

Testimony and/or Statement:

Representative Lamar, Senator Cassano and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Bruce Flax, and I am the interim Director of the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce representing over 500 members from the Stonington and Groton area. I am offering written testimony in support of: **HOUSE BILL NUMBER 5423**

***AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXPANSION OF PASSENGER TRAIN AND GROUND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES IN EASTERN CONNECTICUT.***

In my opinion **House Bill 5423** would significantly benefit the region and public transportation in Connecticut. It would promote transit-oriented development, reduce highway traffic congestion, reduce carbon emissions, and further the state's overall policy goals for economic development. In addition, it would provide support for our industrial base and retain our workforce.

Expanding passenger rail service is particularly important to our Chamber members as well as the Towns of Stonington and Groton, the City of Groton and the City of New London as Electric Boat's expansion plans already under way will translate into thousands of additional employees over the next twenty years, increasing traffic in an already congested road system and exacerbating existing parking challenges.

The expansion of passenger rail service in eastern Connecticut could potentially involve 2 different components.

The first proposes extending Shore Line East (SLE) passenger service from New London to Groton Center, Mystic, Stonington and Westerly, Rhode Island as a part of a larger regional commuter rail system that would connect and enhance service between New York, Providence and Boston.

The second part of the proposal is establishing a new commuter shuttle service using existing Providence and Worcester Railroad (P&W) tracks

that run north and south along the east bank of the Thames River connecting Pfizer, Electric Boat and the U.S. Navy Submarine Base. The P&W tracks run further to Norwich and north to Massachusetts making possible future expansion of commuter service in Connecticut. Existing rail infrastructure allows P&W freight trains to access Amtrak tracks east and west. In Groton there are three existing parallel tracks that would make transfers of passengers between trains possible at a new Groton Station.

Eighty percent of Electric Boat 's employees live outside of Groton and New London, and almost all commute by automobile. While the anticipated addition of thousands of new hires bodes well for economic growth, unless it is accompanied by modern commuter rail and local smart transit-oriented development plans, it will increase traffic congestion, have a negative environmental impact and reduce its economic benefit.

This proposal would significantly improve the movement of people from home to work (and play) with the benefit of reducing - rather than increasing - traffic congestion on I-95 and other roads, carbon pollution, commuting time and highway maintenance costs. These outcomes are a major goal of transit oriented development and would greatly contribute to the continued economic growth and success of southeastern Connecticut as a major industrial and tourism center in Connecticut.

Expanded passenger train service will benefit the economies of these SE CT Towns while simultaneously spurring real economic growth. In addition it will open up intra-state tourism bringin people down the 95 corridor to the Mytstic area without adding I95 traffic.

I urge passage of House Bill 5423 and expanded passenger rail service for eastern Connecticut. Thank you.

Respectfully,  
Bruce Flax  
Interim Director  
Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce

Date: February 18, 2021

