



RIVERSIDE PARK CONSERVANCY  
P.O. Box 1082, New London, CT 06320-1082

January 29, 2017

Ms. Rebecca Reyes-Alicea  
Program Manager  
Federal Railroad Administration  
One Bowling Green, Suite 249  
New York, NY 10004

Subject: NEC Future Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Ms. Reyes-Alicea:

The Riverside Park Conservancy is grateful for the opportunity to share our concerns about the environmental impact of the proposed Old Saybrook-to Kenyon high-speed rail bypass on New London's recreational open space.

Created in 1893, Riverside Park was for decades a popular spot for games, picnicking and swimming, offering panoramic Thames River views and, in its less developed areas, an undisturbed landscape supporting an abundance of native species of plants and wildlife. However, in the 1960s, construction of I-95 severed the connection between New London's north end and the rest of the city, reducing access to the park and heralding a long period of neglect. Our city is still struggling to recover from the loss of population, economic activity and biodiversity, fifty years later.

Over 150 acres of farmland and wetlands were filled to construct the I-95/Gold Star Bridge interchange. The network of connected roads built to enhance automotive mobility also resulted in a fragmented landscape that has been described as a "deathtrap for living things." Where the native ecosystem was disturbed, it was taken over by invasive plants such as Japanese knotweed, oriental bittersweet and tree-of-heaven, which block access to much of Riverside Park, as well as nearby Briggs Brook and Winthrop Cove. Our recent efforts to clear invasives and replant native species have begun to undo the damage, but construction of the proposed high speed rail bypass through New London would tear a destructive swath, once again, through a neighborhood where most residents are apartment-dwellers dependent on local parks for green space and exercise. That we have yet to see a map detailing the exact pathway and crossing location of the proposed bypass is all the more concerning; with its main entrance located less than 1/4 mile from the current highway crossing, it is all too likely that Riverside Park's accessibility and desirability will be degraded by the project.

Riverside Park Conservancy was formed in 2011 for the purpose of improving the quality of environmental conditions and recreational facilities in Riverside Park as well other remaining parcels of city-owned open space north of I-95. We believe that the proposed bypass would be destructive to the already limited natural resources available for public use in New London's most vulnerable neighborhood, and request that the bypass be removed from consideration.

Yours truly,

Lindsey Blank, Chair, Riverside Park Conservancy