

Should NH Extend the MBTA From Massachusetts to Concord? *SB 241 Would Allow Planning to Begin*

*Trains need massive amounts of funding to support operating costs for which the state would be responsible.
Read the many reasons why extending the MBTA's Commuter Rail would be a losing proposition.*

A bill currently in the legislature (SB 241) would make it possible to start planning for The NH Capitol Corridor Rail Expansion Project. [1] The full House of Representatives will vote on it on June 5, 2019. Governor Sununu has in the past recognized that commuter rail for NH would be a "boondoggle" and a huge mistake.

This bill is not just a "study". [1] *"It's project development, engineering, design, and therefore the first step onto the slippery slope, to the point of no return. The first step is a teaser with federal money. The hurt for NH taxpayers comes when we have to subsidize nearly empty trains or give the money back and be left with nothing but debt to show for the foolish decision,"* says Dick Lemieux of Concord, a retired highway engineer and transportation planner with more than 33 years of experience reviewing multimodal transportation plans in NH.

"There has already been a study and it has already told us "it's not even worth it". But lobbyists are twisting the results and pulling the wool over the eyes of legislators who should be more skeptical," he added.

Read the full study here: <https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/aerorailtransit/railandtransit/corridor-rail-transit.htm>

Claims vs Reality

Recently a powerful lobbying firm employed by the groups promoting commuter rail claimed wide support for commuter rail expansion. Less than 700 people were surveyed but the pollsters declared that "75% of all NH residents" want commuter rail. But is a poll of 75% of less than 700 people truly representative of all of NH's residents? Were these people ever asked about the cost and viability of such a system? Were they asked if they themselves would actually use the system? We were not the only ones to question this. An article was published by a NH research organization that went into depth about the poll, how it was taken, and what the Department of Transportation's own Capitol Corridor Rail Study said about the proposed system. You can read it here:

<http://jbartlett.org/wp-content/uploads/Skeptics-Guide-To-Commuter-Rail-Brief.pdf>

Reading this report on the information contained in the DOT's own study we learned *"operations and maintenance costs would be a state responsibility. To cover those costs, it recommended several new taxes and fees."* We also learned that *"Commuter rail is sold as a way to reduce traffic congestion on crowded highways that connect New Hampshire to Boston. But the state's own study shows that commuter rail will have little if any discernible impact on highway traffic congestion."* In addition, the study ***"suggested that land use changes would be needed to create more density near any train station."*** **As we warned, along with trains comes more Transit Oriented Development, or more apartments, (artificially) creating more density!**

People insisting we need this system are often lacking many facts. Let's take a look at some of the myths and misconceptions we have been hearing.

- it would be "high speed"
- it would alleviate traffic
- it would keep youth in NH
- it would help create jobs in NH
- it would help the environment
- it would pay for itself, or would not cost anything

It would NOT be "HIGH SPEED" but an extension of the MBTA

The NH Capitol Corridor Rail Expansion Project would do nothing but expand the MBTA [2] commuter-rail service from Boston to southern New Hampshire. Some are confused in thinking it would be a "high-speed bullet train" similar to that of Japan's. It would NOT! Maximum average speed would be 44 MPH as between Manchester and Lowell. Even if it were a high-speed train, California's high speed train project has been described as "*one of the biggest public policy failures in the state's history*". [3] The Feds are demanding payback because California is not going to finish what they started.

<https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/aerorailtransit/railandtransit/corridor-rail-transit.htm>

It would NOT alleviate traffic

If you look at the Lowell to Boston service that currently exists, you will see that vehicular traffic between those two points hasn't been alleviated at all. From an NHPR article we learned that "*82,000 people travel from New Hampshire to Massachusetts each day, but only about 2,000 of them take public transit.*" Out of 100 commuters who weigh the advantages and disadvantages of transit versus driving, 97.5 percent of them have concluded that **driving is better**. And so it is across the nation.

<https://www.nhpr.org/post/what-drives-nh-commuters-take-bus-boston#stream/0>

It will not necessarily attract youth to NH

Keeping youth in NH has not been difficult. It was recently reported that NH has the highest number of youth migrating to or returning to the state. Should the state make it easier for people to work in Massachusetts?

https://www.unionleader.com/news/business/more--somethings-suddenly-choosing-to-live-in-new-hampshire/article_1e7284a8-88da-5b6c-bcdc-7d22ed4eed19.html

It will not necessarily create jobs

One need only to look at Brunswick, Maine to see that trains alone do not create jobs. "*Incredible economic benefit*" and "*exponential economic prosperity*" were just two of the myths being propagated by proponents there, just as they are here. See pages 33-41 of this briefing on the Downeaster Maine system. The economic conditions in Brunswick are very revealing.

http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PRAC_Briefing_October_13_2015.pdf

"*Train advocates in New Hampshire often cite Maine's Downeaster as an example of a successful train. It is not. It is an economic and transportation disaster,*" writes Lemieux in this article on Patch.

<https://patch.com/new-hampshire/concord-nh/an--passenger-rail-overpriced-underutilized>

Pem Shaeffer, an engineer from Maine, did this review of the Downeaster:

<http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/2019/05/26/maines-downeaster-was-it-worth-it/>

See what NH's Josiah Bartlett Center also had to say about the Downeaster. From the studies that have been conducted after rail service has started, and the experience of the Downeaster here in New Hampshire, and an analysis of town by town jobs numbers here in New Hampshire, we learn that simply having commuter rail does not create jobs. <https://jbartlett.org/2015/05/does-commuter-rail-create-jobs/>

It would not necessarily help the environment – trains use diesel

According to Lemieux in the same Patch article, *“When the Champlain Flyer was proposed in Vermont, it was supposed to reduce pollution. But, when it was shut down after only 2+ years in operation, an audit by the VT Legislature found it contributed to pollution and exacerbated global warming.”*

It would NOT be sustainable because ridership would not support it

We were hard pressed to find any system in America that is not facing serious debt. In many cases it is because of **lack of ridership which is in serious decline**. Simple math will tell you that NH cannot sustain the cost of a system that would be serving only 1/10th of 1% of the population.

That’s what happened in Rhode Island. [4] Per Lemieux, *“new train service to Wickford was predicted to attract 3,386 daily passengers by 2020. By mid-2016, four years after it opened, 10 round trip trains were carrying only 222 one-way daily passengers (11 passengers per train!) at a ticket price of \$3.50. Almost 95 percent of the train’s \$5.2 million annual operating cost was being covered by taxpayers.”*

“Commuters weren’t buying what the state was selling even at a discount”.
<http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/2019/05/18/sb-241-say-no-to-commuter-rail/>

The Josiah Bartlett Center said as much as well.
<https://jbartlett.org/2012/09/highways-pay-for-themselves-trains-dont/>

CATO : It’s the Last Stop on the Light-Rail Gravy Train
<https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/its-last-stop-light-rail-gravy-train>

As this CATO Policy Analysis #824 from October 24, 2017 states, trains are obsolete 19th century technology and NH should instead be preparing for transportation modes of the future.

http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CATO_pa_824-updated.pdf

There are many excellent research pieces done at CATO by Randall O’Toole regarding ridership and the failure of transit. Here is a podcast in which he discusses the viability of these systems, and comments about how they are related to the urbanism “fad”. It will encourage transit-oriented development, better known as 'stack'n'pack' housing, which many townspeople in NH are against. People moved to NH to get away from cities, not create them here in rural areas.

<https://www.libertarianism.org/podcasts/free-thoughts/derailed-false-promises-trains-subways-light-rail-randal-otoole>

In addition to this article: <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/mass-transit-collapsing-everywhere> you can find many more on the subject by searching on [COMMUTER RAIL](#).

Sign the petition against commuter rail.
<https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/no-commuter-rail-for-nh>

Summary

Tying into the already bankrupt MBTA system would be a financial boondoggle for NH and put the state in danger of needing a broad-based tax on the whole state. See all the states we found where trains are running in the red. [5] - [15]

We've also heard similar concerns as were voiced in Phoenix. Some fear it will exacerbate the problems we already have specific to NH with voter fraud and the opioid crisis.

"Neighbors near 19th Avenue say the rail system has disrupted the character of their community. 'Since the light rail came in, it's brought a lot more people into this area that don't belong in this area, that don't have any reason for being in this area,' neighborhood activist Linda Colino told The Republic earlier this year."

<https://www.azcentral.com/in-depth/news/local/phoenix/2018/12/20/ten-years-into-light-rail-continue-expand-metro-phoenix/2144400002/>

The NH House of Representatives must vote NO on SB 241 on June 5, 2019 and if they don't, the Governor must VETO SB 241 and any other attempts to move forward with commuter rail in order to keep the "NH Advantage" and spare the state and its taxpayers from an income tax.

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<https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/no-commuter-rail-for-nh>

Related reading — more from Dick Lemieux, transit engineer

Passenger Rail: Overpriced, Underutilized

<https://patch.com/new-hampshire/concord-nh/an--passenger-rail-overpriced-underutilized>

Commuter Rail Claims Are Preposterous

<http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/2019/05/23/commuter-rail-claims-are-preposterous/>

Are there still Democrats that will side with the little guy?

<http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/2019/05/17/dick-lemieux-on-commuter-rail/>

A wake-up call for proponents of commuter rail

<http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/2019/05/18/sb-241-say-no-to-commuter-rail/>

Lemieux: Jeopardy - New Hampshire Edition

<https://patch.com/new-hampshire/concord-nh/jeopardy-new-hampshire-edition>

Viability of Commuter Rail is a Delusion

<http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/2019/02/27/viability-of-commuter-rail-is-a-delusion/>

Lemieux: Is There a Rail Runner in New Hampshire's Future?

<https://patch.com/new-hampshire/concord-nh/there-rail-runner-new-hampshires-future>

Abolish the N.H. Rail Transit Authority

<https://www.concordmonitor.com/Abolish-NH-Rail-Transit-Authority-15195425>

[1] Why Won't NH Learn from the Mistakes of Others

<http://bedfordresidents.com/bra/2019/05/23/why-wont-nh-learn-from-mistakes-of-others/>

[2] Massachusetts — Boston's MBTA has approximately \$5.0 billion in outstanding debt. This is the system they would like to tie into...

https://pioneerinstitute.org/better_government/working-from-facts-on-the-crisis-at-the-mbta/

[3] California — in debt for \$100 Billion

Jerry Brown Leaves California With \$100B Train Debt, As Texas Pursues Its Own Rail Boondoggle

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/patrickgleason/2018/12/14/jerry-brown-leaves-california-with-100b-train-debt-as-texas-pursues-its-own-rail-boondoggle/#40db0a412b65> and,

After Spending \$5.4 Billion, California's Bullet Train Is Still Going Nowhere

<https://www.hoover.org/research/after-spending-54-billion-californias-bullet-train-still-going-nowhere>

[4] Rhode Island — in debt for \$10 Million

<https://www.providencejournal.com/article/20160319/NEWS/160319157>

[5] Colorado — in debt

<https://i2i.org/rtds-death-spiral/>

[6] Illinois — in debt

<https://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20180614/NEWS10/180619938/metra-suffers-from-lack-of-spending>

[7] Minnesota — in debt

<http://www.startribune.com/funding-for-southwest-lrt-if-it-looks-like-debt-is-it-debt/392369591/>

[8] Maryland — in debt

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/maryland-will-use-marc-fare-revenue-to-pay-purple-line-debt-officials-say/2016/04/04/7f2fa850-fa8f-11e5-80e4-c381214de1a3_story.html

[9] Missouri — in debt

<https://nextstl.com/2013/05/metro-to-make-400m-debt-payment-expansion-arguments-set-to-begin-again/>

[10] New Jersey — in debt

<https://www.politico.com/states/new-jersey/story/2019/02/13/new-jersey-pays-amtrak-182m-plans-to-move-forward-together-852613>

[11] New Mexico — in debt

<https://www.abqjournal.com/1194626/rail-runner-gets-new-payment-plan.html>

[12] New York — in debt

<https://ny.curbed.com/2018/10/11/17964786/mta-budget-deficit-debt-report-thomas-dinapoli>

[13] Philly — in debt

https://www.philly.com/philly/business/transportation/One_of_Phillys_worst_tax_deadbeats_SEPTA_to_have_22M_bill_wiped_from_books.html

[14] Texas — in debt

<https://www.lonestarvoiceonline.org/2017/03/22/burton-targets-commuter-rail-debt/>

[15] China — in debt

<https://www.caixinglobal.com/2019-01-29/zhao-jian-whats-not-great-about-chinas-high-speed-rail-the-debt-101375797.html>

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