

Commuter Rail Communities Coalition

Coordinated Municipal Advocacy for Transformed Commuter Rail

March 4, 2020

Massachusetts House of Representatives
State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Honorable Members of the House of Representatives:

We are writing as co-chairs of the Commuter Rail Communities Coalition, representing municipal leaders in communities served by MBTA Commuter Rail, regarding the upcoming House debate on transportation revenue and bonding, H4508 and H4506.

We are very grateful for the leadership of the House in initiating this legislation, which sets out a framework for sustained transportation investment. We suggest that it may be improved through adoption of amendments to strengthen our statewide transportation network in general, and the commuter rail network in particular.

For background, since the establishment of our coalition in 2018, we have focused on the need for a comprehensive plan to modernize the MBTA commuter rail network; the necessity of improved service to riders, emphasizing reliability and communication; and the importance of revenue to support our short- and long-term needs. Improved rail is central to solving our congestion, climate and equity challenges.

In order to address these urgent transportation challenges, we must transform the rail network to high-frequency, electrified, fully accessible system, affordable for low- and moderate-income riders, and integrated into our larger transportation network.

The Rail Vision process made a start on this transformation, and the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board in November requested an implementation plan from MBTA staff. Legislative leadership will be required for this transformation to actually occur. H 4508 and H.4506 are therefore very timely, for which we thank the House.

As members prepare to debate the resources needed for transportation, we strongly urge you to provide dedicated revenue now to support the multi-billion-dollar rail investment that will be needed in the years to come.

We offer the following recommendations that we believe will help move us closer to the connected Commonwealth we all need and deserve:

Priorities in H.4508 *An Act relative to transportation finance*

1. Increase the gas tax by 15 cents (amendment #61 by Rep. Vittolo). The Coalition has supported this level of dedicated transportation revenue.
2. Support the Transportation and Climate Initiative by voting for amendments #32 and #37 from Rep. Ciccolo. The Coalition has identified climate as a high priority, and TCI and the gas tax are complementary policies.
3. Explore increased tolling on regional highways that would be more equitable, and focus on congestion reduction. Please support amendment #12 (Rep. Peisch) and #81 (Rep. Madaro).
4. Support local revenue-raising tools such as Regional Ballot Initiatives (amendment #273, Rep. Vargas), Value Capture (#120, Rep. Barber) and Local Option taxes (#38, Pignatelli).

Priorities in H.4506, *An Act authorizing and accelerating transportation investment*

There are many worthy amendments that would accelerate the transformation to Regional and Statewide rail. Taken as a whole, these amendments speak to House members' commitment to transforming our rail network, and the urgency of new revenue to support this investment.

We would suggest you prioritize the following amendments:

- #265 (Cahill) Electrification of the Newburyport/Rockport line
- #289 (Khan) Accessibility of the Newton stations
- #229 (Holmes) Electrification of the Fairmount and Providence lines
- #446 (McMurtry) Constructing high level platforms on the Franklin line
- #275 (Vargas) Improvements on Haverhill line
- #306 (Stanley) Improving frequency on all lines
- #339 (Kearney) Improvements on Old Colony line
- #345 (Dykema) Systemwide and Worcester line improvements
- #358 (Kearney) Capacity improvements at South Station

Thank you again for introducing this landmark legislation to help ensure that we have the resources to modernize transportation statewide, and for your consideration of these amendments.

Respectfully,



Thomas McGee
Co-Chair
Mayor of Lynn



Sarah A. Stanton
Co-Chair
Bedford Town Manager