

PVACR News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jen Cosgrove, Communications Dir., Pioneer Valley Advocates for Commuter Rail (PVACR), (413) 636-6707, pvacr@yahoo.com
Tom Irwin, Senior Attorney, Conservation Law Foundation, (603) 225-3060, tirwin@clf.org

NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL RAIL COALITION URGES FUNDING FOR RAIL

\$8 billion stimulus fund an important opportunity for New England

Springfield, MA (March 30, 2009) The recently formed New England Regional Rail Coalition (NERRC) is urging the investment of economic stimulus dollars in rail infrastructure in New England, to improve and expand existing rail services for the region. Pioneer Valley Advocates for Commuter Rail, a Western Mass-based grassroots group of rail advocates that is part of the coalition, has been working through the group to ensure that rail projects benefiting the Pioneer Valley will be considered for stimulus funding.

On March 27, NERRC wrote U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and other federal officials to inform them of important needs and investment opportunities in New England, as officials begin to decide how best to distribute \$8 billion of economic stimulus funding dedicated to intercity and high speed rail service.

“The stronger our connections are to economic centers throughout New England, the stronger we’ll be in Western Mass.,” said Jen Cosgrove, PVACR Communications Dir. “We are working with the NERRC to advocate for rail in New England, and especially the Pioneer Valley region, because acting in concert gives us a better chance of winning funding for building those strong connections.”

“A number of critical opportunities exist in the region to build a rail system that strengthens each of the New England states, and that better integrates the region not only with the rest of the country, but also with Canada,” said Tom Irwin, a senior attorney with the Conservation Law Foundation, a founding member of NERRC. “Our hope is that economic stimulus funds will be allocated to many of these projects, to begin the process of building a world class, sustainable transportation system for New England.”

The economic stimulus law – the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act – established a competitive grant program, with a total of \$8 billion to be distributed to high-speed and intercity rail projects. NERRC’s letter identifies several key projects which, individually and collectively, will help integrate and strengthen New England’s transportation system.

With specific regard to Western Massachusetts, the letter identifies:

1 – Rehabilitation of track infrastructure in Western Massachusetts for Amtrak’s Vermonter service. This project would involve the rehabilitation of rail infrastructure that parallels Interstate 91 through western Massachusetts’ Pioneer Valley, greatly benefiting Amtrak’s Vermonter service between White River Junction, VT and Springfield, MA. The Vermonter currently travels an extra 40 to 50 minutes to avoid inadequate track infrastructure. At an estimated cost of \$25 million, the project will make this detour unnecessary, allowing significant time- and fuel savings, as well as the restoration of rail service for two of the Pioneer Valley’s largest communities – Greenfield and Northampton. The Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization strongly supports this project, which would complement a plan to connect Springfield, MA and New Haven, CT with new commuter service.

2 - Establishment of commuter rail service between New Haven, CT and Springfield, MA. This project would bring much needed commuter rail service connecting New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, and numerous towns and cities in between. It also could provide important connections with Bradley International Airport, multiple links with Amtrak intercity service, and direct links to the existing Metro North and Shore Line East Commuter Rail in New Haven. The project would involve railroad right-of-way owned by Amtrak, and would complement north-south improvements for the Amtrak Vermonter rehabilitation project discussed above.

The New England Regional Rail Coalition is a new and growing collaboration of business interests, planning organizations, and transportation and environmental advocates which recognize the need and value of significantly greater investment in rail in the New England region. NERRC believes an enhanced and expanded rail network is essential to safeguarding New England’s economic competitiveness and reducing the economic, environmental and social costs associated with our region’s current, predominantly highway-oriented system.

For additional information regarding the Coalition and its work, including a copy of the Coalition’s letter to Secretary Lahood, please contact Jen Cosgrove at (413) 636-6707 or pvacr@yahoo.com or Tom Irwin at (603) 225-3060, ext. 15, or via email at tirwin@clf.org.

###

The Pioneer Valley Advocates for Commuter Rail (www.springfieldrail.org, pvacr.blogspot.com) is an all-volunteer group of concerned citizens in Western Mass and Connecticut who want to help bring commuter rail and its many transportation, economic, and environmental benefits to the region. Our supporters include commuters, students, job seekers, community leaders, business owners, policymakers, and rail enthusiasts, among others.

The Conservation Law Foundation (www.clf.org) works to solve the most significant environmental challenges facing New England. CLF’s advocates use law, economics and science to create innovative strategies to conserve natural resources, protect public health and promote vital communities in our region. Founded, in 1966, CLF is a nonprofit, member-supported organization with offices in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.