

August 13, 2012

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) examines the future development of the northeast rail system, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) reaffirms its long-standing commitment to a region-wide network of linked passenger rail corridors that can provide greater mobility; offer options and affordable access for travelers in urban, suburban, and rural communities; and contribute to economic development and community revitalization throughout the region. Our shared goal is a robust rail system that, near-term and in the future, provides improved, expanded passenger rail service that attracts significantly increased intercity and commuter ridership while also supporting essential goods movement. Achieving this goal requires a range of high quality passenger rail services that can entice and retain users by offering safe, secure and frequent service with reduced travel times, improved reliability, enhanced connectivity, and competitive prices. The CONEG Governors have made it a priority for our states to participate in the Northeast Corridor Infrastructure and Operations Advisory Commission as it develops recommendations to Congress for the future of the Northeast Corridor (NEC).

The Northeast Corridor network – the Main Line and the connecting services – is a transportation and economic artery for this region and the nation. This network serves a region that is home to more than 60 million people, 80 percent of whom live within 25 miles of an existing or proposed multi-state regional rail service. It offers the intercity traveler an easily accessible alternative to congested highways and airports, as well as an option for travelers unable to drive or fly. Its extensive geographic reach and multi-modal network connections provide efficient, viable choices for the region's millions of commuters, thereby enlarging access to the employment market for both businesses and workers. Efficient and frequent service linking the region's many large and small urban areas creates a proximity and opportunity for interaction among firms, institutions and individuals that can expand the market for services, encourage greater interaction, and facilitate innovation. Throughout the Northeast, passenger rail stations are a locus for transit services and support the development of vibrant neighborhoods and local businesses.

The northeast passenger rail network offers enormous opportunities for greater regional mobility and economic development; but it also faces significant and immediate challenges. Aging and obsolete infrastructure, limited track capacity and critical chokepoints affect the service quality and reliability for all users – intercity, commuter and freight. This stress on the system occurs even as the demand grows for improved, expanded intercity and commuter service on the NEC Main Line, and on its many connecting corridors, including the inland route linking Boston–Springfield-Albany-Hartford and New Haven, the Knowledge Corridor, the Empire Corridor, the Keystone Corridor, and the Northern New England Corridor.

The CONEG Governors are pleased that the northeast states are actively engaged in partnership with each other, Amtrak, commuter and freight railroads, the U.S. Department of Transportation and local communities, to tackle these challenges and help the region achieve the full potential of an integrated rail network. Joint planning and funding efforts are part of an on-going, coordinated effort to reduce travel times, increase speeds, improve reliability and on-time performance, eliminate chokepoints, improve stations, replace aging bridges and electrical systems, install track and ties, and purchase new rolling stock.

Significant progress is being made. However, coordinated planning and management, combined with significant, sustained investment, must continue if the Northeast region's rail network is to achieve the capacity and connectivity required for additional – and more reliable – service in the near-term; and to lay the critical building blocks for new, expanded high performance service linking the Northeast's major population and employment centers.

We welcome FRA's close cooperation with the states and other stakeholders as it undertakes the NEC FUTURE initiative, a comprehensive, systemic, and market-based examination of the role of the Northeast rail network in the overall mobility and economic vitality of the region. In establishing goals and assessing alternatives, it is vital that this effort address the entire regional network – the Main Line and connecting corridors, the intercity, commuter and freight users, current needs and planned expansion. We also stress that this initiative should consider all strategies that can increase capacity, add frequency, improve reliability and reduce travel time for all users.

Careful, coordinated rail system planning and development requires significant financial resources and expertise. It also helps federal, state and local decision-makers make sound judgments on the most appropriate and cost-effective investments in a multi-modal transportation system. The northeast states, the District of Columbia, and Amtrak are collectively investing more than \$2 billion over the next two years to improve the infrastructure and operations of the NEC network. Therefore, we urge the federal government to continue as a strong, consistent planning and funding partner in bringing the Corridor to a state of good repair, improving the reliability and quality of current passenger services, and laying the foundation for expanded and new services in the future.

The CONEG states look forward to working with the USDOT, Amtrak, the Northeast Corridor Infrastructure and Operations Advisory Commission, and the rail network's many users and stakeholders to ensure that the nation's most extensive passenger rail network will provide improved, higher speed and next generation service that can contribute to greater mobility and economic growth in cities and towns throughout the region.

Sincerely,

/o.s./

Peter Shumlin
Governor of Vermont
CONEG Chair

/o.s./

Lincoln D. Chafee
Governor of Rhode Island
CONEG Vice-Chair

/o.s./

Dannel P. Malloy
Governor of Connecticut
CONEG Lead Governor for
Transportation