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House of Representatives
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Secretary Matthew A. Beaton, EOEEA
Attn: MEPA Office (Purvi Patel)
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Re: South Coast Rail DSEIR
EEA# 14346

Dear Secretary Beaton:

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed Phase 1 service route through Middleborough as part of the South Coast Rail (SCR) Project as described and more thoroughly assessed in the DSEIR; I urge you to issue findings pursuant to MEPA regulation section 11.08(8)(b) that deem and treat the draft SEIR as a final SEIR going forward. I believe that the draft report has sufficiently addressed the issues raised in the notice of project change certificate, as well as comments raised by concerned stakeholders, and I have highlighted a number of particularly meaningful portions of the report below.

Regional equity necessitates that the commonwealth seize the special opportunity presented by the availability of the Middleborough secondary line to provide rail service to Taunton and the South Coast years earlier than would otherwise be possible under the Stoughton alternative alone. The phased approach will provide greater mobility options to the only Gateway Cities within 50 miles of Boston that do not have access to regularly scheduled rail service. In

addition, this provides significant environmental and operational benefits that will accrue to the commonwealth as a whole.

From an environmental perspective, I echo the DSEIR's assessment and stress that Phase 1 poses none of the ecological and legal challenges that challenge the project north of Cotley Junction; crucially, the project change does not require the granting of a variance. Phase 1 service would utilize only Tier 3 and potentially Tier 4 diesel locomotives, among the cleanest diesel locomotives available, and would eliminate 66,400 vehicle miles traveled per day. In total, early service will provide a substantial reduction of 6,460 metric tons of greenhouse gases per year.

Further, operational advantages that flow from the proposed improvements to the Middleborough secondary line independently support much of the marginal cost incurred. Upgrading the right of way to accommodate active passenger rail builds needed redundancy into the commuter rail system, which, as recent winters have demonstrated, is crucial to responding to weather-related and mechanical service disruptions. Future flooding levels experienced through the portion of the Hockomock Swamp contemplated for the Stoughton route would likely limit the train lines' functionality in the coming decades as a result of climate change. Moreover, the related station improvements at Pilgrim Junction – which, critically, allow for a one-seat ride from Fall River and New Bedford and trip times that are in line with other end stations in the state's commuter rail system, represent a sound investment with respect to someday also adding commuter rail service south to Buzzards Bay.

In short, in light of these clear benefits, the logic of phasing this project is undeniable; early work on the Southern Triangle will only serve to move up any projected completion date for the Stoughton build, given that permitting challenges are likely to push any full build start date well into the next decade. With the South Coast becoming increasingly isolated from the greater Boston area due to increasing congestion, I urge approval of the draft report so that the proponent may move to implementation of design and construction.

Sincerely,



Rep. William M. Straus
10th Bristol District