



TOWN OF OLD LYME

OFFICE OF THE SELECTMEN

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February 13, 2017

Ms. Rebecca Reyes-Alicea
Northeast Corridor Joint Program Advisor
USDOT – Federal Railroad Administration
Office of Railroad Policy & Development
One Bowling Green, Suite 429
New York, NY 10004

Dear Ms. Reyes-Alicea:

On December 16, 2016 the Federal Railroad Administration (the “FRA”) released its NEC Future Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (the “FEIS”), which adopts a “Preferred Alternative” that includes a new high-speed rail alignment from Old Saybrook, Connecticut to Kenyon, Rhode Island (the “Bypass”). In connection with the FEIS, the FRA announced a “waiting period” running until January 31, 2017 during which the public may comment on the Preferred Alternative and the FEIS, and subsequently agreed to accept and review feedback until the publication of the Record of Decision on or after March 1, 2017.

I have previously communicated the grave concerns of the Town of Old Lyme and our neighboring communities regarding the Bypass. On behalf of the Old Lyme Board of Selectmen and the citizens of our town, I elaborate on these concerns in this letter and the enclosed document which, as you will see, has input from experts in various fields.

Our principal objections to the FEIS as currently drafted are as follows:

1. The proposed Bypass could cause irreparable harm to the economic, cultural and environmental resources of Old Lyme and the other towns along its route.
2. The mere presence of the Bypass in the FEIS has, and will continue to have, a substantial chilling effect on real estate transactions, and on public and private development decisions, along its route, potentially lasting for the 20- 30-year period

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until a definitive decision on the Bypass is made. Supporting our claims, the Warren Group recently released its report indicating that in 2016, sales in Old Lyme were down 31%, with median prices down 13%, even though New London County, of which we are a part, saw average increases in sales of 9% and in median prices of 2%.

3. No significant research or expert study has yet been conducted to determine either the engineering or environmental feasibility of the proposed tunnel with respect to the Connecticut River Estuary or the Town of Old Lyme. Furthermore, there have been no studies of the present and future impact of the Bypass generally on our town or the other communities that would be affected.
4. There is a substantial question whether the Preferred Alternative represents the rail realignment that will best promote the economic interests of the southern New England states, particularly Connecticut, over the next several decades. Neither the draft EIS nor the FEIS includes a cost-benefit analysis of the Preferred Alternative standing alone or compared to the other alternatives. It appears that no material benefit would accrue to the State of Connecticut from the Preferred Alternative, whereas other routes could give rise to substantial economic improvement.
5. There exist significant defects in the process employed by the FRA in the development of the FEIS.
6. Including the Bypass in the FEIS is not needed to accomplish its objectives, whereas it does cause substantial harm to Old Lyme and our neighboring communities. The Bypass could be deleted today and restored in the future if studies show that it is not harmful, funding becomes available, and the state and local communities approve.

Our identification of the risks posed by the Bypass herein is preliminary and not exhaustive. Other material concerns are likely to be disclosed by future investigation. Further, although our focus has been on the proposed tunnel under the Connecticut River and the center of Old Lyme, we have not assumed any particular construction method and that decision will seriously impact the harm caused. (For example, a cut-and-fill methodology would have very different impacts from a drilled tunnel deep underground.) Finally, were the FRA in Tier 2 to abandon a tunnel in favor of a bridge and an aerial



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structure over our town, the damage caused by the risks noted here would surely be exacerbated and other problems would be implicated.

In light of the foregoing, we strenuously request that the Bypass be removed from the FEIS and that no recommendation be included at this time regarding a new rail alignment through the state. This change would substantially ameliorate the dark “cloud” hanging over the communities affected by the Bypass, without limiting the choice of rail routing in the future. It would, though, permit this decision to be deferred until appropriate research and study have been conducted, and appropriate input has been obtained from the state, the municipalities, the public and other stakeholders.

Two Councils of Government (the Lower CT River COG and the Southeastern CT COG), which also serve as Regional Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and their member towns, have unanimously approved the opposition to the Preferred Alternative as outlined in the FEIS. Of the 39 member towns, 11 are coastal towns and 12 border the Connecticut River. All 39 towns depend on the Old Saybrook and/or New London railroad stations. Our objections are also shared by state government and our federal representatives.

Accompanying this letter is a document containing the comments of the Town of Old Lyme regarding the Preferred Alternative, divided into several individual sections:

Executive Summary
Environmental Issues Related to the Preferred Alternative
Geologic Features: Sole Sourced Aquifers
Noise and Vibration
The Artistic Significance of Old Lyme
Prehistoric Cultural Resources within Old Lyme
Old Lyme Historic District and Historic Structures
Economic Issues

Finally, we are dismayed by the dilution in the FEIS, compared to the draft EIS, of attention paid and dollars allocated to present improvements (upgrades and safety enhancements) to our rail infrastructure. As far as we know, there is unanimous



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agreement at the federal, state and local levels, that this infrastructure is in desperate need of maintenance, repair and enhancement. It would therefore seem clear that federal and state investment in Connecticut's rail is urgently needed, and that the public's interest at this time would be better served by focusing on these issues rather than on future high-speed rail, however worthy that effort may be.

We would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet in person with the FRA to discuss further our concerns and possible remedies. We would also be happy to provide you with any additional information or analysis that might be helpful.

Very truly yours,



Bonnie A. Reemsnyder
First Selectwoman

Mary Jo Nosal
Selectwoman

Arthur E. Sibley, Jr.
Selectman

CC: Senator Richard Blumenthal
Senator Chris Murphy
Congressman Joseph Courtney
Governor Dannel Malloy
Secretary Elaine Chao, US DOT
Mr. Patrick Warren, Acting Administrator, FRA
Commissioner James Redeker, ConnDOT
Commissioner Robert Klee, CT DEEP
Commissioner Catherine Smith, CT DECD

