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AN INTEGRATED REGIONAL RAIL NETWORK FOR NEW ENGLAND *The Prospects and Promise of a New England Rail Connector*

AN OPPORTUNITY MISSED: In the early 1970s Governor Francis Sargent began a new and improved era of regional transportation planning and development in Massachusetts when he ceased construction of the inner belt highway system in Boston and convened the comprehensive Boston Transportation Planning Review (BTPR). The BTPR process established a new blueprint for almost forty years of transportation infrastructure investment in the Commonwealth. The BTPR was rooted in balanced and integrated transportation policy, which emphasized the expansion of our rail and transit options and continued improvement of our air travel and highway assets.

The final element of the BTPR vision was the Central Artery/Tunnel (CA/T) Project, designed to modernize the antiquated Boston section of the regional and interstate highway system. In accordance with the BTPR, it would also have also closed the longstanding Boston gap in the regional and interstate rail system between North and South Stations by building the North/South Rail Link (NSRL). In the final analysis-- and in an ironic inconsistency with the spirit of the BTPR- the rail link aspect of the CA/T project was eliminated in favor of additional highway lanes. However, by design, during the construction of the Central Artery Project, the right of way for the future construction of the NSRL tunnel was preserved.

AN ENCOURAGING RESPONSE: In 1993 – while aspects of the CA/T Project were in the final stages of planning and permitting -- Gov. William Weld convened the Central Artery Rail Link (CARL) Task Force to review and evaluate its continuing feasibility, costs and benefits as an independent project. Governor Weld explicitly asked the CARL Task Force to address four major goals:

- ❖ Close the only gap in intercity rail service along the Atlantic seaboard.
- ❖ Develop an integrated regional rail network serving Massachusetts and New England through improved commuter rail service.
- ❖ Reaffirm Massachusetts as a national leader in intermodal transportation planning, design, engineering and construction.
- ❖ Broaden the public benefits of the Central Artery/Tunnel (CA/T) Project through increased regional service, consistent with national transportation and environmental policy (See the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990).

POSITIVE FINDINGS: In May of 1993 the CARL Task Force published a 70-page report that confirmed the continued feasibility of the North/South Rail Link (NSRL) as a part of the CA/T Project, estimated its costs as a separate project, and confirmed its continued benefits. State and federal elected officials and transportation agencies, led by then Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell of Maine and Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, promptly secured \$4M in Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) funds and the authorizations necessary for the environmental and financial evaluation of the NSRL Project.

OFFICIAL FOLLOW-UP: The environmental and financial evaluation of the NSRL began in 1995 with Amtrak and the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC) as project partners, with the oversight of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Planning Department and the broad-based NSRL Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The result of that collaboration, the 2003 Major Investment Study (MIS) and Draft Environment Impact Statement and Report (DEIS/DEIR), documented and confirmed the positive assessment of the CARL Task Force.

CONTINUING HIATUS: Despite the favorable findings of the MIS/DEIS/DEIR, no further official action has been taken to advance this critical project.

CALL TO ACTION: Gubernatorial leadership is required. Renewed popular and political support for the NSRL Project is essential given the extensive transportation demands of our continuing economic development, looming capacity constraints on regional rail ridership, increased congestion on our highways and transit systems, escalating costs of energy and unavoidable homeland security requirements on all forms of transportation.

NEED FOR A NEW VISION: As the notably successful BTPR era ends, we must develop an innovative and integrated vision for multimodal transportation beyond the CA/T Project. We must again look to the Massachusetts Governor's Office to provide the leadership and understanding required to articulate and achieve that vision for Boston, the Commonwealth, New England and the Northeast Corridor. The NSRL Project, because of its inter-modal transportation potential, extensive economic, environmental and geographic benefits and inherent cost-effectiveness, should become one of the major foundations for that new vision.

THE CURRENT RAIL SYSTEM (S): The Commonwealth owns one of the most extensive commuter rail networks in the United States, yet this system operates at a fraction of its potential because of a gap in its very heart -- the one-mile gap between North Station and South Station in Boston, which is also a gap in the Northeast Corridor. To appreciate the missing link, consider how our subway system would function if its major lines were severed in downtown Boston -- if Red Line trains from Quincy turned back at Downtown Crossing and trains from Cambridge turned back at

Park Street. Although the consequences of such a bifurcated system can only be imagined, that is precisely the situation our rail system has dealt with for more than a century.

Eliminating this gap with a rail link between North and South Stations would transform our two disconnected rail systems into a regional rail network unparalleled in North America. Linking our separate rail systems would improve efficiency, mobility and capacity throughout Massachusetts, New England and the Northeast Corridor. The construction of the North/South Rail Link (NSRL) would, in fact, extend and complete the Northeast Corridor; it would give New England a major competitive advantage to sustain and expand the prosperity of our entire region in an era of rapidly increasing congestion and energy costs.

THE SPECIFIC CONCLUSIONS OF THE CARL TASK FORCE REGARDING THE BENEFITS OF A NSRL PROJECT: In its 1993 report to the Governor and to the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC) Secretary, the CARL Task Force enumerated the following benefits from the North/South Station Rail Link:

- ❖ Intercity rail service will be improved by allowing through service to Maine and New Hampshire. Access to intercity rail services will be improved by providing direct regional rail access from all lines to intercity stations.
- ❖ Regional rail inter-connectivity will be revolutionized by the operation of through-routed rail pairs, serving a wider array of requirements beyond simple radial commuter trips.
- ❖ The inherent efficiency of run-through service will solve upcoming station/track capacity problems at South Station.
- ❖ Core area trip distribution will be much improved with the rail link serving as its own trip-distribution mode for many more trips. Easy direct connections to all four MBTA transit lines will provide many simpler transfer opportunities for regional rail patrons.
- ❖ Rapid transit congestion levels will be reduced as riders shift to regional rail
- ❖ Logan Airport will be directly accessible from South Station by the Silver Line. These connections will be available for all Amtrak and regional rail passengers. Blue Line access to the airport will also be available via the new rail link central station.

- ❖ Highway/rail integration would be optimized through intermodal stations and activity centers at outlying crossing points of major highways and rail lines. These activity centers will synergistically maximize ridership and the effectiveness of the regional rail system.

RELEVANT INTERIM EVENTS: In the more than twelve years since these benefits of the NSRL were clearly outlined by the CARL Task Force, the issues and opportunities that they reflect have remained equally valid and have become ever more timely:

- ❖ With increasing commuter rail ridership and the expansion of commuter rail and Amtrak service to and from North and South Stations, the track capacity problems are now imminent at South Station and rapidly approaching at North Station – all of which the NSRL would address and resolve.
- ❖ Congestion and capacity problems are increasing on transit, highway and air travel systems, and expanding them remains physically and politically constrained - leaving rail as the only regional transportation mode realistically capable of expansion.
- ❖ Escalating gasoline and parking prices have made cars cost-prohibitive for many, increasing the attraction of rail travel.
- ❖ The shift of commuters from highway to rail, which the NSRL achieves to an unprecedented degree by eliminating 60,000 automobile trips, is important to the quality of life as well as the environmental health of the whole region.
- ❖ Fall River, New Bedford, Lowell and Lawrence have all been designated with State Economic Enterprise Zones, largely because of their actual or potential connection by commuter rail. Their economic success would clearly be enhanced by the improved accessibility and mobility of a truly regional rail system.
- ❖ The Seaport District, enhanced by the new Convention Center, is a major new development opportunity that would be quite conveniently accessible by an integrated regional rail system. However, the full development is likely to be delayed and constrained, as recent Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) rulings have suggested, by inadequate transportation capacity.
- ❖ Major transit-oriented development (TOD) options would be greatly enhanced and accelerated at North Station and South Station by access to a regional rail system.

- ❖ TOD is now both established state policy and an attractive economic development strategy. That positive trend is enhanced by truly regional rail that extends the reach of every rail station in the system, providing additional potential for both suburban-to-suburban as well as urban-to-suburban commuting.
- ❖ New emphasis on environmental justice requires that all communities share equitably both the benefits and burdens of transportation services and projects. The benefits of the regional rail network should be fully available to the inner city and inner-belt communities through which it now runs. The NSRL would open new station, destination and employment options to such communities in Boston, Cambridge, Somerville and Chelsea.
- ❖ Suggested air/rail links have been greatly enhanced by transportation, terminal and transit improvements at the airport and by the construction of a transit-way that links South Station and Logan Airport via the Ted Williams Tunnel. The new Silver Line connection from South Station to the airport now makes that station the most completely intermodal terminal in the nation.
- ❖ Stringent homeland security policies after the 9/11 terrorist attacks have made air travel more time consuming and less convenient. They also complicate and constrain automobile access to and from the airport. Integrated regional rail that expedites air to rail transfer and provides an attractive alternative to air-travel is an important element of a contemporary multimodal regional transportation system; and what the NSRL alone would provide.
- ❖ The continued economic growth, integration and vitality of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) are critically important to New England. The NEC's financial, economic and political viability would be greatly enhanced by the NSRL north of Boston to include the other New England states and Canada, and potentially south to include elements of the emerging new Research Triangle beyond the District of Columbia in North Carolina. An expanded regional transportation system could create important competitive advantages nationally and internationally.
- ❖ The recreational potential of rail transportation has continued to grow both locally – e.g., expanded marketing of rail access to Gillette Stadium, Fenway Park and TD Banknorth Garden— and regionally—e.g., winter ski/rail vacations to northern New England and Canada and potentially summer travel to Cape Cod. The NSRL would extend access to these recreational destinations from up and down the Atlantic Coast.

- ❖ Substantial improvements in rail equipment and construction methodology, including improved dual-mode locomotives, make the cost and predictability of construction and the operation requirements more predictable and reliable.
- ❖ Federal funding programs since the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 have explicitly permitted and encouraged investment in a balanced transportation network that emphasis inter-modal connectivity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness -- all inherent to NSRL design and function.

These and other critical benefits of the NSRL Project, and their related costs, were explored and documented in great detail throughout the MIS/DEIS/DEIR process. And while the issues and opportunities that they address have not diminished, the favorable findings and conclusions of that process remain largely ignored. We want to take this opportunity to highlight some of those matters in more detail.

THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Escalating housing costs continue to price potential young Massachusetts residents out of our residential real estate market – a factor that has received much attention in conjunction with reports of our recent population decline. Those who were born here or come here to attend college find that they cannot afford to work, live and raise their families here.

Massachusetts actually has plenty of affordable housing, but it is located in older urban communities without rail access to Boston, like Fall River and New Bedford. Businesses are less likely to locate in these areas because they are competitively disadvantaged by limited transportation options and increased highway congestion. And while improved rail access to this region is already planned, it is impractical without the increased station and track capacity in Boston that only a NSRL can provide.

Connecting our older cities by rail to both Boston and the rest of the state has been a key element in the revitalization Lowell, Worcester and Brockton; where rail access is available, it has had a catalytic effect.

Lowell, for example, continues to successfully develop new downtown lofts that have attracted those priced out of the Boston area real estate by marketing a 40-minute rail commute to Downtown Boston. Likewise, Worcester Mayor Tim Murray continues to push for more frequent rail service between Boston and Worcester to continue the revitalization process started in 1994 with the extension of commuter rail and the restoration of its magnificent Union Station.

Even more recently, Brockton has taken a proactive approach to promoting its downtown development after three new commuter rail stations opened there in 1998.

Indeed, Jack Yunits, the five-term mayor of Brockton, in a recent article in the Boston Globe, cited commuter rail extension as the single most important reason why his city is now turning itself around. Banking and community leaders have been promoting home ownership and residential/commercial smart-growth opportunities in Brockton in a collaborative manner that is becoming a model for other struggling older urban communities.

CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS: Integrating our northside and southside rail systems is becoming a necessity. Ridership has grown dramatically in recent years, and both North and South Stations, which are dead ends, are rapidly nearing their design capacity. In the last decade, the Old Colony service has reopened and service has also increased from the west. Once service starts on the new Greenbush line in 2007, it will be difficult for South Station to handle additional service, and that would jeopardize new commuter rail service to New Bedford, Fall River, Taunton and Cape Cod. The same situation will soon prevail at North Station as well, given the success of the Amtrak Downeaster service to/from Portland and the anticipated commuter rail extensions north to Nashua and Manchester, New Hampshire. Additionally, the new commuter rail line to Newburyport from North Station has increased northside service just in the last ten years.

Without additional capacity at its downtown terminals, our regional commuter rail system will be unable to meet increased ridership demand. This terminal capacity crunch will also cap Amtrak service to New York and points south and to Portland and points north at a time when the need for intercity rail service has never been greater. Our rail infrastructure should be an engine of regional growth, not a limiting factor. Adding surface platforms in a constrained urban setting is a nearly impossible task, and competes directly with other land uses. The North/South Rail Link, by allowing efficient run-through service, resolves the terminal bottlenecks at their source, making continued service improvements and expansions both easy and more feasible.

INCREASING URGENCY: Although Governor Romney's recent report on the state's transportation future clearly noted these problems, it did not offer any solutions. In the short run, the Commonwealth may build additional tracks and other improvements at the two stations to accommodate some increased rail traffic -- if adjacent public and private property owners cooperate. Such substantial investments would marginally increase terminal capacity, but do little to expand the throughput capacity of the system. Only the NSRL can achieve that essential goal through major increases in ridership and revenues, as well as operating efficiencies and cost savings.

The Commonwealth does not have the luxury of deciding whether or not to build the North/South Rail Link-- it must be built if Boston, Massachusetts and New England are to continue to grow and develop economically. In the meantime, we must also be sure that we do not preclude that option by compromising a limited and vulnerable right-of way with other development plans for the area that fail to take it into adequate account.

AN ADAPTABLE PROJECT: Project proponents have continued to consider how the basic NSRL concept could be adapted in an even more appropriate, cost effective and operationally efficient manner.

The initial NSRL concept envisioned three downtown stations – North, South, and Central. That proposal was advanced when the most direct link between commuter rail and the airport was via the Blue Line at the NSRL Central Station to the existing Aquarium T Station. Since then, with construction of the Ted Williams Tunnel, the airport connection can arguably be better made via the new Silver Line from South Station, which makes the Central Station relatively less important.

Both 3-station and 2-station options were evaluated in the MIS/DEIS/DEIR. In the 2-station scenario, the northern station would move somewhat to the south, and the southern station would move somewhat to the north; but each would be directly linked by underground walkways to the existing transportation complexes at North and South Stations respectively. Eliminating the proposed central station would reduce the cost by hundreds of millions of dollars.

RELEVANT HISTORY: Political and economical historians ponder why North and South Stations have never been connected. As the 20th Century was just beginning, northern New England railroad barons negotiated a treaty with J.P. Morgan's New York and Southern New England railroad baron to divide New England along a line between Boston and Albany. Morgan agreed to stay on the south side of the line, and his competitor agreed to stay on the north side of the line. Thus, neither side had any interest in closing the gap between North and South Station, since any connection might invite competition. The original plans for the CA/T Project had included a rail connector down the center of the new underground artery, but the perceived need to expand the roadway preempted that. The failure to build a North/South Rail Link has now resulted in four critical challenges that will only get worse:

- ❖ Capacity constraints at both North and South Stations, as previously described.
- ❖ Unrealized ridership growth, because potential new commuter rail passengers are discouraged by the need for long walks and/or transfers to the T in order to reach their final Boston destinations.

- ❖ Higher staffing, equipment and operating costs for the two inefficient stub-end systems, which require their operators to turn around at the terminals rather than run through to the other side of the system.
- ❖ Increased congestion on our highways and in our subway systems – and related adverse air quality impacts -- from thousands of commuters who would otherwise commute by rail. The MIS/DEIS/DEIR process reliably estimated the number of trips involved in the range of 60, 000 automobile trips and 50,000 transit trips daily.

An inter-modal shift of that magnitude is significant because neither the highway nor transit systems in the downtown core are capable of expansion. With the NSRL, the regional rail system is the only element of our transportation network capable of expanding capacity and utilization, which is essential to the efficient operation of all modes of transportation as well as to our future economic development and employment growth.

IMPROVED CONSTRUCTION METHODOLOGIES: Underground construction, of the type required by the NSRL, has been successfully accomplished elsewhere in Massachusetts using construction methodologies that were quite innovative and are both cost-effective and reliable:

- ❖ The Red Line extension from Harvard Square to Alewife involved extensive tunnel work; it was completed on time and on budget.
- ❖ The Orange Line through the South End, Roxbury and Jamaica Plain used tunnel slurry walls along a substantial part of the corridor; there were no major cost or schedule overruns.
- ❖ The Boston Harbor cleanup involved substantial tunneling and was, next to the CA/T Project, the single most extensive and expensive public works project in the Commonwealth's history. Unlike the CA/T Project, however, it was completed on-time and under-budget. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority continues to do extensive tunneling as part of its effort to modernize and expand the capacity of the system, with no major overruns thus far.

Recent experience with the CA/T Project and world-wide with underground methodologies for tunnel and station construction makes projects such as the NSRL increasingly more reliable and more cost effective. Because we already know a lot about the geology and other conditions in this particular part of the city after our experience with the CA/T Project, the NSRL should be far less costly and complicated with fewer uncertainties regarding its scope, schedule and budget.

PROJECT COST PROJECTIONS: The CA/T Project seems to have traumatized the engineering and construction communities, public, media, and many of our public leaders. Because of abundant caution, public infrastructure projects are now burdened by cost estimates with unprecedented contingencies.

As a direct result, during the past decade, officials have presented a bewildering array of apparently escalating NSRL cost estimates. Although the original estimate was \$1.74B in 1993, we have now been told that the project could cost in excess of \$8.3B.

How and why projected NSRL costs appear to have quadrupled in the past ten years is an interesting story:

- ❖ **The Initial CARL Estimate:** The expert CARL Task Force prepared the initial project estimates for Governor Weld in 1993 to evaluate the feasibility of the NSRL project -- and assure the CAT Project was designed and built to preserve the NSRL right of way. The CARL Task Force estimated the costs of construction of basic project infrastructure to be \$1.74B in 1993 dollars. That included the required tunnels, stations, tracks, signals and portals, but did not include the cost of total system electrification, which was considered desirable, but not essential.
- ❖ **The Initial Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB) Estimate:** Based upon the CARL Task Force's positive conclusions and with \$4M in federal funds, the NSRL Project, with Amtrak and EOTC as project partners, proceeded in 1995 to an extensive environmental evaluation and economic analysis with the Major Investment Study (MIS) and related federal Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and state Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). The MIS/DEIS/DEIR was completed in 2003.

The initial MIS/DEIS/DEIR project construction estimate was \$2.74B in 1998 dollars, which included a 50% contingency to accommodate unexpected design and construction conditions. This figure was later inflated to 2002 dollars -- \$3.1B for a full 2-tunnel/4-track/3-station configuration. Given the 50% contingency provision and inflation during intervening years, the \$3.1B VHB estimate was essentially in line with the \$1.74B CARL Task Force estimate.

- ❖ **The Peer Review Estimate:** Integral to the MIS/DEIS/DEIR process, was the review of the VHB financial estimates by independent professionals with experience in underground construction. The peer review of the VHB construction cost estimates verified that they were both reasonable and conservative. They even suggested that newer mining techniques could likely reduce those estimates. The Peer Review panel recommended a NSRL project construction cost of \$2.4B.

❖ **The Final MIS/DEIS/DEIR Estimate:** Just before the MIS/DEIS/DEIR document was to be published in 1998, the initial VHB total project cost estimate was escalated substantially, even though the underlying project costs remained unchanged. This was done over the Citizens Advisory Committee's expressed objections. The higher costs were justified based on rationales of dubious merit and arguable relevance. These included:

- An additional, undefined \$500M to reflect *the Artery experience*.
- An additional \$820M to address possible project scope changes – pump stations, access shafts and building underpinning.
- Another \$950M to cover new locomotive and coach purchases, most of which would have been required of the MBTA regardless.
- A further \$1.3B (30%) for unspecified design, construction management and administrative costs – beyond the previous 50% contingency.
- Another \$1.82B for inflation to the presumed *mid-point of construction* – the first time such a standard was applied to a major infrastructure project.

Because of these late changes to the initial VHB costs estimates, the estimated NSRL cost increased by two and a half times the earlier estimate -- from \$3.1B to \$8.3B. Lost in the process was the fact that project construction costs had not increased -- and probably had decreased, based on improvements in tunnel and station construction methodology.

OPERATIONAL SAVINGS AND COST CONSIDERATIONS: Additional to this major NSRL project cost increase, projected revenue increases and cost savings were not directly factored into the MIS/DEIS/DEIR financial analysis. As documented in the MIS/DEIS/DEIR related technical studies, these included:

- ❖ Increases in annual operating revenues (\$120M+) from significantly increased rail ridership.
- ❖ Operating expense savings (\$70-90M annually) from major staff, equipment and logistical efficiencies.
- ❖ Reductions in initial equipment purchases (\$75M) that would otherwise have been made by the MBTA, a significant, albeit non-recurring cost.

These revenue sources were carefully calculated in the initial phases of the MIS/DEIS/DEIR technical studies; and for the 4-track/3-station option, it was estimated they could total \$270M annually in 2010 dollars. The nationally known and respected Infrastructure Management Group (IMG), in doing a financial plan for the project, concluded that half of the \$270M would result from improved system-wide equipment utilization, increased crew productivity, direct access to the Boston Engine Terminal for equipment maintenance throughout the system, a reduction in non-revenue *deadhead* trips, and stopping trains from having to back out of congested terminals. These are the continuing operational benefits the NSRL would provide, along with the essential additional transportation capacity required to sustain our economic growth.

Curiously, they were not reflected in the MIS/DEIS/DEIR. If they had been so reflected, these recurring cash flows would have been sufficient to cover the annual bonding amortization costs of virtually all of the projected project capital costs based on initial VHB estimates – and almost half of even the most inflated estimates.

POTENTIAL COMMERCIAL AND JOINT DEVELOPMENT INCOME: The IMG also concluded real estate development at and around North and South Stations could generate \$14.6M to \$19.2M in annual revenues -- and perhaps as high as \$66.8M to \$96.1M, assuming a design-build procurement strategy combined with higher levels of joint development and shared public/private construction.

Four things are particularly significant about these estimates:

- ❖ **Relevance:** As with the operating revenues and savings described above, these potential income sources were left out of the MIS/DEIS/DEIR financial analysis.
- ❖ **Timeliness:** These estimates likely understate the commercial potential of NSRL stations, when designed, constructed, financed, marketed and managed as integrated transportation and retail facilities. Recent trends in integrated retail, restaurant and other commercial tenants in the design and operation of airport terminals throughout the country, as well as the successful retail experience of underground transportation complexes elsewhere in the world, demonstrate interesting and relevant opportunities.
- ❖ **Scope:** The public/private partnership and joint economic development potential of the NSRL Project is not limited to North and South Stations, and likely substantially understated in the MIS/DEIS/DEIR. Such opportunities include development possibilities elsewhere in Downtown Boston – the adjacent Seaport District, the future development of which is constrained by accessibility issues, as recent MEPA comments on previous Seaport District development proposals

have made clear. While many of these development opportunities are likely to be undertaken eventually, all would be expanded, facilitated and accelerated by the additional transportation capacity and mobility the NSRL alone can provide.

- ❖ **Equity:** The economic development opportunities facilitated by this project encompass virtually all areas already identified as economic enterprise zones; specifically including critical areas of intersection among the present and proposed elements of our multi-modal transportation network.

Such development opportunities include those locations where rail intersects with highway, as in Westwood or Woburn; but also include Boston, Cambridge, Somerville and Chelsea. In these communities, the existing rail system intersects with current transit lines and with the planned Urban Ring circumferential route. These communities bear all of the burdens of rail facilities without securing any of their benefits – making the NSRL an important issue of environmental justice.

The increased regional accessibility and mobility that would be provided by the NSRL would support and accelerate development in these areas. It would also extend such economic and employment opportunities beyond the reach of the existing rail network as both commuter and interstate rail continues to grow in Massachusetts, New England and along the Northeast Corridor. In that context, the North/South Rail Link is truly a New England or Northeast Corridor Rail Link, given the extensive scope of the regional transportation, economic and environmental benefits that it would generate

THE NSRL AS A FOUNDATION FOR A NEW TRANSPORTION VISION: More than thirty-five years ago, a combination of responsive gubernatorial leadership and informed community involvement resulted in a BTPR process that changed the way we thought about the balance and symmetry of public and private transportation systems in Boston and Massachusetts. It also provided a practical and long-term blueprint for our regional transportation strategy investment in the decades that followed – one that culminated in the CA/T Project and has now been effectively completed.

Today we need a new vision for the future – one that values and integrates all of our economic, environmental and transportation plans, priorities and values. And rather than basing that perspective on a project that should not be done, as was the case with the BTPR, now we can build it on a project that should be done- the NSRL.

The NSRL is uniquely suited to be a principal foundation on which to build such renewed and integrated regional vision for at least four reasons:

- ❖ **Benefits:** The NSRL produces regional transportation, environmental and economic benefits that are timely, relevant and demonstrable – and are not otherwise possible on that scale from any other proposed transportation projects.
- ❖ **Scope:** The NSRL physically and functionally intersects all aspects of multimodal regional transportation network – highway, rail, transit, air, water; it does so in a manner that supports and enhances their complementary interaction.
- ❖ **Scale:** The NSRL is truly regional in scope, given the fact that it finally integrates a growing commuter and interstate rail network that extends throughout and beyond the Commonwealth and actually encompasses all of the states in New England and the Northeast Corridor.
- ❖ **Synergy:** This project complements economic development policies and plans in both the public and the private sectors in a manner that lends itself to the kind of public/private planning and development and financing partnerships that are now becoming increasingly characteristic of transit-oriented development initiatives. These include recent *district improvement financing* proposals advanced by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) in connection with Seaport District infrastructure funding and could be relevant for transit-oriented development elsewhere as well.

For all of these reasons, there is no other present or proposed project that has the potential to reflect and reinforce the issues and opportunities that should inform our regional vision for the 21st Century as fully as does the NSRL Project. It also offers an opportunity for political leadership on the scale of the BTPR and in the context of a gubernatorial campaign debate about how we should think about transportation, economic and environmental plans and priorities in new substantive and institutional ways. This is an opportunity not to be missed.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS: To that end, there are a specific series of next action steps that we believe must be promptly and seriously considered:

- ❖ **Designate the New Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) to Complete and File the Final NSRL Project EIS/EIR:** The NSRL Project MIS/DEIS/DEIR, which was completed after eight years of professional and community input in 2003, has yet to be officially received by federal or state authorities, in large part because no state agency was ready, willing and able to accept responsibility for completion of the Final EIS/EIR document.

The MBTA, to which the formerly named Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC) had perhaps unfortunately delegated responsibility for

preparing the draft MIS/DEIS/DEIR document, was clearly unready or unwilling to do so in 2003, given project priorities that were already beyond its capabilities and its continuing and very serious budget problems. EOT itself, based on its original legal relationship with Amtrak and on the scope of its multi-modal transportation purview, is the most appropriate and advisable candidate for this task, and the new Governor, regardless of his or her party affiliation, should direct EOT to proceed to the next steps.

- ❖ **Engage the Other New England States in this Collective Endeavor:** As a truly regional project that has substantial benefits for all of the New England states, both individually and collectively, it is both appropriate and advisable for all of New England, in both the private and the public sectors, to work together on the NSRL Project. Undoubtedly, the lack of consistent coordination and communication among the New England states to date has contributed to the lack of significant progress on the NSRL since the MIS/DEIS/DEIR was published. In that regard, it's especially regrettable that Governor Romney has taken Massachusetts out of the National Governors' Association.

Leadership to that end by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, of the type that Governor Weld applauded when he appointed the CARL Task Force, is clearly in order.

- ❖ **Update the Financial Analysis:** Because of the incompleteness of the MIS/DEIS/DEIR financial analysis as described above, and in the light of new information and changed conditions since that time, it is appropriate and advisable to expand and update the financial analysis as quickly as possible. This should include the following steps:
 - Review the generally agreed-upon project construction costs and their possible revision based on new construction methodologies including technology, expertise and experience, and update all estimates to current dollars.
 - Review the basic scope of the project in order to determine the optimum number of tunnels, tracks, stations, and platforms.
 - Adjust ridership and related revenue projections to reflect the optimum system configuration(s).
 - Verify projected operating and equipment costs/savings.

- Determine the appropriate levels of contingency for a project of this type at this stage of its development, with due consideration to emerging risk-based estimating polices and procedures.
 - Identify the nature and scope of related commercial and development opportunities
 - Prepare a comprehensive funding/financing strategy that includes all these updated projections.
 - Identify critical right-of-way issues and develop and implement interim right-of-way protection strategies in cooperation with city, state and federal environmental review and development planning and permitting agencies.
- ❖ **Submit this Analysis to Peer Review**, in order to validate the basic engineering, transportation, development and funding assumptions of the financial analysis, both to verify their objectivity and enhance their credibility.
 - ❖ **Undertake Preliminary Engineering** based on the proposed project configuration and logistical assumptions.
 - ❖ **Publish a Final EIS/EIR** for further action, as appropriate.
 - ❖ **Request and Utilize Federal Funds *already*** authorized for these purposes.

CONCLUSION: What this report attempts to underscore is that there is no other practical means to achieve the essential goal of additional regional transportation capacity and operational efficiency that the North/South Rail Link alone can provide and our regional rail system desperately needs. That is a fact that Governor Romney's recent long-range transportation plan confirms, even though that plan neither embraces the NSRL project nor offers any practical alternative to it.

Clearly, both of our major rail terminals are already running out of station and track space. South Station will barely be able to accommodate the new Greenbush service scheduled to begin operating next year. That will seriously jeopardize critical plans for expanded commuter rail to Fall River, New Bedford, Taunton and Cape Cod; hopes for improved service and frequencies to Worcester; and at least a serious beginning on regular rail service from Boston to Springfield. And that does not take into account the fact that existing commuter rail ridership has itself been increasing quite dramatically in the past decade and will likely continue to do so – if it can.

Critics argue that in the wake of the CA/T Project the NSRL is unaffordable, either financially or politically. We do not believe that to be the case – quite the contrary. Unlike the CA/T Project, a very significant percentage of the costs of this project would be offset by increased revenues and operating savings, even before the commercial and development income potential of the project is taken into account. Without the scale of transportation improvements that only the rail link can provide, billions of dollars of development potential may be put in jeopardy and billions of related dollars of property, income and other taxes will be foregone.

Now is the time for renewed public leadership on the transportation front. A new Massachusetts Governor will be taking office in January 2007; and in the interim, the gubernatorial candidates of all parties will be putting forward their policy priorities and investment plans during their campaigns. In that context, we stand ready to work with our governors, our mayors, our legislators and other elected officials to advance the NSRL Project. To that end, we will join efforts with the broad and bipartisan coalition of groups and individuals who support the need for a renewed commitment to our regional rail system and understand the unique role of the North-South Rail Link in the success of that system in the decades ahead.

That is the kind of historic civic vision that has created in Massachusetts a public transportation system that other communities are even now trying to emulate at very great expense; and that is the kind of vision that will sustain and enhance our region well into the 21st Century.

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