



South Eastern Connecticut Enterprise Region

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February 21, 2017

Ms. Rebecca Reyes-Alicea
Program Manager
Federal Rail Administration
One Bowling Green, Suite 429
New York, NY 10004

Dear Ms. Reyes-Alicea

The Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer) is a non-profit, private regional economic development agency serving the 20 towns, two Boroughs and two Native American Tribal Nations of Southeastern Connecticut. seCTer's mission is to promote and preserve the region's attractiveness, to encourage new businesses, and to assist and to nurture existing and expanding local enterprises. seCTer is the agency responsible for developing and implementing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) for the Southeastern CT Economic Development District in close partnership and coordination with the Southeastern CT Council of Governments (SCCOG) and other regional organizations.

As the region's Economic Development entity, seCTer joins the City of New London, other impacted municipalities in our region, the SCCOG, Congressman Joe Courtney and other federal and state legislators in opposing the Kenyon Bypass portion of the NEC Future plan.

Improving the transportation infrastructure within our region, including the aging rail line, is a critical component of our CEDs strategy and the SCCOG's Long Range Regional Transportation Plan, however doing so in a way that could negatively impact historic neighborhoods, fragile ecosystems and key tourism attractions cannot be supported. Our region is already far behind the nation in recovering from the Great Recession. The Norwich-New London Labor Market Area (LMA) has experienced a 9.3% erosion of its job base since the onset of the Great Recession. Since the spring of 2015, the region as a whole has finally achieved sustained job growth rates, often exceeding other areas of the state. This growth has been fueled by a resurgence in the Manufacturing sector spurred by hiring at Electric Boat, the world's premier manufacturer of nuclear submarines. Other contributing factors to this growth are significant gains in the Healthcare industry and growth in both the Retail and Food Service sectors, fueled by economic diversification efforts by Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods, the two regional casinos. As a region, we are working together to develop the workforce pipeline and supporting infrastructure needed to fill these current and future opportunities. We are working hard to create a "sense of place" that



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attracts and retains employers, employees and their families. The Kenyon Bypass therefore works directly against our region's economic development goals.

In addition, the plan could create two parallel east-west rail lines that are quite close together, negatively impacting land use plans in the affected municipalities. Taking the City of New London as just one an example, the plan would disrupt its already fragile tax base by eliminating precious commercial property in a city that has little taxable land. It also bypasses its existing train station, which is currently a regional transportation hub, but also the site of the future National Coast Guard Museum, a major planned tourism destination for which that train station is a key link. The existing station links various modes of transportation, including auto, rail, bus, bike and even water taxis, but it also links other regional tourism attractions together. The set-back this project would cause to the city, and therefore its neighboring suburbs, cannot be overemphasized.

We are a region that celebrates collaboration and coordination, and seCTer greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on this very important rail improvement plan. We join our partners in opposing the Kenyan Bypass, but also in seeking to work WITH the FRA to develop a mutually beneficial plan. We need a better rail system, but not at the expense of compromising critical regional resources.

I am happy to provide any additional information that you might need to better evaluate our opposition.

Sincerely,

Nancy M. Cowser
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