

# *Rail New England*

July 20, 2010

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Honorable Jim Douglas  
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Honorable John Lynch  
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Honorable Deval L. Patrick  
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Honorable M. Jodi Rell  
Executive Office of the Governor  
State Capitol  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Via first class mail and facsimile

Re: **New England Regional Rail Network – Urgent Action Required**

Dear Governor Baldacci, Governor Carcieri, Governor Douglas, Governor Lynch, Governor Patrick, and Governor Rell:

We, members of the ad hoc group, ***Rail New England***, write today to urge you, the Governors of the states of New England, to follow the lead of fellow governors in the Midwest and Southeast and achieve consensus on a comprehensive plan for a 21<sup>st</sup> century rail network the region. Time is of the essence because **High Speed Rail (HSR) grant requests are due into the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) by August 6, 2010** and the quality of the projects currently being requested by the New England states leave much to be desired. Please recall that the results of the last round of grants – \$8 billion was available from the FRA, but New England only received \$200 million, a paltry 2.5%. Similarly, we urge you to support the freight rail system through public-private partnerships (PPP) with freight railroads through TIGER grants. In the last round of these grants, many freight rail projects were submitted and awarded, but none in New England. **Applications for 2010 Tiger II grants are due on August 23, 2010.**

Despite some gaps in the rail network, there is a key advantage on the passenger rail side. New England already has a high end, high speed rail offering in the Northeast Corridor (NEC), but it requires further investment to reach its full potential. The NEC has **Acela trainsets capable of 165 mph**, a 230 mile (New York City <-> Boston) electrified right of way (ROW), and portions of that ROW where the trains routinely hit 150 mph. **No other region of the country has this advantage. The Boston-New York corridor can be upgraded to true HSR for a fraction of what it will cost to achieve similar result in the approved California and Florida projects.** Why cannot New England build from this unique strength with the following vision for passenger rail?

***Rail New England*** - Proposed Regional Passenger Rail Projects:

1. **Upgrade the NEC (Northeast Corridor) from New York City (Penn Station) to Boston (South Station) to enable true High Speed Rail service.**
  - a. ***Acela Express (non-stop): 1 hr 45 min, avg. speed - 130 mph***
  - b. ***Acela Standard (normal Acela stops) 2 hrs 15 min, avg. speed – 100 mph***
2. **Build the North/South Rail Link (NSRL) in Boston and extend the NEC northward, from South Station, Boston to Montreal, Canada. Certify for 110 mph speed.**

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- a. Phase 1: South Station, Boston to Manchester, NH
- b. Phase 2: Manchester, NH to Montreal, Quebec (via Concord, NH, Montpelier, VT, Burlington, VT), and Woburn, MA to Portland, ME
3. **Upgrade the “Knowledge Corridor”** (New Haven <-> Hartford <-> Springfield) and **“Inland Route”** (New York City<->New Haven<->Springfield<->Boston). Certify for 110 mph operation.

Investment is likewise needed in the region’s freight rail lines. In the continental 48 states, rail commonly holds a 25% to 40% share of freight traffic. Not so in New England where less than 10% of freight travels by rail. The rest of the goods are expensively transported by truck. New England freight rail lines have not kept up with national standards in terms of height clearance, weight capacities, and speed. The seaports have inadequate or non-existent rail freight service and adjoining land, needed for related logistics support, is quickly disappearing. The region has been steadily losing its rail freight infrastructure, resulting in marginal operations that do not provide competitive service or adequate return on reinvestment.

Reversing this trend will have many benefits for New England. The Panama Canal is being widened to accommodate a new class of super-tankers. This presents economic opportunities for freight business and job creation throughout the region. Moving freight from trucks to trains will lower the cost of living and doing business in New England, decrease congestion on highways, and lessen wear and tear on roads and bridges. Following is the vision for increasing rail freight in the region:

### ***Rail New England*** – Proposed Regional Freight Rail Plan:

1. Built/Restore Infrastructure to **state of good repair** on key lines.
2. **Upgrade critical North/South and East/West freight rail lines** and associated feeder lines that run from Atlantic Ocean and Long Island Sound seaports to New York state and Canadian border gateways.
  - East/West: New York state line to Boston seaport at Conley (South Boston) and Moran (Charlestown) terminals
  - North/South from Connecticut seaports to the Canadian border.
3. **Upgrade NE freight network to national standards** for seamless travel throughout region and country:
  - 286,000 lb weight capacity, Class 5 operational status
  - Plate I double stack height (20 ft, 9 in) on main lines. Where electrified locomotives are currently in use, or such use is planned, height should conform to the national electrification standard of 23 feet.
4. **Regional collaboration on Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP)** for states, federal government, and key railroads on rail infrastructure:
  - Ensure infrastructure is adequate to retail, support and grow rail freight activity.
    - (i.e. rail yards, passing sidings, seaport access, intermodal facilities, inland ports, etc.).
  - Establish **land bank** of currently unused rail served land/facilities/ROW for the future use.

As indicated at the beginning of the letter, we are very concerned that New England is not getting a fair share of federal HSR and Tiger grant dollars. Likewise, we are concerned that the projects New England is submitting lack the competitiveness, cohesiveness, and connectivity of projects submitted by competing regions. In addition to the well reported HSR grants won by Florida and California, significant higher speed rail grants were won by the Midwest (various Chicago-centric projects), the Ohio corridor (Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati) and the Southeast corridor (Washington DC-Richmond-Charlotte-Atlanta). The Southeast corridor win is the most disconcerting because this corridor is actually an extension southward of our own Northeast Corridor. New England has not proposed to extend the NEC northward to New Hampshire, Maine and Montreal Canada, even though the population density would justify it. A similar story can be told for Tiger grant awards for rail freight – part of the CREATE Project in Chicago to realign the inter-connections of six freight railroads, and the National Gateway Corridor to improve rail transportation between the Atlantic seaports to the Midwest.

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The door for funding critical rail projects is open now, but it may close with New England on the outside looking in. If New England does not act now, there will be further disinvestment in the region's infrastructure as these dollars will flow to other, more aggressive regions. Many residents are questioning why New England is failing to win approval for critical transportation projects. These questions will only increase in intensity as the election season gets closer to November.

We ask that you consider the passenger rail projects described here for submission to FRA. True high speed service on the important, extended Northeast Corridor would be a very strong proposal. Time is short but some work has already been done on segments, including NEC improvements, the North/South Rail Link in Boston, and the Capitol Corridor project in New Hampshire. In the 1990's, a comprehensive freight plan was developed for double stack access on key East-West freight lines from the New York state line to the Boston seaport. Some work has been done by private railroads to upgrade their facilities but this work does not appear to be reflected in the states' Tiger grant submissions. Why cannot freight projects be built from comprehensive work already done?

New England continues to see its tax base and population shrink as businesses, entrepreneurs, and residents leave the region. Will these proposed projects change this problem overnight? No, but these strategic infrastructure investments will be a step in the right direction to show that New England can still be an attractive place to start or grow a business and raise a family.

We urge you to (1) personally review the High Speed Rail and Tiger grant applications being submitted by your transportation administrators, and (2) goal-set your respective Department of Transportation Secretaries or Commissioners to submit plans aligned with the forward looking projects that were recommended in this letter.

Respectfully,

For further information:

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