

Testimony in support of

H.3532

An Act Relative to an Interstate Compact for Western MA Rail Service

S.2345

An Act to establish fast, frequent, and reliable passenger rail service between Pittsfield and Boston via Springfield

H.3571

An Act funding a study of passenger service on the Housatonic rail line

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

Submitted by:

The Western Mass Rail Coalition

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

The Western Mass Rail Coalition, with this letter, offers its strong support for the following three bills being considered at today's meeting of the Joint Transportation Committee.

H.3532

An Act Relative to an Interstate Compact for Western MA Rail Service

Presenters: Rep. Paul Mark and Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa

- An interstate compact for passenger rail service is needed to better manage the bi-state passenger rail corridor between New Haven, Springfield and Greenfield.
- The existing Amtrak-operated passenger rail service along the MassDOT-owned Knowledge Corridor north of Springfield is today an intercity rail service whose target market is longer-distance travel. Local and regional travel, for example Northampton to Hartford, on this service is simply not practical because the fare structure in place today is prohibitively expensive for most people.
- 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.

- Such a service could be an extension of the existing and frequent CTDOT-managed Hartford Line service that currently operates between New Haven, Hartford and Springfield.
- The proposed service would allow for residents of the northern parts of western Mass to easily travel between points all along this corridor without needing to drive a personal vehicle.

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S.2345

An Act to establish fast, frequent, and reliable passenger rail service between Pittsfield and Boston via Springfield

Presenter: Sen. Eric Lesser

- East-West passenger rail would connect the Commonwealth, creating a viable public transportation corridor between the 1st, 2nd and 4th largest cities in New England (Boston, Worcester, and Springfield). Springfield, with a diverse population of over 154,000, sits at the important crossroads of Interstates 90 and 91, and is the nexus of existing passenger rail lines between Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut.
- East-West passenger rail would revive the historic "Inland Route" between Boston and NYC, providing a hedge against climate change impacts on the current shore route, and allowing for future growth in passenger service to Boston and NYC, since the shore route, in particular Amtrak's Acela service, frequently sells out.
- East-West passenger rail could provide an answer to the Boston area's severe housing crunch, which has only been exacerbated during the pandemic, as more workers work from home, and seek more permanent housing. Western Mass housing remains relatively affordable, especially in comparison to the astronomical increases in home prices in the eastern part of the state.
- East-West passenger rail is crucial to the economic development of western Massachusetts. A study by the Capitol Region Council of Governments and AECOM (May 2021) found that service connecting Worcester, Springfield and Hartford would generate 20,000–40,000 professional jobs and \$47 to \$84 billion in regional GDP in that corridor alone.
- Potential ridership on a future East-West passenger rail line is likely robust, in spite of pandemic-related trends. As an example, the Quaboag Connector van and shuttle bus service, which was created in 2017 to serve an area west of Worcester with limited public transit options, has continued to expand ridership and routes throughout the pandemic. In FY21 "Ware-Palmer had the highest recovery of all PVTA routes, at 110%, exceeding its pre-covid ridership." -- Director of Transit Operations Report, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority Advisory Board Meeting minutes, 8/18/2021, page 5.

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H.3571

An Act funding a study of passenger service on the Housatonic rail line

Presenter: Rep. Smitty Pignatelli

- This bill would bring economic benefits to Berkshire County and it furthers the creation of a regional rail system, providing an important connection between western Mass and New York City.
- Restoration of passenger rail service on the Housatonic rail line is listed as the top priority in the Berkshire County 2020 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), a long-range (25-year) document that provides the basis for future transportation investment and planning in the region.
- In 2014, Massachusetts passed a transportation bond bill that included funds in support of the Berkshire Housatonic Line. The Commonwealth purchased 37 miles of track in the state from Housatonic Railroad Corporation. The goal was to eliminate all track conditions that prevent operation of passenger trains and to provide a solid base for future improvement.
- The Berkshire Housatonic Line service is still in the conceptual stages. No decisions have been made with respect to train control systems, equipment, maintenance facilities, or station locations (though a \$250,000 study in 2014 has assessed locations in Berkshire County itself).
- There have been many suggestions, however, such as dual-mode battery electric options, high acceleration, rail cars instead of locomotive-hauled trains, reuse of historic stations within walking distance of attractions, integration with feeder bus services to expand the market area, etc., which are both feasible and appealing, but those decisions have not been made. The time to debate and find the best options will be when the proposal moves to the design stage.
- The Berkshire Housatonic Line service should be a link in a much more extensive passenger rail network that will help to revitalize the region and meet the needs of a greener, more connected transportation service.
- With these points in mind we call on the legislature to pass this bill so that a proper study can now be conducted to assess the feasibility of this much talked about expansion of passenger rail service in western Mass.

The [Western Mass Rail Coalition](#), and its member organizations, advocate for the development, implementation, operation, sustainability and expansion of publicly-supported passenger rail services that benefit the residents of western Massachusetts.

Respectfully,

Anne Miller

Anne Miller, for The Western Mass Rail Coalition

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Member Organizations

[Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop](#)

An advocacy group working to restore passenger rail service to the “Town of Seven Railroads” at the junction of the East-West (Boston to Pittsfield) and Central Corridor (New London to Brattleboro) rail lines, and to improve mass transit options for residents of the Quaboag Valley region.

[Chester Railway Station & Museum](#)

Advocates working to restore daily rail passenger service to Western Mass.

[The Train Campaign](#)

A rail advocacy organization for Berkshire and Litchfield counties and the surrounding region, sharing a vision for passenger rail as the essential framework for efficient, sustainable transportation in the 21st century. The Train Campaign supports passenger rail initiatives including the East-West Rail Study, the Pownal line, the Berkshire Flyer, and the Housatonic Line.

[Trains In The Valley](#)

An advocacy group focused on improved and expanded passenger and freight rail service in the Pioneer Valley region of western Massachusetts.