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Executive Director

October 31, 2017

The Honorable Thomas M. McGee, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Transportation
State House Room 109C
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable William M. Straus, House Chair
Joint Committee on Transportation
State House Room 134
Boston, MA 02133

RE: S.1935 – An Act to Study the Feasibility of High-Speed Rail Access Between
Springfield and Boston

Dear Chairman McGee and Chairman Straus:

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) strongly supports S.1935, *An Act to study the feasibility of high-speed rail access between Springfield and Boston*, filed by Senator Lesser. We urge the Committee to release this strategically vital legislation with a favorable recommendation, although we suggest a few modifications so that it may be of benefit to all of western and central Massachusetts.

The just published *MassMoves* report, developed by the Massachusetts Senate in collaboration with the Barr Foundation, found that the first priority of respondents from Western Massachusetts, including the Berkshires, was to “Establish/improve east/west rail links (connecting Pittsfield, Springfield and Worcester to each other and to Boston and New York State.” Similarly, the *Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (BRPC, 2017) states: “The region would benefit from more frequent passenger rail service that would allow people to commute daily to Albany, NY, Springfield, MA, Worcester, MA, or Boston, MA without the need for an automobile. New York is studying true high speed rail service in the NYC-Albany-Buffalo corridor and establishing quality connection to that service would be a significant opportunity.”

The legislation, as introduced, limits the potential of the needed study two ways. First, it does not include the western fifth of Massachusetts (the Berkshires) which is poorly served by all forms of transportation, has an economy which is among the weakest in the Commonwealth and does not attempt to take advantage of the strong passenger rail assets to our west along

the Hudson River in New York state. Second, by terming the only option to be studied "high-speed rail", which has a very specific definition of speeds over 110 miles per hour, the legislation may allow those who might not wish to support a significant investment in passenger rail in the western part of the state to use that definition to limit the possibilities. It would be preferable to require a study of passenger rail access, and allow considerations of lesser speeds which may be a practical limitation due to track geometry and topographic constraints. The railroad industry professionals designate up to 90mph as "Conventional", 90-110 as Higher Speed Rail (HrSR) and over 110 as "High Speed Rail (HSR)". None of these options should be dropped from consideration in the study. High-speed rail would be preferable but it may simply not be feasible while something less than that would still provide a great benefit.

While we would prefer to see our two concerns addressed in this legislation, if that is not possible, we still respectfully urge the Committee to report the bill favorably. Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nathaniel W. Karns". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Nathaniel W. Karns, AICP
Executive Director

Cc: The Honorable Stanley Rosenberg, Senate President
The Honorable Robert DeLeo, House Speaker
The Honorable Eric Lesser, Senator, First Hampden and Hampshire District
The Honorable Adam Hinds, Senator, Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden District
The Honorable Paul Mark, Representative, 2nd Berkshire District
The Honorable Tricia Farley-Bouvier, 3rd Berkshire District
The Honorable Smitty Pignatelli, 4th Berkshire District