



TOWN OF OLD LYME

OFFICE OF THE SELECTMEN

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10 February 2016

Sarah Feinberg
Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Ms. Feinberg:

On 2 February 2016, thirty-five individuals representing more than a dozen local, regional, and statewide organizations gathered at my invitation. This meeting was convened to articulate a number of significant concerns about the Rail Investment Plan for the Northeast Corridor (NEC Future), a plan that could decimate the environmental, historic and cultural resources and integrity of the Town of Old Lyme, Connecticut and other communities along the eastern Connecticut coastline.

There was wholehearted support for upgrades to our nation's passenger rail infrastructure and unquestioning agreement on the need for continued major improvements to eastern Connecticut's existing rail corridor. However, the Federal Railroad Administration's vision for high speed rail notes that this investment should "serve as a catalyst for growth in regional economic productivity and expansion by stimulating domestic manufacturing, promoting local tourism, and driving commercial and residential development," as well as "foster livable urban and rural communities." We concurred that the proposed routing of high speed rail through Old Lyme in Alternative 1 would destroy and detract far more than enhance and promote our historically and environmentally unique community. NEC Alternative 1 will threaten historic and environmental resources that are integral to our economic and social livelihood and quality of life.

We also took note of the project's human cost. The Old Lyme community already absorbs the impact of Interstate 95's noise and vehicular emissions. It is worth noting that the National Register description for Old Lyme's National Historic District ends by noting the "major damage" already suffered from the "four-lane swath" of Interstate 95.

Our emergency resources - a Volunteer Fire Department and Volunteer Ambulance Association - are first responders to I-95 incidents. Local commerce comes to a standstill when re-routed traffic from those incidents descend upon the only two major arteries in the town: Routes 1 and 156. A bridge and rail construction project of the magnitude proposed in Alternative 1 will multiply traffic problems as it inflicts dust, dirt, delays and noise over a period of many years.

First settled in the 1630s, Old Lyme is a community of 7,500 year-round residents with a population that triples in the summer months. Nestled on the banks of the Connecticut River, Old Lyme is a gateway for visitors to southeastern Connecticut and the lower Connecticut River Valley. Old Lyme is a designated *Preserve America* community, earning this national recognition for efforts to protect our heritage and use our historic assets for economic development and community revitalization.

The Connecticut River estuary was named a Wetland of International Importance under the RAMSAR Convention, was identified as one of the 40 "Last Great Places" by the Nature Conservancy, and has American Heritage River and National Blueway River designations granted by the Department of Interior. Under NEC Alternative 1, the proposed construction of a new rail bridge at the mouth of the Connecticut River for dedicated use by high speed trains would significantly compromise the environmental integrity of the estuary.

Old Lyme's historic and cultural legacy would be similarly threatened by NEC Alternative 1. Preliminary plans show the proposed new rail corridor accessing the I-95 right of way by cutting across the Old Lyme Historic District. This district is National Register listed and comprises the community's village center and only commercial area. Designated in 1971, the district acknowledges historic residential, commercial, ecclesiastical, municipal and institutional structures (including Lyme Academy of Fine Arts, the Florence Griswold Museum and the Lyme Art Association). The Florence Griswold House and Museum have National Historic Landmark status.

Given the magnitude and significance of resources in Old Lyme, we are surprised to find our community a focus of the Alternative 1 proposal.

We would expect the collective resources identified above to afford our community significant protections under the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. Yet Alternative 1 makes it clear that these designations and laws are meaningless should the Federal Railroad Administration elect to proceed with Alternative 1.

Our concerns are further elaborated in the attached document.

Sincerely,



Bonnie A. Reemsnyder
First Selectwoman

xc:

James P. Redeker, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Transportation
U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal
U.S. Senator Joe Courtney
U.S. Senator Chris Murphy
State Senator Paul Formica
State Senator Art Linares
State Representative Devin Carney