

October 10, 2012

Re: U.S. Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Tier I Environmental Impact Statement for the Northeast Corridor

The Regional Transportation Advisory Council of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization would like to submit the following comments on the scoping for the Tier I Environmental Impact Statement for the Northeast Corridor:

The Advisory Council strongly supports the construction of high speed rail (220 mph) connecting Boston to New York City and Washington, DC, and urges that the EIS be scoped to evaluate the improvements (including passenger rail stations in Massachusetts) that would be needed in connection with the extension of a high speed rail corridor from New York City to Boston with provisions for expansion of high speed rail to northern New England. Many of the Commonwealth's facilities need improvements to be able to provide true high speed rail service in our segment of the Northeast Corridor, while also providing for commuter rail and freight expansion with efficiency of operation in its shared corridors. The EIS study should include in its scoping, evaluation of various alternative routes.

Adding tracks at South Station is an important improvement, but not enough. Boston needs to prepare for 220 miles per hour high speed rail service to remain a competitive destination and environment for business and tourism. The Advisory Council supports scoping that includes Boston Terminal storage and capacity improvements and 286,000 pound weight capacity for rail freight. South Station and the Southampton Street Yard are at capacity, and additional terminal capacity will be needed to accommodate projected 2030 service levels and equipment needs. These projections include initiating MBTA South Coast commuter service to Fall River and New Bedford and adding intercity trains to the "Inland Route" between South Station and Springfield.

Major components that are needed include the addition of a third track north and south of the Canton Viaduct in the vicinity of Route 128 Station, Sharon, and Mansfield. These projects are needed to increase capacity of a two-track section to reduce a major bottleneck in what is otherwise a predominately three-track railroad. Electrification of main line tracks and added sidings will improve

infrastructure utilization and facilitate fully electric commuter operations. High platforms should be installed at all stations while preserving freight clearances.

Thanks to the success of the Downeaster, thousands of people are now taking trains daily between Boston and Portland, Maine—and soon, Brunswick. The Northeast Corridor should be extended through the North-South Rail Link to include New Hampshire, Maine, and Canada, in order to alleviate track and train storage issues in Boston, and to improve service to the north. Providing through-service will reduce congestion on both our regional highways and at our airports, diverting travel to an environmentally superior and efficient mode. If the EIR determines that the North-South Rail Link cannot be constructed in the near future, it should evaluate the benefit of designing and constructing the South Station Expansion so that the future construction of a North-South Rail Link is not precluded.