



March 9, 2016

State of Connecticut
General Assembly
Chairman Kennedy, Chairman Albis and fellow members
Committee On Environment

RE: Raised Bill No. 385

The Connecticut Southern Railroad (CSO) is a shortline railroad that operates approximately 78 miles of mainline and auxiliary railroad track and associated infrastructure from West Springfield, MA to New Haven, CT as well as Manchester, Windsor, Suffield and Wethersfield. This includes operating over approximately 54 miles of Amtrak-owned and maintained mainline miles of track within the State of Connecticut. The CSO provides rail freight service to Connecticut businesses that depend on the safe and efficient delivery of their products. These commodities range from lumber to steel and recycling.

Bill No. 385 contains language that the CSO opposes about vegetation control along our right of way.

The Federal Railroad Administration has existing Federal regulations that require all railroads operating in the United States to control vegetation along their right of way. These regulations are in place to provide proper drainage, proper clearances for rolling stock, safety for railroad employees and the general public, and allow for sustaining the physical plant (railroad ties, grade crossings, etc.). The CSO fully complies with these regulations by both spraying and cutting vegetation on CSO owned and leased property. The CSO uses licensed vegetation control contractors that also fully comply with these and other regulations. The FRA enforces these regulations through field inspections.

Vegetation control along the CSO is restricted to within the railroad's right of way (track and immediate adjoining land for support and drainage). In general, this is about a 100-foot right of way along the mainline plus auxiliary tracks such as passing sidings and yard tracks. Very few changes, if any, occur from year to year for the areas that are covered by railroad vegetation control. Amtrak handles their own vegetation control.

This legislation would place burdensome restrictions on the railroad's vegetation control efforts by requiring multiple advance contacts that would be cumbersome and could cause delays in the vegetation control process. The CSO operates through numerous municipalities, over about 24 miles of mainline owned and leased trackage. The application of weed spray has to be done on a seasonal basis to be effective. Actual application dates and areas can vary due to weather conditions (such as rain) and railroad operating schedules. The weed spraying is generally done by a hi-rail vehicle (a truck with special on track rail wheels that allows it to run on the railroad track as well as over the road).

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A CSO employee that is qualified on federal mandated safety and operating rules as well as the physical territory is with the contractor for oversight and safe operating methods. Amtrak is likely exempted from this legislation under 49 U.S. Code § 24902.

It is also important to note that shortline railroads operate much like small businesses with limited resources. These proposed regulations will increase costs to the railroads that could impact funding available for other railroad physical plant work.

For the reasons and concerns outlined above, the CSO is opposed to this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Hunter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a stylized "H".

Charles D. Hunter
Assistant Vice President, Government Affairs
Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Services, Inc.
On behalf of Connecticut Southern Railroad