



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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February 11, 2015

H.B. 6343
"AN ACT CONCERNING THE RESTORATION OF THE HOUSATONIC
RAILROAD LINE."

Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero, Senator Boucher, and Representative O Dea, thank you for considering H.B. 6343 "*An Act Concerning The Restoration of The Housatonic Railroad Line.*"

For the record, I am State Representative Roberta Willis, representing the 64th District.

On January 7th, in Governor Malloy's inaugural address, he announced that transportation and the economy would be his next policy initiative. The Governor promised a 30 year Transportation Plan for all of Connecticut. While I recognize there are critical transportation needs in other areas around the state, we need to insure that rural NW CT is included in an overall transportation plan. Yes, we prefer our one lane bridges, we are not looking for a highway exit ramp because we don't have any highways and we don't need an inland seaport. I am here today to urge the Transportation Committee to "*get on board*" and support: **HB 6343 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RESTORATION OF THE HOUSATONIC RAILROAD LINE.**

The stated purpose of the bill is: "To protect the continuing operation of freight service to the northwest region's major industries and employers, to protect environmentally sensitive areas that this railroad runs through by improving the infrastructure to prevent derailments, and to once again operate a passenger rail service from New York City up through NW CT to Pittsfield Massachusetts to support the regional economy.

Presently, Housatonic Railroad is a freight railroad that connects to the national rail system. Housatonic runs freight trains from Pittsfield, Massachusetts south to Danbury. Over the years,

the Housatonic Railroad Company has experienced multiple derailments on tracks that run immediately along the Housatonic River and through town centers. It is my understanding that most of the derailments were due to the condition of the track which was put down in 1920, so it is now fast approaching its 100 years in service. The State of Massachusetts has committed \$35 million in 2015 to rebuild the tracks in Massachusetts to bring them up to current standards, which will be able to support passenger rail service.

In July 2014, Massachusetts Department of Transportation authorized the purchase of 37 miles of the railroad's Berkshire Line for \$12 million. The state purchase is intended to extend rail services to New York City, following track improvements for passenger and freight service between Massachusetts and Connecticut.

That railroad ceased passenger operations in 1971, along with most of the private passenger rail operators in the US. With the renewed interest in mass transportation and the resurgence of support for improving rail, we are hopeful that the Housatonic Rail Road is worthy of consideration and investment as we develop a 30 year Transportation Master Plan.

I would like to thank you for your consideration of this bill.



February 10, 2015

Transportation Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 2300
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: H.B. 6343: An act concerning the restoration of the Housatonic Rail Line

Dear Representative Guerrero, Senator Maynard, Senator Boucher, Representative O'Dea and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee:

On behalf of the Northwest Hills Council of Governments (NHTCOG), we would like to voice our support for H.B. 6343: An act concerning the restoration of the Housatonic Rail Line.

The Housatonic Railroad's freight service plays a critical role in the regional economy supporting the largest employers in our region. The 37 mile portion of State owned track between New Milford and the Massachusetts border in Canaan has more than exceeded its useful life and needs to be replaced. Today the railroad is operating on rail that was manufactured in the 1920's and derailments are much too common. When these derailments occur on the portion of this track that runs right next to the Housatonic River there could be serious environmental consequences.

This rail line also plays an important role in reducing truck traffic along our two lane highways. According to the Housatonic Railroad, just one average sized train moving from Danbury to Pittsfield effectively removes 120 to 150 trucks from Connecticut roads such as Route 7 in rural towns such as Kent and Cornwall. With renewed interest in upgrading long neglected infrastructure throughout the State this is the time to remedy a problem that has existed for far too long.

The NHTCOG also plans to work with its member towns to consider and plan for the regional economic and land use impacts of possible restored passenger rail service on the Housatonic Railroad.

Restoring the tracks used by the Housatonic Rail Road will help to retain jobs in our region, prevent future derailments, reduce truck traffic on our rural State roads, and offer the potential for additional economic development in our region.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Ayer
Jocelyn Ayer,
Community & Economic Development Director

