March 19, 2023

Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission
Chair Brendan Crighton
Chair William Straus

Dear Co-Chairs Crighton and Straus,

The Western Mass Rail Coalition member organizations have been advocating for East-West passenger rail service since 2013 and we as a coalition are pleased to offer this written testimony in support of the Commission's work.

Before commenting on the topic of passenger rail governance we would like to draw your attention to the diagram labeled “Passenger Rail Service in Western Massachusetts” that you will find attached as page 8.

We prepared this diagram so that commission members could more easily understand the existing and planned passenger rail service in our region.
We think there are five basic questions that need to be answered at this stage.

1. **Who should design, permit, and construct the necessary infrastructure?**

2. **Who should provide the passenger rail service?**

3. **Who should oversee the passenger rail service?**

4. **Who should fund the ongoing provision of service?**

5. **How should Massachusetts promote and develop intercity passenger rail service with neighboring states?**

On the following pages we will outline what we feel are reasonable ways for the Commission to address each of these questions.
1. Who should design, permit, and construct the necessary infrastructure?

We believe that the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is the logical public entity to design, permit and construct the necessary infrastructure for the ongoing provision of passenger rail service in Western Massachusetts.

MassDOT performs these functions today in support of the existing passenger rail service in Western Massachusetts, and they also should perform these functions for the East-West rail project.

MassDOT has the necessary technical expertise and knowledge to manage such large and complex projects.

Furthermore, MassDOT has the ability to tap the technical expertise that exists today within the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Commuter Rail division — as it did during the Knowledge Corridor-Restore Vermonter project between 2012 and 2015.

MassDOT also has the “standing” as a peer organization to work with the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the New York State Department of Transportation, and/or the Vermont Agency of Transportation on infrastructure projects that necessarily affect passenger rail service that crosses state lines.

With that said, MassDOT's design, permitting and construction work in support of passenger rail in Western Massachusetts must be closely and transparently coordinated with any regional entity — for example, a Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Authority — that may be created by the legislature to oversee the passenger rail service in our region.

2. Who should provide the passenger rail service?

For all the reasons detailed in MassDOT’s Massachusetts Intercity Passenger Rail Governance White Paper dated November 12, 2021, we agree that Amtrak should be the provider of all intercity passenger rail service in Western Massachusetts at this time.
3. **Who should oversee the passenger rail service?**

We believe that passenger rail service should be overseen by a new government entity known as the **Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Authority**.

The creation of an authority would ensure that passenger rail service directly serves rural, suburban and urban areas of western Massachusetts to meet the needs of all residents for improved connections to employment, training and education, health care, social services, food, and affordable housing.

The creation of a rail authority would also allow for more effective and focused local and regional oversight of the passenger rail services that are provided in western Massachusetts.

Such an authority would be similar to the existing Regional Transit Authorities (RTA) that exist across the Commonwealth for the provision of local and regional bus service.

An authority would allow for rail fares to be set at levels that would allow for use by all potential riders, regardless of their income.

The authority should coordinate its work with the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) and Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) so that passenger rail services work seamlessly with public and private transit services across the region.

We note that public passenger rail authorities have been established in many areas across the country, including these three notable examples:

- **Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority** (NNEPRA)
  NNEPRA, based in Portland Maine, oversees the Amtrak Downeaster service between Brunswick, Portland, and Boston.

- **Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority** (SRPRA)
  SRPRA is overseeing and implementing the restoration of passenger rail service between Reading and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

- **Virginia Passenger Rail Authority** (VRPA)
  VRPA is responsible for promoting, sustaining, and expanding the availability of passenger and commuter rail service in Virginia.
4. **Who should fund the ongoing provision of service?**

The retention, maintenance, improvement, and development of intercity passenger and freight rail-related infrastructure improvements and operations are essential to the Commonwealth’s continued economic growth, vitality, and competitiveness.

To fund the ongoing operation of the state-supported intercity passenger rail service the legislature should identify a dedicated funding stream.

One source of funding could be a percentage of the income tax revenues that are produced by the additional 4 per cent income tax levy on very high incomes, or by redirecting the 1% of the sales tax in Western Massachusetts that currently is used to fund the MBTA.

With this in mind, we believe that the legislature should create a “Commonwealth Rail Fund” that would be used to fund both the capital costs and operating costs associated with developing and continuing intercity passenger and freight rail operations and the development of rail infrastructure, rolling stock, and support facilities to support intercity passenger and freight rail service in the Commonwealth.

5. **How should Massachusetts promote and develop intercity passenger rail service with neighboring states?**

All of the existing and planned intercity passenger rail services in Western Massachusetts operate across state lines.

This means that these services are supported by MassDOT in cooperation with the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the New York State Department of Transportation, and/or the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

We believe that the Commission’s final report should endorse the establishment of an Interstate Rail Compact\(^1\) between Massachusetts and the states of Connecticut, New York and Vermont.
Examples of existing Interstate Rail Compacts include:

**Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission**
Members include: Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, and Wisconsin

**Southern Rail Commission**
Members include: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Interstate Rail Compacts have a history of promoting intercity passenger rail projects within their regions and encouraging policies that foster the efficient development of intercity passenger rail projects.

Importantly we note that Rep. Lindsay Sabdosa has filed [House Bill HD.2977](#) and Sen. Paul Mark has filed [Senate Bill SD.1919](#), two bills which call for the creation of an Interstate Rail Compact between the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and Vermont.

We stand ready to answer any questions that the Commission may have regarding this testimony.

Sincerely,

**Western Mass Rail Coalition**

The Western Mass Rail Coalition

Attachment

Rev 2

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1 Interstate Compacts were created pursuant to section 410 of the Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act.
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

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.

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 Inland Route (Boston to NYC) 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 expand rail passenger service in Western Massachusetts.

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, the Pownal line, the Berkshire Flyer, and the Housatonic Line.
Passenger Rail Service in Western Massachusetts

- ALBANY-RENSSELAER
- SPRINGFIELD UNION STATION
- BOSTON SOUTH STATION
- HARTFORD CT
- Pittsfield
- Chester
- Windsor Locks CT
- Holyoke
- Greenfield
- Northampton
- Vermont (Montreal)
- Palmer
- Worcester
- Framingham

- Berkshire Flyer (Amtrak)
- Hartford Line (Amtrak & CTrail)
- Lake Shore Limited (Amtrak)
- Northeast Direct (Amtrak)
- Valley Flyer (Amtrak)
- Vermonter (Amtrak)
- Framingham/Worcester Line (MBTA)

- East-West Inland Route (Amtrak)
- East-West Boston – Albany-Rensselaer (Amtrak)

Note: This diagram is not drawn to scale. Not all stations are shown.
Passenger Rail Service in Western Massachusetts

Note: This diagram is not drawn to scale.