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RE: Public comment on HB 6343 - An act concerning the restoration of the Housatonic Railroad line

Representative Guerrero, Senator Maynard, Senator Boucher, Representative O'Dea and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 6343: An act concerning the restoration of the Housatonic Railroad line.

I am writing to you as a resident of North Canaan, CT, in support of updating and restoring passenger rail service through Northwest Connecticut, as described in Rep Roberta Willis' proposed legislation HB 6343. I've been a firm advocate of restoring passenger rail service for a number of years, and am one of the founding members of the citizen led petition "Restore our Railways".

As the Governor mentioned in his State of the State address on January 7th, he envisions:

- "A state whose bus and rail systems interconnect all of Connecticut, linking us to cities up and down the east coast;"
- "A state where our children want to stay and raise new generations because they have a choice to live and work with a car... or without one;"

These statements touch on a number of reasons to support HB 6343.

The small towns of Northwest CT were founded on the rails, with both freight and passenger service playing a vital role in our history. That was true 100 years ago, and looking at the future, is becoming more and more critical for our communities moving forward. We need to keep Northwest Connecticut linked to the rest of the state and beyond.

All the demographic studies published over the past many years have shown that public transportation, especially rail based transit, is the future of this country. Those communities which have and support it will be able to attract the new families and businesses critical to thriving communities. Those that do not have that support will find it more difficult to thrive.

Our towns would benefit from the increased tourism a passenger railroad would deliver. The Northwest Corner has so many attractions to draw in visitors, and we want those businesses and attractions to remain viable in our communities. There have been studies performed on adding rail service showing the estimated impact, with increased regional revenue estimated at \$625M in the first 10 years (data, attached)

Our towns would hold onto existing freight business, which employ large numbers of residents in the Northwest Corner. Towns like North Canaan could not exist without the companies which rely on freight traffic to deliver their goods, good companies like Becton Dickinson, Specialty Minerals, Sheffield Plastics.

Our environments would benefit. Freight service removes 18,000 semi trucks per year from our local roads. Getting visitors out of their cars means less traffic congestion and pollution up the corridor.

And finally, our towns would be set up for success in the future. As small towns, we need to continually attract new young families, families that want a slower pace of life in addition to access to the rest of New England and beyond.

Thank you for your time today, and please consider supporting this bill which would truly "lay the rails" for the future of Northwest Connecticut.

Respectfully submitted,
Todd Shearer