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February 28, 2017

Mr. Patrick Warren
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Warren,

As a representative from Connecticut, a state that contributes significantly to ridership along the Northeast Corridor (NEC), I commend the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on its efforts to develop the NEC FUTURE, a comprehensive plan to define, evaluate, and prioritize the future of the NEC. In developing this plan, I urge the FRA to be forward-looking in developing high-speed rail and to prioritize safe, reliable, and speedy passenger rail throughout the North East Corridor (NEC). Thank you for your willingness to accept comments regarding the FRA's Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the NEC FUTURE initiative, and thank you for your work to improve rail service along the NEC.

I urge the FRA to revisit Alternative 3 of the Tier 1 Draft EIS that runs inland between New York City, Danbury, Waterbury, and Hartford. There are several reasons why I believe that the Alternative 3 route would better serve rail passengers across the northeast region. First, the inland segment would enable high-speed passenger rail service in a way that is simply not feasible along Connecticut's coastal shoreline. Second, the inland route would relieve severe highway congestion and provide much-needed rail service to passengers across Connecticut. Third, the inland route would be transformational to the regional economy, connecting residents and employers in Connecticut to Washington, D.C., New York, and Boston.

High-speed rail that connects New York City and Boston would transform rail transportation throughout the NEC and across central Connecticut. Unfortunately, because of the S-curves through Bridgeport, constrained real estate, numerous river-crossings, historic landmarks, and dense population, high-speed rail across southern Connecticut is simply not feasible. This corridor is intensely developed with land uses in close proximity to the rail line. Adding two new rail tracks adjacent to the New Haven line would be very difficult and displace economically viable properties. Under the

coastal route, speed restrictions will continue to be necessary, thereby preventing actual high-speed service.

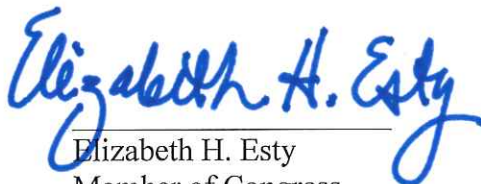
Unlike the coastal route, Alternative 3 is a straighter route, without many S-curves or rivers to cross, and provides the opportunity for the FRA to implement high-speed rail travel that would move passengers from New York to Boston much faster and more reliably. The southern alternative does include a new segment bypassing the existing coastal route in southeast Connecticut to provide a more direct and faster route and circumvent several moveable bridges over navigable waterways. However, that proposal has generated extensive opposition due to the dramatic changes it would impose on small, historic coastal communities. In contrast, Alternative 3 would target cities that have existing infrastructure and land patterns supportive of an expansion of rail service, and could accommodate the land development pressures.

In addition, the inland route would relieve severe highway congestion for many residents and visitors who rely heavily on an already congested I-84 corridor and provide rail access to all corners of Connecticut. For example, by implementing the Alternative 3 route, the City of Waterbury could be transformed into a major transportation hub with the combination of a new high-speed rail connection and existing access to Interstate 84, the Route 8 Expressway, and the Waterbury branch rail commuter line.

Finally, the inland route would be transformational to the regional economy, connecting residents and employers in Connecticut to Washington, D.C., New York, and Boston. Rail across northwest Connecticut would serve as a catalyst for growth of the regional economy and revitalization and reinvestment of our distressed cities. The resultant rail network would complete much needed connections throughout the entire western part of Connecticut and seamlessly tie New Haven, Bridgeport, Stamford, Danbury, Waterbury and Hartford together to create a consolidated economic region that will be better able to compete in the national and global markets.

Thank you for your efforts to improve passenger rail service along the NEC. It is my hope that the vision you have outlined in the Tier 1 EIS is the beginning of an ongoing conversation that thinks big and boldly about how we can build a truly world-class, 21st century transportation network along the NEC.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth H. Esty
Member of Congress