



Mayor of Providence

Jorge O. Elorza

December 9, 2015

Rebecca Reyes-Alicea
U.S. DOT Federal Railroad Administration
One Bowling Green, Suite 429
New York, NY 10004

Dear Ms. Reyes-Alicea,

The City of Providence has closely followed and evaluated the Federal Rail Administration's (FRA) work to assess and select a preferred alternative for future investments in passenger rail service for the Northeast Corridor. After careful review and consideration of the alternatives presented within the draft Environmental Impact Statement, I wish to offer the following comments on the options that are currently under consideration by the FRA on behalf of the City of Providence. I support the FRA's efforts to grow and transform the role of passenger rail service and am particularly enthusiastic about improved high speed connections to Providence. The inclusion of an additional two-track segment between Washington, D.C., and Boston in Alternatives 3.1 and 3.2 would support high speed service connecting directly to Providence at speeds up to 220 miles per hour, reducing overall travel time to and between Washington, D.C. and Boston by as much as three hours.

As the capital City of Rhode Island and the 39th most populated metropolitan area in the United States, Providence is an important hub within the northeast corridor as both a commuter base and a destination. I strongly oppose any alternative that excludes Providence from critical future investments, resulting in high-speed rail service bypassing our city. The selection of Alternatives 3.3 (Washington, D.C. to Boston via Long Island/Worcester) or 3.4 (Washington, D.C. to Boston via Central Connecticut/Worcester) have the potential to be disastrous for Providence, eliminating the possibility of high speed rail and other passenger rail upgrades in our city and bypassing a critical connection to the existing northeast corridor in Providence. If Alternative 3 is to be selected, we strongly urge the selection of either Alternative 3.1 (Washington, D.C., to Boston via Central Connecticut/Providence) or Alternative 3.2 (Washington, D.C. to Boston via Long Island/Providence). Either of these two options would improve interaction with the existing northeast corridor at major hubs, including Providence, while still providing service to new markets that would provide a boost to the metropolitan Providence region. To cut the City of Providence off from future high-speed rail service by connecting to Worcester rather than Providence would be a detriment to the entire northeast region, causing negative impacts to both transportation and our economy. For similar reasons, I recommend a revision to Alternative 1 which, based on Table 7-1-10, does not appear to include Providence as a "Major Hub," but rather lists it as a "Local Hub."

As a key transportation center, Providence is a critical destination. In 2012, the Providence-New Bedford-Fall River Metropolitan Area had over 750,000 daily commuters, nearly double the number of

commuters as the Worcester Metropolitan Area. Intercity ridership at Providence Station rose by 31% from 2006 to 2012 and continues to grow, as the Providence Amtrak station is currently the 15th busiest station in the country and the third busiest station in New England. Providence Station is also the third busiest MBTA station in the MBTA network, second only to South Station and Back Bay Station in Boston.

The Providence metropolitan area is also a strong economic center for the country, ranked as the 43rd largest gross metropolitan product in 2014, producing \$75.9 billion with a projected 4% annual growth rate for the economy predicted between 2014 and 2021. By comparison, the Worcester metropolitan area was ranked 69th with only \$38.5 billion in gross metropolitan product in 2014. With development underway on 19 acres of prime real estate downtown, recently made available by the relocation of Interstate 195, a stronger connection to New York City, Boston and other points within New England is needed to continue to meet the demand of the growing number of employees and residents in the core of our City. For many of the numerous new developments underway, including a one million square foot high-end research and innovation center and meeting destination, connections to future high-speed passenger rail service are critical. For Providence to be able to continue to support existing investments such as this and to attract this level of investment in the future, a strong connection to the growth and transformation of passenger rail service is essential.

I look forward to remaining engaged in the NEC Future planning effort as the FRA proceeds to select a preferred alternative. It is critical that the City of Providence must be included as a "Major Hub" in the preferred alternative. More frequent service, faster travel times, and connections to new markets not currently served by passenger rail would create new opportunities for Providence and create positive environmental, economic, and transportation impacts extending beyond Rhode Island's capital city to benefit the entire region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J-O-E", followed by a horizontal line.

Jorge O. Elorza
Mayor