



PLAN FOR PROGRESS

February 27, 2018

The Honorable Stephanie Pollack, Secretary
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Secretary Pollack:

We, the Pioneer Valley **Plan for Progress** Coordinating Council, are writing in response to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) recently released State Rail Plan. Thank you in advance for your careful consideration of our feedback.

The Plan for Progress is our region's economic development strategy, setting forth a broad vision of a strong, innovative, engaging, and vibrant economy and quality of life that fosters prosperity and sustainability and is driven by collaborative leadership. Long ago, we identified infrastructure as a major issue of focus towards achieving these aims. The reconstruction and reactivation of passenger rail service along the Knowledge Corridor was identified as a primary goal in the 2004 and 2015 editions of the Pioneer Valley **Plan for Progress** and in the 2017 Pioneer Valley Region's *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)*, which is prepared in support of the region's Economic Development District as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration. For this reason, we respectfully offer the following input.

We would like to first of all applaud MassDOT for its inclusion of expanded passenger rail service along the Knowledge Corridor, serving Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton and Greenfield. Demand for this service has been demonstrated despite the currently limited schedule of once a day travel and is sure to only grow in use with these additional daily trips. We urge MassDOT to establish a pilot period of no less than three years to allow usage to properly develop, with an ideal pilot period of five years. Furthermore, we are encouraged to see MassDOT's State Rail Plan address the elevated platform needs of Springfield's Union Station, which currently renders this expanded service less than fully accessible.

We are additionally appreciative of MassDOT's inclusion of an upgrade to the Massachusetts portion of the New England Central Railroad line to the 286,000 pound industry standard capacity - a longstanding logistical challenge to Massachusetts shippers, which will now be able to provide continuous service from Connecticut to Vermont.

We had hoped to see the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (NNEIRI) study's recommended proposals of eight daily roundtrips between Boston and Springfield advanced into Tier 1 for preliminary implementation. That MassDOT study - released in June of 2016 as the result of a multiyear collaborative planning effort by the Departments of Transportation of Connecticut, Vermont, Massachusetts and the United States – was an extensive effort that explicitly modeled (among other things) how increased passenger rail service could successfully co-exist with projected freight rail growth in the corridor. We urge that the proposed new study be initiated in earnest, with a concise scope aimed at answering any lingering questions MassDOT may have, while simultaneously completing it on a timeline that will ensure the abundance of NNEIRI conclusions supporting the establishment of this service do not become antiquated in the interim. We would also encourage MassDOT to revisit their Tier 3 designation of a Palmer station on such East-West service as it stands in direct contrast with the NNEIRI report's findings which recommended eight daily-roundtrips for all proposed stations on the Boston-Springfield route (with connections to Connecticut).

Thank you again for your consideration of these comments. Please do not hesitate to contact us if there is anyway the Plan for Progress Coordinating Council can be of assistance to the Commonwealth in this important process.

Sincerely,

Lori A. Tanner
Senior Economic Development/Policy Analyst

On behalf of the Plan for Progress Coordinating Council Members:

Kathleen Anderson, President, Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce
Suzanne Beck, Executive Director, Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce
Ellen Bembem, President, T2 Foundation
Debra Boronski, Western MA Regional Director, Massachusetts Office of Business Development
Timothy Brennan, Executive Director, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Jessica Collins, Executive Director, Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts
Patricia Crosby, Executive Director, Franklin/Hampshire Regional Employment Board
Dianne Fuller Doherty, Building Capacity Consultant
Kathleen Dowd, Consultant.
Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director, Franklin Regional Council of Governments
Jonathan Edwards, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Tech Foundry
Martha Field, Ph.D., Professor, Economics & Business, Greenfield Community College
Brooks Fitch, Consultant
Thom Fox, Giombetti Associates – Leadership and Talent Solutions
Nicole Griffin, President and CEO, Griffin Staffing Network

Richard Griffin, Jr., *MassDevelopment*
Jeffrey Hayden, *Vice President, Business and Community Services, Holyoke Community College*
Daniel Hodge, *Principal, Hodge Economic Consulting*
Samalid Hogan, *Regional Director, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center*
David Howland, *Regional Engineer, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection*
Geoff Little, *Consultant*
Larry Martin, *Business Services and Projects Manager, Regional Employment Board of Hampden County*
Terence Masterson, *Economic Development Director, City of Northampton*
Laura Masulis, *Transformative Development Fellow, MassDevelopment*
Kevin Maynard, *Attorney, Bulkley, Richardson and Gelinis and Chairman, Leadership Pioneer Valley*
Russell Peotter, *WGBY Channel 57 Public Television Advisor*
Katherine Putnam, *Chief Strategy Officer, Tursus LLC and Mentor, MIT Venture Mentoring*
Robert Reckman, *Northampton Chamber of Commerce and Fairgrounds Redevelopment Corporation*
Jessica Roncarati-Howe, *Chicopee Chamber of Commerce*
Christina Royal, *President, Holyoke Community College*
James Shriver, *Chairman, Chamber Energy Coalition, Inc.*
Christopher Sikes, *Chief Executive Officer, Common Capital*
Richard Sullivan, *President/CEO, Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts*
Michael Suzor, *Assistant to the President, Springfield Technical Community College*
Rebecca Townsend, *Manchester Community College*
Oreste Varela, *Springfield Branch Manager, U.S. Small Business Administration*
Mary Walachy, *Executive Director, Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation*
Kwame Webster, *Managing Director, Teach for America – Western Massachusetts*
Lora Wondolowski, *Executive Director, Leadership Pioneer Valley*
David Woods, *Principal, Woods Financial Group*
Katie Zobel, *President, Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts*