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Joe Courtney

Congress of the United States

2nd District, Connecticut

February 7, 2017

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

2348 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
P (202) 225-2076
F (202) 225-4977

DISTRICT OFFICES:

55 MAIN STREET, SUITE 250
NORWICH, CT 06360
P (860) 886-0139
F (860) 886-2974

77 HAZARD AVENUE, UNIT J
ENFIELD, CT 06082
P (860) 741-6011
F (860) 741-6036

The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David E. Price
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Frelinghuysen and Diaz-Balart and Ranking Members Lowey and Price:

I am writing to follow up on my conversations with you regarding a serious situation that now exists in the state of Connecticut. As we discussed, a portion of a report issued in December 2016 in the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) initiative on the Northeast Corridor (NEC), known as NEC FUTURE has created a cloud of uncertainty over the longstanding development of shoreline communities that date back to the founding of our state. While I strongly support improved passenger rail service along the NEC, one segment of the project—a bypass route that deviates from existing track line that would span the length of eastern Connecticut's shoreline, known as the Keynon Bypass—is completely untethered to any reality of the environment and living patterns of the region.

As you grapple with completion of a spending plan for Fiscal Year 2017 and begin work in Fiscal Year 2018, I am writing to confirm that there will be no funding whatsoever for implementation of FRA's report. Your committee of course, has its hands full, funding a long list of existing transportation infrastructure that has been fully vetted in past years, which I want to emphasize in the strongest terms possible, is not the case with the Kenyon Bypass. I request that no federal funding be made available to fund this bypass project.

When the FRA released the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) a year ago, it included the aforementioned bypass—spanning from Old Saybrook, Connecticut to Kenyon, Rhode Island and cutting through a number of towns in my district. While I understand that this proposal seeks to speed up rail service through Connecticut, it is clear that the FRA drew a line on a map without regard to the actual communities. As it stands, this bypass would cut through the middle of historic downtown Old Lyme and cuts a close path next to Olde Mistick Village—a popular tourism destination in the state.

After the FRA released the Tier 1 Draft EIS, the avalanche of public opposition made clear that the bypass was a non-starter. In fact, of the 3,000 total comments submitted for the NEC FUTURE plan, 1,200 were specifically about the Old Saybrook-Kenyon bypass. Unfortunately, when the Final Tier 1 EIS was released in December, rather than reevaluating the route of the entire bypass, the FRA chose to instead replace the aerial structure spanning the Connecticut River and through Old Lyme with a tunnel under the river and town—an estimated \$20 billion project on its own. Obviously, the environmental concerns involved with boring a tunnel under the Connecticut River's pristine estuary are vast, and without including such a proposal in a Draft EIS, I feel that input from the public and academic sectors has been significantly muted.

The towns along the eastern Connecticut shoreline are some of the oldest in our nation—rich with history, ecological treasures, and cultural centers. This proposed bypass, which was developed without a proper on-the-record dialogue with residents and key stakeholders, will devastate these communities and is already causing a dip in home values. I strongly urge you to keep this bypass in mind and explicitly deny any federal funding from being used on any construction related to this segment of the NEC FUTURE plan.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress