

BLUMENTHAL, MURPHY, COURTNEY STRESS OPPOSITION TO RAIL THROUGH OLD LYME, URGE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION TO HEAR COMMUNITY CONCERNS

(Hartford, CT) – U.S. Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Chris Murphy (D-CT), and U.S. Representative Joe Courtney (D-2) today urged the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to meet with the Old Lyme community before moving forward with any plans for a new rail route through the historic city. The FRA has started a massive, multi-million dollar undertaking called “NEC FUTURE” to develop a vision that will meet the passenger rail needs of the Northeast in 2040, and it currently includes ideas to reroute Amtrak straight through Old Lyme. In a letter to the FRA today, the lawmakers reiterated their strong opposition to any proposal that would route a new rail line through Old Lyme and called on the Administration to attend a public forum there so that community leaders can explain how to meet our region’s rail needs while honoring historic preservation and environmental protection priorities.

“As the Federal Railroad Administration continues to develop its framework for critically needed investments in the Northeast Corridor (NEC), known as NEC FUTURE, we write to reiterate our call that you ensure the plan reflects the priorities of the people who live and work in the region. To that end, we express our strong opposition to proposals that would route a new rail line through Old Lyme, Connecticut, and we request that you attend a public forum there so that community leaders can explain how to meet our region’s rail needs while honoring historic preservation and environmental protection priorities.”

The proposed rail line realignment outlined in Alternative 1 of the NEC FUTURE Plan would shift the main rail line northward ahead of the Old Saybrook Station and run through several Connecticut and Rhode Island shoreline communities before reconnecting to the existing segment in Kenyon, RI. Blumenthal, Murphy, and Courtney have been vocal in their opposition of any plan that would reroute rail through Old Lyme. At a Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation subcommittee hearing earlier this month, Blumenthal pressed Amtrak Vice President Stephen Gardner to ditch any plans to build a new route through Southeastern Connecticut that would be strongly opposed by residents of the region.

The text of the letter is available below:

Dear Administrator Feinberg:

As the Federal Railroad Administration continues to develop its framework for critically needed investments in the Northeast Corridor (NEC), known as NEC FUTURE, we write to reiterate our call that you ensure the plan reflects

the priorities of the people who live and work in the region. To that end, we express our strong opposition to proposals that would route a new rail line through Old Lyme, Connecticut, and we request that you attend a public forum there so that community leaders can explain how to meet our region's rail needs while honoring historic preservation and environmental protection priorities.

We strongly support comprehensive, bold efforts to strengthen the NEC rail network, which for too long has subjected our constituents in Connecticut and throughout the Northeast region to daily disruptions and delays on a system that has outlived its useful life. It is time to rebuild the network and ensure it is made safer and more responsive to the needs of the millions who rely on it to live, work and commute each day. In doing so, however, the needs and priorities of the communities that will be impacted by new rail routes must be taken into consideration.

We understand FRA is set to unveil a final Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on various alternatives to improve rail service in Connecticut later this year; state governments, local entities and rail operators may then use the EIS as a springboard for localized, project-specific plans. Unfortunately, the Tier 1 EIS now underway falls short on many fronts. One of the major proposals envisioned by NEC FUTURE would re-route Amtrak through the heart of many historic towns and communities in our state, including Old Lyme. We reject such a proposal, and call on you to ensure the final Tier 1 EIS is absent any scenario that sends rail through Old Lyme. Moreover, whatever alternative is chosen in the EIS must be accompanied by an impact analysis that fairly details the chosen alternative's impact on the environment, the community, and historical properties.

NEC FUTURE is an important opportunity to comprehensively plan for the investments required to ensure that the Northeast rail corridor—the nation's busiest—remains safe and viable for decades to come. The FRA is spending considerable resources on this plan, and we are eager to see a final product that is worthy of that investment of time and money. Accordingly, we urge you to put forward a proposal that can be supported by Connecticut and that bolsters historic preservation and environmental conservation instead of undercutting those values. We also ask you to commit to attending a public forum in Old Lyme so FRA and the community can discuss how to develop a long-term plan that reflects the values of our constituents.

We appreciate your attention to this important matter, and look forward to your response.