



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
*House of Representatives*  
*State House, Boston 02133-1054*

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COMMITTEE  
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Transportation

May 16, 2017

Secretary Matthew Beaton  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs  
100 Cambridge St., Suite 900  
Boston, MA 02114

Re: South Coast Rail/Phase I Service – Notice of Project Change  
EEA No. 14346

Dear Secretary Beaton:

Please accept these comments with respect to the above-referenced Notice of Project Change, which was filed by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation on or around March 15 of this year.

As the House chair of the Joint Committee on Transportation, having served as a state representative from the South Coast since 1993, I am well positioned to offer insight on the project and the proposed early service through Middleborough. As a longtime, active proponent of South Coast Rail, I believe Phase I realistically places rail service to Boston on a near-term horizon for the first time since 1959.

For communities that have been waiting decades for restored rail service to and from Boston, the potential benefits offered by Phase I are impossible to ignore. At a cost of 12 minutes in trip time (77 minutes via Stoughton versus 89 minutes via Middleborough option 2), at marginal expense (the overwhelming majority of Phase I overlaps with the Stoughton alternative in the so-

called “Southern Triangle”), we will see meaningful transit service to the region’s economic centers at least 6 years earlier than 2030 – the projected date service is scheduled to begin under the Stoughton alternative, assuming, of course, that the Stoughton route is not bogged down in litigation.

In fact, this is one of the key beneficial aspects of the Notice of Project Change. State environmental laws require the project proponent to obtain all permits before beginning construction. Because Phase I would not rely on wetlands permits north of Cotley Junction, we could begin construction at a much earlier date while the Phase II permitting process, which is expected to be contentious, forges ahead. I note that cost savings derived from the earlier start date would accrue to the benefit of supporters of both routes.

Any criticism that Phase I threatens Phase II and certain interests served by Phase II is utterly misplaced. The Stoughton alternative remains the preferred route. MADOT has been abundantly clear on this point, and this intention is memorialized within the NPC. I expect that Phase II proponents will continue to strive towards resolving the significant financing and permitting issues as they always have.

I also stress my strong support for Phase I service that ensures a one-seat ride from New Bedford and Fall River by employing a well-coordinated shuttle service from the existing Lakeville station to Bridgewater, where riders could then travel cross-platform to board trains from the South Coast. Not only does this service readily offer the prospect of expanded service to Wareham and Buzzards Bay, but it takes into account Middleborough residents’ concerns by minimizing the local impact that would otherwise flow from a new station at or around Pilgrim Junction. It also offers a significant value engineering opportunity by avoiding the costs associated with constructing a new station in Middleborough.

A final brief note with respect to the Middleborough secondary line. When assessing the extent of the track improvements to be undertaken along this stretch, priority must be given to improvements in track capacity that allow for a minimum of three morning peak-hour trains originating from both New Bedford and Fall River. It is imperative that such scheduling flexibility be built into the project.

Sincerely,



William M. Straus  
State Representative  
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