



February 11, 2020

The Honorable Charles D. Baker, Jr.
Governor
State House, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

Disruption is far too weak a word for what is coming to commuters west of Boston once the I-90 Allston Multimodal Project gets underway in 2022. Long-term lane reductions along the turnpike stretching between Boston University and the Charles River will upend automobile travel to and from Boston.

The project should be used as an opportunity to get more people out of their cars and onto the Worcester Commuter Rail Line (Worcester Line) by improving and accelerating train service, especially considering the many transit-oriented development projects in the works along the Worcester Line corridor. Yet MassDOT's Scoping Report presented to the public and to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) states that under the Hybrid Option, the Worcester Line will be operating on a single track for up to half of the ten-year construction time in the project area. Single track service for any of the project period is unacceptable and will be a major deterrent to ridership.

In its Scoping Report, MassDOT notes that the Hybrid Option, which includes elevating Soldiers Field Road over I-90, will take more time than other options. The report states that *"construction staging for this option will necessarily require more time than other Throat options to move major utilities, construct the temporary trestle, and then sequentially construct the proposed railroad, interstate, and parkway infrastructure."* The "Throat" is the area where the BU viaduct presently stands.

Commuters, whose lives are going to be uprooted for at least a decade, should get the benefit of seeing cost differentials for both construction and long-term maintenance as well as project durations for alternative infrastructure design options, yet only one option was presented for the Throat area.

Pioneer Institute recommends that MassDOT revise its Scoping Report and that a modified at-grade option for I-90 and Soldiers Field Road in the throat area that includes the Paul Dudley White bicycle and pedestrian path as a bridge over the river away from the riverbank to provide for parkland with neighborhood access be submitted to FHWA for consideration.

Additionally, in designing West Station, planners should consider how attractive the stop will be for those coming from points west once the Allston development is near complete. Traveling on the Worcester Line to South Station from West Station will take about 15 minutes and many will no doubt seek employment in the newly transformed Allston to save a half an hour in their daily commutes. It would be wise to consider a design with four tracks rather than three to accommodate future growth.

Also, the turnpike structures over Route 128 are about eight years older than the BU viaduct, are also structurally deficient, and in dire need of repair. The work on those bridges should be done before 2022 when the Allston project begins to avoid concurrent projects that compound traffic woes.

Finally, Pioneer Institute recommends that the following additional actions be considered for mitigation:

- Maintain two-track Worcester Line service throughout the construction period

- Begin a pilot project to electrify key areas of the Worcester Line to improve commutes and increase ridership
- Expand service on the Worcester Line with more frequent service and higher capacity than presently exists
- End plans for the West Station layover facility to avoid additional traffic on the Worcester Line in the Boston area
- Build platforms for completely level boarding at more commuter rail stations, beginning with Back Bay Station, to reduce dwell time
- Expedite certain proposed design upgrades for Newton's commuter rail stops to improve access and facilitate faster peak-hour boarding
- Facilitate partnerships among the MBTA, communities, and private firms to increase parking capacity during project construction near the Green Line, Worcester Line, and bus stations in the I-90 corridor
- Provide transparency on the plan to provide Kendall Square transit access from West Station to benefit commuters from the west
- Where practical, permanently expand station parking lots or consider higher-capacity garages
- Provide MBTA bus service for the I-90 corridor from Park and Ride lots to Boston during construction
- Conduct a feasibility study for improving the Newton Corner exit interchange, addressing design deficiencies of exit ramps and preventing traffic spillover onto I-90
- Encourage pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements near existing Worcester Line and Green Line stations
- Increase MBTA coordination with the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority and the Worcester Regional Transit Authority, including expanded service during construction
- Install electronic speed limit signs that adjust to traffic conditions, maximizing road efficiency
- Create numerous opportunities for western commuters to provide feedback to MassDOT on these mitigation efforts, including public meetings, special web forums, and outreach efforts
- Ensure that residents from MetroWest and Central Massachusetts are represented on the MassDOT board throughout the construction period
- Establish the finance plan for the project in an open and transparent manner and form a finance plan task force with toll payer and other public representation
- Seek extensive federal funding for the project and continue to work with private organizations to help fund the project

Sincerely,

Mary Z. Connaughton
 Director of Government Transparency