



MEDIA STATEMENT

Date **November 17, 2021**

From **The Western Mass Rail Coalition**

RE **Federal Infrastructure Bill and new MassDOT white paper
set up path forward for East-West Rail**
**– MassDOT recommends Amtrak as the operator for East-West Rail
and creation of a “Western Massachusetts Intercity Rail Authority”**

On November 15, 2021, President Biden signed into law what many would say is the most important piece of legislation in Amtrak’s history — the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

The legislation provides an unprecedented \$66 billion in funding for passenger rail — to eliminate the Amtrak maintenance backlog, replace and expand Amtrak’s fleet, and upgrade train stations and platforms across the country, among many other things.

The Act also creates new grant programs that would allow for new and expanded passenger rail corridors, such as East-West passenger rail in Massachusetts.

The Western Mass Rail Coalition specifically wishes to thank Senator Edward Markey for the provisions that he incorporated into the bill as it worked its way through Congress.

As signed, the legislation includes all of Senator Markey's critical priorities to enhance safety, promote equity, and increase funding for passenger rail, public transit, bridges, roads, clean water, and broadband in Massachusetts.

MassDOT White Paper

Notably, the Act's signing coincides with last Friday's public release of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's "[Massachusetts Intercity Passenger Rail Governance White Paper](#)."

The paper lays down two important building blocks for East-West Passenger Rail, asserting that:

- the service should be operated by Amtrak (and not the MBTA); and that
- the state legislature should establish a Western Massachusetts Intercity Rail Authority to manage the East-West Passenger Rail project and service.

The choice of wording in the 29-page white paper is worth pointing out. In it, MassDOT seems to express real optimism that East-West Rail could become a reality, writing this in the executive summary,

“MassDOT officials believe the recommendations in this white paper will help position the Commonwealth to take advantage of the federal funding opportunities and is the most logical course to develop an East-West rail corridor and grow other rail services in Western Massachusetts.”

We applaud MassDOT for stepping forward at this important juncture with these two fundamental recommendations for East-West Rail, thereby providing a way forward for this project.

With this press release, the Western Mass Rail Coalition fully endorses MassDOT's recommendation that Amtrak be the operator of choice for East-West Rail, since it is clear to us that Amtrak is the most sensible choice of operator at this time.

We also strongly support MassDOT's recommendation that the legislature establish a Western Massachusetts Intercity Rail Authority — an entity that would develop, manage, and oversee the East-West Rail service.

The model for such an intercity rail authority can be found in other states where similar entities exist today — in particular the [Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority](#), which manages and oversees the Amtrak Downeaster service between Boston, and Portland and Brunswick, Maine.

With that said, we think it is important for the legislature to factor in the following important points as it considers MassDOT's proposal for the governance of East-West Passenger Rail.

1. There is no mention in the white paper of how the Western Massachusetts Intercity Rail Authority would be funded. We find this to be a notable omission that we hope will be addressed soon in some detail.
2. We question why MassDOT has assumed that the Board of Directors for the new authority will be appointed by the Governor of Massachusetts. There are other models that could be used to determine the composition of the board. For example, the board members of the Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority are appointed solely by the local elected officials in the region.
3. We strongly support having the proposed Western Massachusetts Intercity Rail Authority oversee and manage the commonwealth's existing "state-supported" Amtrak services (the Vermonter, the Hartford Line, and the Valley Flyer) since these services are part of this region's network of passenger rail services.

4. We strongly believe that the Western Massachusetts Intercity Rail Authority should be empowered to oversee and manage any future services in western Massachusetts, including service along the Northern Tier Corridor (Boston–Greenfield–North Adams), the proposed service along the Berkshire Line, and the planned BerkshireFlyer service.
5. Considering Connecticut’s desire for direct service between Hartford and Boston via Springfield, and Amtrak’s proposal to provide additional service between Boston and Albany-Rensselaer NY via Springfield, we encourage the legislature to review carefully the need for the Western Massachusetts Intercity Rail Authority to work very closely with our neighboring states (in particular Connecticut and New York).

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

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