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Association for Public Transportation

Massachusetts Association of Railroad Passengers

P.O. Box 51029
Boston, MA 02205-1029

apt@aptmarp.org
APT Message Line : 617.482.0282

Richard J. Arena
President

rjarena@aptmarp.org
Tel: 732.576.8840 Fax: 732.576.8839

Open Letter to Governor Deval Patrick, re. North/South Rail Link and High Speed Rail Funding Requests

April 1, 2011

The Honorable Deval L. Patrick
Governor, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts State House, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Patrick:

Despite intense efforts by many interested parties over the past month, it appears unlikely that MassDOT will submit requests for any of the \$2.4 billion of Florida's returned High Speed Rail (HSR) funds for use on the North/South Rail Link (NSRL). ***APT strongly recommends the following funding requests for the NSRL: (1) \$60 million for preliminary engineering work, and (2) \$6 million to complete NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) requirements. Time is of the essence--funding requests are due to the FRA (Federal Railroad Administration) by 8:00 PM, Monday April 4, 2011.***

Massachusetts has had three opportunities, in 2009, 2010, and now 2011, to request HSR funds for this important project, and each time the Commonwealth has declined. **This underground South Station – North Station rail connection would add capacity to both of Boston's congested commuter rail stations, create thousands of jobs, remove 50,000 cars from the region's highways, and provide the infrastructure for a future 200+ mph HSR gateway station in the Commonwealth.** This failure to act would be another missed opportunity by Massachusetts to construct what is arguably the most strategic and critical rail project for the Commonwealth and the New England region.

Massachusetts has fared poorly in earlier attempts to secure HSR funds. To date, the entire New England region has received only 2% of available federal HSR funds. These projects are far from what is considered "true" 200+ mph HSR. The "Knowledge Corridor" in western Massachusetts will have a top speed of only 60 mph and an average speed of 46 mph. The Haverhill bridge replacement, for which MassDOT is making an application, supports commuter rail traffic and the Portland Downeaster train which has a top speed of 79 mph and an average speed of only 50 mph. These projects pale in comparison to published HSR plans which project Boston to New York City trip times of 84 minutes, with a top speed of over 200 mph and an average speed of 160 mph. This "true" HSR project is a game changer for the economies of not only Massachusetts but also all of New England. The NSRL is Massachusetts' investment to advance this critical project and make sure the Commonwealth stays in the hunt for future HSR funding to make this vision a reality.

MassDOT Secretary Jeffrey Mullan is doing a credible job under severe constraints but one must conclude the Commonwealth is making the wrong call in not advancing the NSRL and HSR. Secretary Mullan is working closely with Amtrak, clearly the correct thing to do. Amtrak is of the opinion that the NSRL is a very good project or it would not have funded a \$4.5 million feasibility study on it. However Amtrak will not go out of its way to support the NSRL prior to the awarding of the latest HSR grants. Amtrak's dilemma is that it must focus on the Washington to New York City segment of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) due to severe capacity and maintenance issues in New York and New Jersey.

Therein lies the problem – **Amtrak's interests and the Commonwealth's interests are not necessarily aligned.** Amtrak's number one priority is the New York / New Jersey Gateway tunnel project and rail station expansion because Penn

Station in Manhattan, and the Hudson River tunnels that connect to it, are at capacity today. The second Amtrak priority is a Washington to New York City 200+ mph HSR line. Travelers on the Washington - New York HSR corridor will see dramatic system improvements in just over 10 years. Best case, the Commonwealth gets 200+ mph HSR service in 25 years, 15 years later. But Massachusetts' 200+ mph HSR service is far from a firm commitment.

Both Amtrak and Congressman John Mica (R-FL), Chair of the influential House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, have expressed the desirability, if not the need, for a true HSR demonstration project to convince Americans that 200+ mph HSR is worthy of their support and tax dollars. The Washington to Boston Northeast Corridor (NEC), with a distance of 455 miles, would be great route; but Washington to New York City, a distance of 225 miles, is more than good enough to make the case for HSR. The important point -- **HSR does not need Boston or Massachusetts to prove its viability. But Boston and Massachusetts and New England do need HSR to remain competitive** with other regions that will be the beneficiaries of "true" 200+ mph HSR services.

There are serious concerns that proactive, forward-thinking states on the Southeastern Corridor will use their increasing political muscle to extend the 200+ mph HSR Northeast Corridor southward to Atlanta via Richmond and Charlotte. Their objective is rational and clearly understandable: after the New York to Washington HSR corridor is completed, either leapfrog or replace the New York to Boston HSR leg with the Southeast Corridor HSR leg running from Washington to Atlanta. This would not only affect Massachusetts, it would also impact the rest of New England as well as the development of a federally designated high speed line to Canada from Boston. The bottom line is that Massachusetts' future is far from assured, and there is a significant risk of falling behind economically. Is this delay in the Commonwealth's best interests? If New England's 200+ mph rail service is preempted, Massachusetts will be left with slower service than we have now. What's that picture? Imagine the condition of the ageing Acela trainsets on the tired Northeast Corridor rail bed in 20 to 30 years.

It is in the Commonwealth's and the region's best interests that MassDOT submits requests for funds to complete NEPA reviews as well as preliminary engineering for the NSRL. MassDOT is in the best position to determine the amount of the request, but numbers presented in the past are in the vicinity of \$6 million for NEPA to complete environmental reports and \$60 million for preliminary engineering. The \$6 million figure is also the amount that APT and other groups, at MassDOT's recommendation, have requested as an earmark from the Massachusetts' Congressional delegation.

The time to make this HSR funding request is short. The **Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) must receive all project funding requests by 8:00 PM on Monday, April 4, 2011.** To reiterate, the Association for Public Transportation along with many other transportation professionals and advocates are very disappointed that the Commonwealth is not making a funding request related to the NSRL any of the \$2.4 billion of HSR funds recently returned by Florida. ***While a request for \$60 million in preliminary engineering funds has been referenced in earlier reports, and APT would wholeheartedly endorse such a request, the Commonwealth should at minimum put in a request of \$6 million for funding to complete all the NEPA environmental requirements.***

Thank you in advance for your timely consideration of this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Arena
President
Association for Public Transportation