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MEMORANDUM TO: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)
MEMORANDUM FROM: J. H. Torrance Downes, Senior Planner
Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments
Connecticut River Gateway Commission
DATE: January 29, 2016
SUBJECT: Comments on Option 1, NEC Future Tier 1 Draft EIS

This memorandum is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission and its member towns Old Saybrook and Old Lyme to express strenuous opposition to Alternative 1 which would establish the high speed rail corridor through the shoreline of Connecticut in the area of the lower Connecticut River. Alternative 1 will cause significant damage to historical resources dating back to the first English settlements in Connecticut and to the unique environmental resources of the lower Connecticut River. Those environmental resources have received international, national, state, regional and local accolades. To damage or impact those celebrated estuarine resources in any way is short-sighted and makes little sense

It is the opinion of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission that any efforts to construct a new railroad bridge and its approaches between Old Saybrook and Old Lyme and to develop a right-of-way as summarized in Alternative 1 of the Tier 1 Draft EIS should be discontinued with the other two alternatives being likely more feasible and explored more seriously as the NEC Future planning process moves forward.

As codified in Section 25-102a of the Connecticut General Statutes, the lower Connecticut River Valley in the area of the possible new bridge crossing was found by the Connecticut General Assembly ".... to possess *unique scenic, ecological, scientific and historic value contributing to public enjoyment, inspiration and scientific study, that it is in the public interest that the provisions of this chapter be adopted to preserve such values and to prevent deterioration of the natural and traditional riverway scene for the enjoyment of present and future generations of Connecticut citizens* (emph.added)....". The provisions of this chapter were adopted by each of the eight member municipalities, including Old Lyme and Old Saybrook.

In order to accomplish this important mission, the General Assembly and the eight member towns established the Commission to act in a regional capacity to preserve the values described above and to "...prevent deterioration of the natural and traditional riverway scene for the enjoyment of present and future generations of Connecticut citizens...". The Commission has been doing so for the past 42 years.

The Gateway Commission accomplishes this mission through the adoption of zoning standards designed to minimize the visual impact of development within the Gateway Conservation Zone which encompasses the hillsides of the river valley up to the first ridge. The Commission also has the ability to acquire conservation easements and fee-simple land within the river valley to accomplish the same protective goal. Since its inception in 1974, the Gateway Commission has participated in the protection of over 1,000 acres of land for purposes of visual and ecological preservation.