can also serve much of the Berkshires if part of a first phase.
- State acquisition of all or part of the right of way to better control costs and service.
- Improvements to RTA services that feed into East-West service to increase ridership.
- Adding Housatonic service to build out the state rail network and increase mobility options via Pittsfield.
- Quantification of benefits to freight service if passenger service runs in its own right of way.
- Finally, if the goal is truly “East-West” service for all of Western Massachusetts then this should include the Northern Tier route as well.

The time is right for trains because the next Presidential administration will be even more supportive of passenger rail. Rail projects have a long lead-time; now is the time to be planning for the future.

Sincerely,

Clint Richmond & John Kyper,  
Co-Chairs, Transportation Committee