



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Railroad
Administration**



1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE.
Washington, D.C. 20590

April 20, 2016

Ms. Bonnie A. Reemsnyder
First Selectwoman
Town of Old Lyme
52 Lyme Street
Old Lyme, CT 06371

RE: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Northeast Corridor (NEC) FUTURE program,
Old Lyme Meeting

Dear Ms. Reemsnyder:

Thank you for your letter of March 23, 2016, regarding FRA's NEC FUTURE program, and for the productive meeting we held with you and other Old Lyme officials on March 11, 2016. The FRA understands and appreciates the concerns raised by the Town and residents of Old Lyme regarding potential impacts from improvements to the Northeast Corridor (NEC) rail line. The FRA agrees with the general conclusions from our meeting of March 11, 2016, as stated in your letter; however, I would like to provide some clarifications.

The Process

As described in your letter, the Tier 1 EIS is intended to be a high level, conceptual vision for the Northeast Corridor into the future. The FRA intends to announce the Preferred Alternative in the summer of 2016, and while we encourage stakeholder and public review and feedback we do not intend to provide a formal comment and review process. In the early fall of 2016, FRA plans to issue the Tier 1 Final EIS. The Tier 1 Final EIS is a separate document from the Record of Decision (ROD): The Tier 1 Final EIS describes and evaluates the Preferred Alternative and responds to comments received on the Tier 1 Draft EIS; the ROD formalizes the FRA decision and selection of a Preferred Alternative (which then becomes the Selected Alternative), concluding the Tier 1 environmental review process.

As to incorporating the concerns raised by the Town of Old Lyme, the Tier 1 Final EIS will identify the importance of the Connecticut River Estuary and the Old Lyme historic district. If you or other

organizations advocating for the environmental and historical resources of Old Lyme and its surrounding areas provide information to the FRA regarding the importance of those resources, as you mention in your letter, the FRA may use that information to inform the Tier 1 Final EIS and/or as part of the Tier 2 planning process.

In the event the Preferred Alternative includes the Old Saybrook-Kenyon segment, for the purposes of assessing representative environmental and other effects, and estimating costs, the Preferred Alternative will be analyzed using a representative routing of a tunnel although the exact construction details and location will not be determined until the Tier 2 planning process can fully assess a full range of site-specific alternatives. The NEC FUTURE Tier 1 ROD will formalize commitments to avoid aerial construction through the Old Lyme historic district and to mitigate effects on the Connecticut River Estuary.

As you correctly mention, FRA will release the Service Development Plan (SDP) in 2017 and in it, will provide a blueprint for implementation of the Selected Alternative, further defining the sequencing and timing for projects and the associated organizational, institutional, and finance/funding requirements. The SDP will map out a strategy for implementing projects to achieve the NEC FUTURE vision.

It is important to clarify the relationship between the Tier 1 decision and subsequent Tier 2 projects or actions. Achieving the Tier 1 vision will require advancing several projects over time in a well-coordinated fashion as separate Tier 2 actions rather than as a single Tier 2 process. The sponsorship and specific scope and geography of individual projects will further determine the environmental review requirements. It is during the Tier 2 process where more site-specific engineering is undertaken and public outreach is initiated to consider design options and address environmental issues and required mitigation. For each Tier 2 project, specific decisions about the type of environmental review are yet to be determined, but will depend on the type and extent of potential environmental effects, level of public interest, and scope of the proposed action.

Action Alternative 1

As you note, all three Action Alternatives considered in the NEC FUTURE Tier 1 Draft EIS include upgrades to the existing NEC, which currently crosses the Connecticut River and runs through Old Lyme along the Long Island Sound coast line. These upgrades are necessary to support existing and future growth in passenger rail travel between Washington, D.C., and Boston, MA, and destinations in between.

Alternative 1 adds a supplemental segment between Old Saybrook, CT, and Kenyon, RI, allowing for increased service and improved travel times on a more resilient/redundant routing away from the coast line. The representative route for this supplemental segment, depicted in the Mapping Atlas (Appendix A) of the Tier 1 Draft EIS, was described as an aerial structure crossing the Connecticut River and through a portion of Old Lyme. While the supplemental segment depicted in Alternative 1 is

Ms. Bonnie Reemsnyder
Re: NEC FUTURE Old Lyme Meeting
April 20, 2016
Page 3 of 3



representational only and has not been designed or engineered, through the comment process the FRA has a better understanding of the deep-felt concerns raised by residents and others about an aerial structure built over the center of the Old Lyme historic district.

Conclusions

In addition to our discussions with Old Lyme representatives on March 11th, the FRA reviewed hundreds of comments from residents, environmental advocates, state representatives, and elected officials about the environmental effects of Action Alternative 1 and proposed aerial structure construction over the Connecticut River and the Old Lyme historic district. As the FRA stated during the March 11th meeting and reiterated in this letter, in the event that the Preferred Alternative includes the supplemental segment between Old Saybrook, CT and Kenyon, RI, the Tier 1 Final EIS and ROD will specifically preclude use of an aerial structure through Old Lyme and identify the importance of mitigating impacts on the Connecticut River Estuary. To clarify, however, the specific limits of the proposed supplemental segment or the construction techniques have yet to be defined. If a supplemental segment is advanced in the future, Tier 2 studies would include analysis of alignment, engineering and construction options, assessment of environmental effects, and public outreach and involvement in the study process.

The FRA very much appreciates the input of Old Lyme and its residents. We have heard the concerns of the community and believe we have addressed them. The FRA looks forward to continued engagement with Old Lyme as NEC FUTURE and upgrades to the NEC move forward. Thank you again for taking the time to meet with our team and your continued support of the NEC FUTURE program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rebecca Reyes-Alicea".

Rebecca Reyes-Alicea
NEC FUTURE Program Manager

Cc: Sam Gold, Executive Director, RiverCOG
John Forbis, Old Lyme
Bennett Bernblum, Old Lyme
Board of Selectmen