

**Testimony in support of
H.3532: An Act Relative to an Interstate Compact for Western MA Rail Service**

For the meeting of the Joint Committee on Transportation on January 10, 2022

Submitted by:

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Dear Sen. Keenan, Rep. Devers, Rep. Strauss, and members of the Joint Transportation Committee,

I am writing today to strongly support H.3532, a bill that would instruct MassDOT to enter into an Interstate Passenger Rail Compact with the State of Connecticut, so that the existing commuter rail service that exists south of Springfield can be extended north of Springfield, with stops in Holyoke, Northampton and Greenfield.

The existing Amtrak-operated passenger rail service along the MassDOT-owned Knowledge Corridor north of Springfield is an intercity rail service whose target market is longer-distance travel — for example, travel to New York City. Local and regional travel on this service is simply not practical because the fare structure in place today is prohibitively expensive for most people.

Alternatively, south of Springfield there is an existing passenger rail service known as the Hartford Line which offers both intercity and commuter rail service. The Hartford Line, which is primarily managed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), currently operates up to fourteen (14) trains a day between Springfield, Hartford, and New Haven, with fares set at levels that are both reasonable and fair.

For example, the adult fare for travel from Springfield to Hartford on a Hartford Line train is \$6. The adult fare for travel from Holyoke (the next stop past Springfield) to Hartford on an Amtrak intercity train (on Monday, January 10th is \$17 — almost three times the price as from Springfield. No one takes the train today from Holyoke to Hartford, because the train fares are simply too high. Instead they drive.

With an interstate compact in place, MassDOT and CTDOT could more formally agree on how best to manage the bi-state passenger rail corridor that exists between New Haven, Springfield and Greenfield, for the benefit of people living in and near the stations along the entire corridor — rather than CTDOT focusing on only the needs of the users in Connecticut and MassDOT only focusing on the needs of users in Massachusetts.

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An Interstate Passenger Rail Compact between MassDOT and CTDOT could allow for — a harmonized fare structure along the entire corridor, the extension of a limited number of Hartford Line trains north of Springfield, the use of Hartford Line ticket vending machines at stations north of Springfield, and joint promotion and marketing to users along the entire corridor, among other things.

Ideally the Interstate Passenger Rail Compact would later be incorporated into and managed by a Western Mass Rail Authority, if and when such an entity is created by the legislature.

At a later date consideration should also be given to establishing a similar interstate compact with the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Such a compact would allow for greater cooperation and focus on regional passenger rail service between western Massachusetts and Vermont.

Improved and expanded passenger rail service between New Haven, Hartford, Springfield, and Greenfield, has the ability to be transformative as we work towards providing a means for people to move within our region without the use of a private vehicle.

We see the creation of an interstate compact between MassDOT and CTDOT as an important and critical step towards making passenger rail service along this corridor a useful and worthwhile service for all members of the community.

Sincerely,

Ben Heckscher

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Co-Founder

Trains In The Valley

Trains In The Valley is an unincorporated nonprofit association whose purpose is to advocate for and promote improved and expanded use of passenger and freight rail services in the Pioneer Valley region of western Massachusetts.