



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release:

Tuesday, October 25, 2011 at 9:00 a.m.

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New Report Recommends Strategies to Leverage Rail Investments for Greater Economic Growth in the Knowledge Corridor

Business Leaders and Local Officials Meet Today in Rocky Hill, Connecticut

(Rocky Hill, CT) – A new report released today by Regional Plan Association recommends strategies for leveraging public investments in improving the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield (NHHS) Rail Corridor for economic growth. Titled, “[Dependable Rail in 2016: What Will it Mean for the Knowledge Corridor Region?](#)”, the report includes lessons from successful passenger rail corridors in Maine and Northern California, and proposes a broad set of strategies to build on the \$400 million initial public investment being made to upgrade the NHHS Rail Corridor. These preliminary, recommended strategies are offered for discussion at a convening of business leaders and local officials today in Rocky Hill, who will explore additional strategies and next steps for achieving the maximum economic benefit from the NHHS rail project.

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Today's conference, "The New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Rail Corridor: Opportunities for Economic Growth," is expected to attract 80 local business leaders and municipal officials to the Hartford Marriott Rocky Hill, 100 Capital Boulevard, from 8:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. They will discuss the economic benefits of rail investment, the strategies proposed in the report, and next steps that can be taken by Connecticut and Massachusetts, the business community, and municipalities along the rail corridor. The conference is hosted by Regional Plan Association in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Transportation and RPA's national infrastructure advocacy initiative, America 2050.

The state of Connecticut and the federal government are investing more than \$400 million in a rail improvement project that adds a second track along the majority of the corridor, upgrades and improves stations, platforms, bridges, grade crossings, and signal systems and upon completion adds capacity for up to 25 daily round trip trains, up from 6 today. By 2016, passengers can expect more reliable, more frequent rail service on the corridor.

The recommendations contained in the report were first developed in June 2011 at a two-day workshop in Hartford, Connecticut that brought together local business leaders, municipal officials, and planners with the people responsible for improving rail service on corridors in Northern California and Maine. In the Capitol Corridor and Downeaster rail corridors, improvements to existing passenger rail service resulted in dramatic increases in ridership and attracted commercial investment around the stations in cities like Emeryville, California, and Old Orchard Beach, Maine, respectively.

Drawing on the input of business and community leaders at the June workshop and visiting experts from Maine and California, the report proposes the following strategies:

- Plan for transportation connections at each station, including to bus services, private shuttles, bike and pedestrian facilities, and parking. Integrate scheduling and ticketing to connecting services, including offering vouchers for free bus transfers, as is done on the Capitol Corridor in California.
- Create a marketing strategy and brand identify for the new, improved service that reflects the unique qualities of the region. A great example is the Downeaster service, which is known as "Maine's train," has the highest customer satisfaction in the Amtrak network, and serves local food, such as lobster rolls and clam chowder, in its café car.
- Integrate and align state economic development initiatives with local strategies to create a single, corridor-wide, economic development plan for attracting and retaining businesses and employees, particularly in knowledge sector industries.

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- Explore new funding and financing mechanisms for capital and operating needs of the rail service. The states should provide assistance to communities that want to make use of value capture techniques around station areas, through property taxes or special assessments.
- Promote transit villages and downtown revitalization with zoning regulations that guide development around station areas and with state policies that promote transit villages around stations in Connecticut and Massachusetts.
- Explore forming a single purpose entity – such as a Knowledge Corridor Rail Authority – to coordinate the multiple functions and agencies involved in the project. It would provide better interagency and state-local coordination, and ensure that rail operations solutions are developed in a manner that is also supportive of state and local development goals. The new entity should work with a coordinating council of municipalities on the corridor to improve stations and station access.

“Connecticut and Massachusetts can learn from other regions that have successfully improved their passenger rail services and reaped tangible economic benefits,” said Robert Yaro, president of Regional Plan Association. “Rail investment is just one piece of the puzzle; it needs to be part of a larger strategy for economic development and for connecting rail passengers to the major employers and destinations in the Knowledge Corridor region.”

“These significant transit investments alongside an economic development strategy focused on the Knowledge Corridor station areas will spur growth in Connecticut and Massachusetts while protecting community character, providing housing and transportation options, and laying the foundation for a more sustainable future,” said David Kooris, Vice President and Connecticut Director of Regional Plan Association.

Tom Maziarz, Chief of Planning at CT DOT, welcomed the report as “an important initial look at the question of how to achieve the maximum economic benefit from the state’s investment in the New Haven – Springfield rail project. The conference on October 25th will continue the discussion and explore some of the potential economic strategies in greater detail.”

The report was made possible through the generous support of The Rockefeller Foundation and the Surdna Foundation.

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The report, “Dependable Rail in 2016: What Will it Mean for the Knowledge Corridor Region?”, can be downloaded at:

http://www.rpa.org/upload/2011/10/Dependable%20Rail_FinalReport_FINAL.pdf (5 MB)

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