



NEWS RELEASE

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GREENBUSH LINE WITHOUT THE NORTH/SOUTH RAIL LINK: SOUTH STATION WILL EXCEED CAPACITY, SERVICE WILL SUFFER

BOSTON – The MBTA’s recently announced plan to move forward with the Greenbush Line to finally reconnect portions of the south shore to the regional rail system are music to the ears of organizations like the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club supports the project because of its ability to attract new public transportation riders and because it will reduce dangerous air pollutants from our skies.

The 17-mile route is expected to cost \$479 million, but will be an economic engine for communities on the route. The trains will run from Hingham into South Station in Boston, along with eight other commuter rail lines, and the Amtrak regional service.

The Sierra Club is, however, questioning how Greenbush will fit, along with eight other lines, into an already over-crowded South Station and is calling on the state to get serious about connecting North and South Stations with a one-mile train tunnel called the North/South Rail Link that would not disrupt surface traffic.

“The T has two reports that both say that South Station is at capacity and incapable of handling the additional trains,” said Jeremy Marin, Conservation Organizer for the Sierra Club. “They don’t need to start building the North/South Rail Link tomorrow,” said Marin, “but they do need to preserve the alignment so it can be built in the future.”

“If you keep pouring water into a glass, pretty soon it starts overflowing. South Station is now full,” Marin said.

The first report was commissioned by the MBTA and completed in 1999 as part of the New Bedford/Fall River Commuter Rail Extension Project. The U.S. Postal Service, who has signed a “Memorandum of Understanding,” or MOU with the T to sell their South Station Annex when they move out, commissioned the second report. Both reports, and statements of the MBTA General Manager, Michael Mulhern, point to the need for the North/South Rail Link in order to expand service.

The first report, done in 1999 by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, and Systra Consulting says “The total number of trains in operation [at South Station] during the morning and evening hour peak periods is nearing capacity.” In recognition of the T’s notoriously poor performance record, the report cites the need to correct this, saying “In the future, it will become increasingly important to adhere to a strict schedule in order [to move trains in and out of the station properly.]”

But because North and South Stations are the final stops of a “stub-end system” trains must back out of the station to go to temporary ‘holding yards.’ Without the North/South Rail Link, the storage space on either side is not being utilized efficiently. As the report says, “a result of a lack of storage space, contributes to a potential collapse of the operation in the evening peak.” That means that without the North/South Rail Link, trains will not be able to run as frequently.

The second report is even more emphatic in its statements about the inability of South Station to handle increased trains, saying “One issue of major concern is most certainly the ability of an already at-capacity South Station to cope with such growth.”

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It highlights the concerns of line expansion without the North/South Rail Link by saying that “The capacity of the entire south side system is now constrained, particularly at peak load times by the number of available platforms at South Station.” It further says, “there is very little if any room left to introduce any new service to South Station.”

The ability of the commuter trains to maintain an on-time schedule will be dramatically hindered by the addition of new trains, according to the report. “The situation is compounded by the planned introduction of additional train services such as the proposed Greenbush and Fall River/New Bedford extensions.” On-time performance during the evening rush-hour is estimated to “decrease to only 76 percent during the morning peak hour and 73 percent during the evening peak hour. A single late train causing delays to cascade through the entire peak period. This indicates a highly unstable operating plan that will not recover quickly or effectively from everyday random delays.”

By allowing trains to flow through the station and continue north, the North/South Rail Link would eliminate these issues according to the MBTA’s own studies. It would also allow for more frequent service by eliminating the stub-end system currently in place. The only other option, according to the reports, is to reduce train frequency, not a viable option when daily ridership is expected to double by 2025.

“The addition of Greenbush Line service plus proposed New Bedford/Fall River service while keeping all existing MBTA and imminent future Amtrak services intact creates such congestion during peak hours that it may be difficult or impossible to execute reliable day-to-day operations.”

In a statement to the Metropolitan Highway System Advisory Board during discussion of the Beacon Yards in Allston, General Manager Mulhern stated, “South Station, which serves commuters and passengers, is already near capacity.” He followed that up by stating his concerns about service reliability, saying “Trains must be brought in and out of the station on a precise schedule... otherwise there will be service delays.”

A recently completed MBTA study on the North/South Rail Link says that it would connect all the North and South side lines, taking 55,000 vehicle trips off the road every day, the elimination of 1 million miles driven daily, and prevent the emission of 583 tons of carbon dioxide every single day. The T has also said that the North/South Rail Link “would result in the largest absolute time savings of any commuter rail project examined.”

According to the MBTA, the Rail Link “would create a more efficient regional rail system... and extend intercity rail service.” The Rail Link would alleviate the congestion problems from new lines such as Greenbush and Fall River/New Bedford, saying that communities would actually “benefit from increased regional accessibility and enhanced service.” It would actually result in “an increase in the number of commuter rail trips.”

The report also says that the Rail Link would ease congestion on the rapid transit system by allowing commuters to go directly to their intended location and would result “in a net reduction of roughly 44,000 trips on the MBTA rapid transit system.”

The Rail Link would actually meet Governor Romney and Doug Foy’s stated goals of better ‘transit oriented development.’ “Unlike the existing hub and spoke commuter rail system that is designed to bring commuters into Boston in the morning and return them to the suburbs in the evening, the rail system created by the rail link would increase opportunities for suburb-to-suburb and “reverse commutes.... Over the long term, this enhanced accessibility has the potential to increase the economic desirability and development and job creation potential of the stations, including those in older, outlying urban areas.”

“There are lots of great public transportation projects on the table,” said Marin. “But if we don’t put them together properly, these reports show that none of them will function. If Governor Romney is serious about improving public transportation in Massachusetts, and is serious about clearing our roads and cleaning our air, then he needs to get serious about the North/South Rail Link,” said Marin.

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