

February 10, 2015

To: Transportation Committee Re: HB 6343

My name is Susan Clayton.

I am a member of North Canaan's Board of Selectmen, in the second year of my 5th term.

I am also a sitting member of the Northwest Chamber Of Commerce's Economic Development Corporation and sit on the Infrastructure Committee.

I write in support of HB6343 introduced by Rep. Roberta Willis for the restoration of the Housatonic Railway.

I write to seek support of my community's efforts in calling for the restoration of these rails, owned by the State from North Canaan to New Milford, and currently leased by Housatonic Railroad, whose ongoing freight operation is critical to North Canaan's overall economic well being.

Housatonic Railroad currently services major global manufacturers located within North Canaan. Two of our largest manufacturers are Becton Dickinson, who manufacture syringes for medical use, and Specialty Minerals, producer of limestone and limestone products used in many applications used around the world. Both use Housatonic Railroad extensively to move their products. Rail has proven to be a cost effective and more environmentally friendly choice for moving their products.

Their use of rails has helped reduce truck traffic by keeping nearly 18,000 semi-trucks off our narrow roads each year which makes our roads safer, is better for the environment, and reduces highway wear and tear.

They are also two of North Canaan's largest employers, offering good paying jobs with benefits to their employees. More importantly their access to rail has kept them from relocating to other States, which not only North Canaan, but the State of Connecticut, can not afford to lose

Both have indicated a desire to expand, but any expansion would require the ability to move their products more efficiently. Restoration of this important corridor would better allow for such expansion, creating much needed jobs in our area.

Better transportation, better infrastructure being the cornerstone of the Governor's second term, I believe that updating this rail system would be viewed as an important component of any larger plan.

I view this project as more than just a transportation project. I see this as an economic development project that could certainly benefit North Canaan, currently designated as one of the State's 28 distressed communities.

Restoring this corridor is also an important component of our Regional Economic Development plan, only the second Regional plan to have been approved.

When passenger service ended on this line in 1971, it was the same year I graduated high school. Like every teenager I went off to college vowing never to return.

After seeing a bit of the world, I realized this was a special place. I came back and settled here in 1978. When I returned I could see the toll the loss of rail had left in its wake.

When Housatonic Railroad revived freight operations in 1979, they also operated scenic trains on the weekends, between North Canaan and Cornwall, that brought folks to town from near and far.

Sadly those week-end scenic rides had to end due to the worsening condition of the rails, thus ending North Canaan as a destination, adding to its economic woes.

It seems it would make greater economic sense to improve the entirety of this line as proposed in the bill introduced by Representative Willis. The Bones are there. Restoring this line would be far more cost effective than starting from scratch.

Although passenger service is a future goal, the restoration of these rails, in the shorter term, would provide more reliable service, safer crossings, quieter freight operations, all improvements that would provide relief to those living along its path. It could also allow the resumption of the scenic week-end excursions which would have an immediate positive economic impact.

Restoration would create many jobs in our area during its construction, which would also have an immediate positive economic impact.

Rail is a more environmentally friendly way to transport goods, and this line's restoration would make it even more so.

Restoration for freight, would lend itself to the possible re-establishment of passenger service.

Regionally, if you study the Downeaster service in Maine, in measuring the actual benefits a service like this brought to that area, 22% of the riders on the train were people who would not have come to Maine had the train not be running. It was determined that after two years of operation the train brought about 10,000 new visitors and their pocketbooks to Maine, they spent 2.9 million in new revenue to the area generating 87 new jobs.

This restoration would serve four major markets, three of which will generate new spending in Connecticut.

Commuters who take the train to NYC will bring those dollars back to Connecticut to spend. This kind of spending would generate tax income for the State. New spending would take some time to develop but over time the numbers will grow as users working in NYC seek affordable housing along the rail line.

Visitors who come from NYC to Connecticut will spend money on food, entertainment, lodging and other purchases. Visitor market research indicates that the average age of the prospective rider is 37. Dramatically younger than the average visitor who comes to Connecticut from NYC today. With our aging population, attracting younger citizens who may choose to relocate here is critical.

If the ridership numbers are only half of what Housatonic Railway research has indicated, the number of new visitors, after start up, will be 8 or more times what they experienced in Maine because NYC is much larger, with a population of 8 million, versus 700,000 the Downeaster reaches in the Boston market.

That suggests, if the experience in Maine is similar, and I suspect it is, new spending could be well over \$23 million and would create about a thousand new jobs.

I am not just advocating for North Canaan, I believe the restoration of the entirety of this rail line as proposed in Representative Willis' bill, will benefit and improve the lives and economy of the entire western third of the State.

Supporting HB6343, opens up the opportunity for a true public/private partnership between the State and Housatonic Railroad.

Working in collaboration with Housatonic Railroad, who already operates a successful freight operation, who has the expertise and knowledge, whose curated plan to restore passenger service that could operate *without* State subsidy, just makes sense.

Such a collaboration could be a model for other public/private endeavors, which is something we as leaders talk about all the time. This could be the perfect opportunity to test the theory.

In closing, it is my hope that given my testimony, that this committee will seriously consider this restoration project in its entirety..

This project, no doubt, will benefit the Town of North Canaan, my hometown, the town I have the great honor of representing.

North Canaan is and always will be a Railroad town. It is in our DNA

Help return to North Canaan its economic vitality, its identity, its history, by making this project a priority in the State's overall transportation plan by supporting HB6343

We are shovel ready and ready to go.

I thank you for your kind attention and consideration..

Susan J. Clayton, Selectman

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