



# Association for Public Transportation, Inc

P.O. Box 51029  
Boston, MA 02205-1029

617.482.0282

e-mail: [apt@car-free.com](mailto:apt@car-free.com)

[www.car-free.com](http://www.car-free.com)

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Mr. Bernard Cohen  
Secretary of Transportation & Construction  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
State Transportation Building  
Ten Park Plaza; Suite 3170  
Boston, MA 02116

Reference: May 2007 Report by Citizens Advisory Committee for the North/South Rail Link Project

Dear Secretary Cohen:

The Association for Public Transportation (APT), an active member of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) for the North/South Rail Link (NSRL), has endeavored to work constructively with you and your staff at the Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) to advocate for this vital project. APT, and other interested parties, met with you on April 2007 to reaffirm our support. At your request, the NSRL CAC provided in May 2007 a comprehensive plan, a cookbook as it were, to get the project back on track. Integral to that plan was a list of ten steps that would achieve that objective. This letter will not repeat those steps, but will instead attempt to put this very special project into the context of the needs of an economically disadvantaged state.

APT strongly supports the North/South Rail Link because of the strategic impact this project will have on the economic strength of the Commonwealth. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, a well-connected metropolitan region is a prerequisite to maximize the benefits of the symbiotic relationships among magnet cities, their suburbs, and surrounding areas. Unfortunately, Massachusetts is adversely impacted by an inability to travel easily and conveniently by rail between its northern and southern regions. The North/South Rail Link will address this glaring deficiency, and will be the engine that helps restore the luster and importance of Boston and Massachusetts in the Northeast Megaregion.

The Executive Office of Transportation has many worthy and deserving projects on its plate, but funding is available for only a small number of them. The Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) do a reasonably good job of project prioritization, but more often than not, the projects recommended are simply those which address urgent tactical needs. This leaves little budget for strategic projects, those large scale, paradigm-shifting endeavors that can change the economic landscape of the entire region.

Following are some examples of strategic projects that have impacted, or soon will impact, positively on the Commonwealth:

- Central Artery & Tunnel "Big Dig" Project
- Capacity increase on Route 128 / I-95
- New runway 14-32 at Logan Airport
- Electrification of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor (NEC)

On the other hand, the following active and proposed projects are examples of valuable, but nonetheless, tactical programs:

- Sagamore Bridge Flyover

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- Green Line extension to Somerville and Medford
- Commuter rail to the South Coast.

The challenge to urban planners and the EOT is that tactical projects often appear to have more support than strategic ones. A good example is a current priority project on the Commonwealth's plate: the Green Line extension to Somerville. The notification that the Commonwealth may have to delay the project for two years was immediately met with organized protests. There was no doubt that this was a very critical project to the residents of Somerville and Medford.

Strategic projects, on the other hand, because of their regional and Megaregional scope, do not generally have this built-in constituency. The benefits of strategic projects are often so diffused over such a wide area, that the ultimate beneficiaries are often unaware of the rewards until after the project is completed. Additionally, the price tag of a strategic project, the engineering complexities, the extra oversight and mandated reviews, can make such undertakings exceedingly difficult to approve and fund. The NSRL obviously fits this description. But the overriding benefits to the Commonwealth are so compelling that the political will and courage to push projects like this forward are now more imperative than ever.

It is APT's position that, at this time, there are two strategic projects that are especially worthy of funding by the Commonwealth – (1) the **North/South Rail Link** (NSRL) to join North and South side rail networks, and (2) a **comprehensive rail freight strategy** that will enable unrestricted double-height container capability from Albany to the Boston seaport. Both these projects will remove vehicles from the State's congested roadways, leverage underutilized state transportation resources (such as the seaport), increase the connectedness of the region, improve air quality, reduce costs for residents and businesses, and ultimately, enhance the Commonwealth's competitiveness. This letter will only address the NSRL project; a freight strategy will be addressed by APT in the future.

We have seen the vigorous reaction of affected citizens to the delay of the Somerville Green Line extension. The reaction when strategic projects do not make the cut is far more muted. Both residents and businesses vote with their wallets and their feet. Travel within the State and region becomes more difficult and forbidding, and the cost of living and cost of doing business continue to rise. Eventually a tipping point is reached and difficult decisions are taken to relocate from the uncompetitive area. This is exactly what has occurred in the Commonwealth over the past five years, quietly, without fanfare, but with devastating consequences.

Other states have reacted far more aggressively and proactively to address such critical issues by making significant investments to strategic transportation infrastructure. I will mention only a few, as many examples abound.

- Los Angeles, through a private-public-partnership (PPP), created the Alameda Corridor to improve rail access and increase capacity to its busy seaport.
- Midwestern states and the Commonwealth of Virginia cooperated in another PPP to construct the Heartland Corridor from the Port of Virginia to Chicago.
- A major Illinois project, named CREATE, combined, optimized, and enhanced the routes of the six major freight railroads serving Chicago. This project also positively impacts passenger rail.
- In Philadelphia, a rail link was constructed to join the former Reading Railroad's lines at Market St Station to the old Pennsylvania Railroad's 30<sup>th</sup> St Station, thereby linking the railroads.

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- New York City's East Side Access (ESA) and Access to the Region's Core (ARC) projects will permit commuters from all directions to have access to both the West Side's Penn Station and the East Side's Grand Central Terminal.
- New Jersey has undertaken several major projects to route all its rail lines into Manhattan. New Jersey's actions, along with projects in other adjacent states, have resulted in a well-connected rail network for New York City and its surrounding environs, extending into Connecticut, upstate New York, New Jersey, and even eastern Pennsylvania.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the city of Boston can achieve many of the same synergies with the North/South Rail Link. A promising, synergistic NSRL benefit worth mentioning is "Home Shoring". This describes a process whereby Greater Boston businesses can leverage lower cost regions of the Commonwealth, such as Worcester, New Bedford, and Springfield, by situating jobs there that might otherwise be outsourced to lower cost, out-of-state locations. These areas are also attractive for their abundant supply of affordable housing. What makes Home Shoring feasible is an effective, connected regional rail network that only the NSRL can provide.

To move forward once again, it is necessary to restart the NSRL project and initiate preliminary engineering. This should start as soon as possible to prevent possible obstructions to the vulnerable right of way which would permanently preclude the construction the NSRL. APT is formally requesting that you take the specified actions to shepherd the project through the environmental process by notifying the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that EOT is now the federal project sponsor. This action does not mean a commitment to finance, construct or operate the North/South Rail Link. As suggested in the May 30, 2007 letter to you by Robert B. O'Brien, NSRL Project Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Chair and former Rep. John A. Businger (D-Brookline), NSRL Project CAC Vice-Chair, you can resume the environmental process by notifying the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that EOT is now the federal project sponsor.

APT urges you to adopt that suggestion, become the project sponsor, and get the North/South Rail Link Project back on track. We repeat, this course is not a commitment to finance, construct, or operate the project. However, it will allow all to see the benefits the project brings, and highlight the severe operational, logistical, and capacity problems that have resulted due to the gap between the two stations.

The Association for Public Transportation stands ready to assist you in any way we can, and await your favorable response.

Sincerely,

[signed]

Richard J. Arena

President  
Association for Public Transportation, Inc.

Phone: 732.576.8840  
E-Mail: rjarena@verizon.net

c: Governor Deval Patrick  
Lt. Governor Timothy P. Murray  
Former Governor Michael S. Dukakis  
NSRL CAC Chair Robert B. O'Brien  
NSRL CAC Vice-Chair John A. Businger