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William J. Flynn
Chief Executive Officer



June 28, 2021

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

I am writing to express Amtrak's concerns about reports that the House may include in the INVEST in America Act an amendment that would create a "North Atlantic Rail Compact" (NARC) with an ostensible charge to construct an ill-defined "North Atlantic Rail Network." Amtrak is strongly opposed to the adoption of this amendment and the likely negative consequences of such a decision for the Northeast Corridor and the national rail network. Adopting the amendment would establish – without any hearings, committee consideration, studies or opportunity for those impacted by the proposal to be heard – support for an infeasible proposal, *previously rejected because of the harm it would do to the environment*, by an advocacy group called North Atlantic Rail (NAR) to build a new, up to 225 mph dedicated high-speed rail line between New York City and Boston.

The dedicated high-speed rail line's route (NAR Alignment) would not follow the existing Northeast Corridor (NEC) alignment that parallels Interstate 95. Instead, it would travel beneath the East River in a new tunnel; cross dense urban sections of Queens and Long Island to Ronkonkoma; turn north to Port Jefferson; traverse the Long Island Sound in a 16-mile tunnel to Stratford, Connecticut; and after passing through New Haven and Hartford, turn east across Eastern Connecticut and Rhode Island to Providence, from which it would follow the existing NEC rail corridor to Boston. Most of the line would be built on elevated viaducts. Extensive portions of the high-speed line would need to be constructed along newly acquired and cleared rights-of-way on which there are no rail lines or existing transportation corridors today.

Building a high-speed rail line along the NAR Alignment was evaluated in the comprehensive, five-year NEC FUTURE planning and environmental review process – and rejected in the Record of Decision (ROD) issued by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in 2017 because of the harm it would cause to the environment, its costs and failure to provide needed investment to the existing NEC. Instead, FRA, eight NEC states, the District of Columbia and Amtrak endorsed a Preferred Alternative that would increase track capacity and speeds along the existing NEC alignment, and build dedicated high-speed



tracks parallel to it where warranted, to minimize environmental impacts and benefit all Amtrak and commuter passengers on the NEC rather than just those traveling on high-speed trains.

The prior rejection of the NAR Alignment is not the only crucial fact undisclosed in the cursory description of the NAR Proposal on NAR's website and in its handouts.

- Federal safety regulations governing Tier III (above 186 mph) high-speed rail equipment would preclude the operation of conventional speed (125 mph or less) intercity and commuter trains over any portion of the NAR Alignment. This means that passengers traveling from currently served NEC cities such as Stamford or Bridgeport to Boston would have to change trains to travel on high-speed trains over the NAR Alignment, as would passengers from New London, Springfield, and Northern New England. It also means that New York City-to-Boston trains would not be able to operate above 160 mph – which will soon be the maximum speed between New York City and Boston – over the NAR Alignment until the *entire* line was completed, which NAR acknowledges would be decades away.
- While NAR's advocates claim that the NAR HSR Line would cost \$84.6 billion, and "Early Action Projects" (investments in other New England rail corridors) an additional \$23.4 billion, they have not provided *any* engineering or cost study to substantiate those figures.
- Building a new 240-mile high-speed rail line, much of it through heavily populated areas where there is no existing rail line or right-of-way, would require purchasing or condemning innumerable homes and businesses, and routing the line through parks and wetlands. Maps prepared for the NEC Future study indicate that the least intrusive route along the NAR Alignment would:
 - Bisect Forest Park in Queens on a viaduct, and travel in a trench through Eisenhower County Park in Nassau;
 - Be built on trenches or viaducts through residential neighborhoods and business districts alongside the Long Island Rail Road's heavily traveled Main, Hempstead and Ronkonkoma Lines (on which service would have to be curtailed during construction); and
 - Follow new alignments, primarily on viaducts, between Ronkonkoma and Port Jefferson, and through numerous communities, parks and wetlands between Hartford and Providence.
- While the "Early Action Projects" listed on NAR's website are all worthwhile projects, they are not new ideas and have no connection to NAR's high-speed line proposal. In fact, most of them would not connect with a high-speed line built along the NAR Alignment. The massive levels of funding it would consume would make it *less* likely that these projects would be funded.



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- Likewise, a federal funding commitment to the NAR Alignment – which would cost more than the Biden Administration’s proposed investment in *all* passenger rail projects *throughout the country* – would leave little federal funding available for projects in other regions.

The amendment would give NARC, the Compact it creates, responsibility for planning and constructing the New York City-to-Boston high-speed rail line. NARC would be tasked with planning other New England passenger rail improvement projects, a responsibility currently held by FRA, the states, the NEC Commission and Amtrak. NARC would gain these important and complex responsibilities once only two of the seven New England states ratified the compact creating it, even though it would have no resources or employees at that time. It would be governed by an unwieldy 17-member Board on which the federal government and each NEC state would have the same number of votes (two) on issues relating to the construction of a federally-funded high-speed rail line from New York City to Boston as Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Oddly, the amendment would not give NARC the legal authority possessed by Amtrak and states to condemn properties necessary for the construction of the NAR Alignment, or the remedies Amtrak has if freight railroads that own rail lines on which Early Action Projects would be constructed decline to allow those projects.

Amtrak recognizes that the advocates for the NAR proposal are well-intentioned. We share their vision of faster service between New York City and Boston, where Amtrak carries more travelers than all airlines combined despite inadequate infrastructure and investment that makes the trip on *Acela* 45 minutes longer than traveling the same distance from New York City to Washington. The best way to accomplish that is to advance the series of investments contemplated by NEC Future, which will produce *near-term* benefits – shorter trip times and more trains - for *all* NEC rail users as each project is completed.

Fifty years after the creation of Amtrak, the stars are finally aligning in ways that would provide New England with the improved and expanded high-speed, intercity and commuter service it needs and deserves. For the first time in Amtrak’s history, we have an Administration, a Congress and multiple New England state partners who support making the types of investments other countries have made to develop world class passenger rail services. Because of climate change, an unprecedented pandemic, a growing population, and increasing congestion in other modes, the need for investments in passenger rail service to provide mobility, reduce emissions and spur an economic recovery has never been greater. Amtrak and our state partners stand ready to seize that opportunity.

Two months ago, I testified before your committee to urge support for investments to reduce trip times between New York City and Boston to less than two hours and thirty minutes. Amtrak and our New England state partners along the NEC are about to begin one of the most important steps in that process: a study to evaluate alternative alignments – *including* their environmental and community impacts – for increased capacity and higher speeds between New Haven and Providence to identify a Preferred

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Alternative, as contemplated by the NEC FUTURE ROD. The NEC Commission is about to release its CONNECT NEC 2035 report, a 15-year roadmap for implementing NEC FUTURE's vision for expanded and faster passenger rail service. In April, we released our "Amtrak Connects US" vision that would provide or expand Amtrak service, also over a 15-year time period, on the same intercity corridors off the NEC Main Line that are included in the NAR's list of "Early Action Projects."

Amtrak, state DOTs, the NEC Commission and FRA already have the institutional capabilities, the collaborative framework and the requisite rights to advance high-speed and other intercity passenger rail service in New England. Right now would be the worst possible time to throw a monkey wrench into the progress they are making by creating a new bureaucracy with poorly defined and overlapping aims and yet no institutional capability. Continuing to move forward with the NEC FUTURE investment program, which has already received Tier I environmental clearance, and advancing the "Amtrak Connects US" vision and state rail plans, offer the best, fastest, most cost-effective and most environmentally responsible path to achieving the improved and expanded high-speed, intercity passenger and commuter rail service that residents of New England expect and deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William J. Flynn".

William J. Flynn

Chief Executive Officer