

Congressman Seth Moulton's Vision for Massachusetts' Rail Transit

The MBTA is an epic mess, and housing is the number one issue in Massachusetts. What we all need to better understand is the intimate connection between the two.

Access to housing—and, in turn, access to the best jobs from where you live—is essential to grow our economy. Consider this: If you could get from Springfield to Boston in 45 minutes, and connect seamlessly to any of our existing commuter or subway lines—with fast, reliable service—housing options would grow exponentially. Today, you cannot realistically live in Western Massachusetts and work in the East; you can't even live on the North Shore and work on the South Shore or vice versa.

We're both stuck in traffic and stuck in the past. This has to change.

The MBTA's transformation starts with a wholesale culture shift at the organization under the leadership of Mr. Eng, the newly announced General Manager. We need the T to be a good place to work that attracts and retains its workforce. And we should look to leading international peers for best practices.

The MBTA also cannot continue to restrict speeds and forgo long overdue, basic maintenance and track work, especially while many of the MBTA's peers operate larger systems with no speed restrictions at all. At the same time, there are multiple federal grants available that will help not only address these issues but allow us to complete long-discussed projects.

As the MBTA starts a new chapter, we must prioritize the right projects and sequence them correctly to dramatically change the speed and options for moving around the Commonwealth.

This means solidifying a vision for the future rooted in the real economic needs and aspirations of the region.

Here is such a vision, and a plan to get there.

Build the North-South Rail Link

- **Step 1.** Complete the Environmental Impact Statement
- **Step 2.** Secure the required parcels as part of a City of Boston development plan
- **Step 3.** Establish a P3 to advance the project

The North-South Rail Link (NSRL) will do more to increase housing and job access in the region than any other infrastructure project. When completed, the 2.8-mile tunnel will reduce travel times between North and South stations from 30 minutes to 2, but the real purpose of the link is to provide the foundation for a regional rail network, enabling faster-than-car travel times throughout the Boston metropolitan area. It could also create a new transit accessible and climate resilient neighborhood near Widett Circle that would help pay for a majority of the project on its own through tax revenue and the economic opportunities it creates. Add to this the money saved by forgoing the South Station Expansion (\$2 billion), and the project becomes a no brainer.

Action needed: Complete the Environmental Impact Statement, secure the required parcels as part of a City of Boston development plan, protect the right of way through local or state legislation, establish a P3 to advance the project.

Start Building East-West Rail

- **Step 1.** Revise the EIS to establish future high-speed rail service
- **Step 2.** Build the faster segments first
- **Step 3.** Move west with increasing service frequencies as travel times decrease

East-West Rail (EWR) will connect metro Boston to Worcester and Springfield, and high-speed service will enable 25-minute service from Worcester to Boston. While the corridor is well suited for high-speed service, the current plan for EWR uses tracks laid out in the 19th century that can't handle modern trains. (It's like trying to run the Turnpike down Rte 9.) This project will decrease traffic congestion and help meet Massachusetts' environmental goals, all while enabling massive economic growth for Western Massachusetts. If we don't commit the funds to complete the project in its entirety, it can be built in phases as France has done with its TGV network. The first phase should be Worcester to Boston.

But we need our priorities to be in order. Consider that the South Station Expansion is slated to cost up to \$1b more than it cost to build a 100+ mile high speed rail line in Morocco. It isn't impossible for the Commonwealth to pursue this project even without the help of federal dollars. Especially when Morocco, which has a GDP that is ¼ that of Massachusetts.

***Action needed:** Revise the EIS for high-speed rail service; build the faster segments first; move west with increasing service frequencies as travel times decrease.*

Transform the Commuter Rail into a Regional Rail System

- **Step 1.** Establish a regional rail pilot on the Providence Line
- **Step 2.** Electrify the Environmental Justice Corridor
- **Step 3.** Convert additional lines to regional rail

The Commonwealth has an under-utilized asset in its 400-mile commuter rail network. We must transform it into a system that can get you around metro Boston *faster than driving*. However, this cannot be achieved until service frequency increases, each line is electrified, each stop has level boarding platforms, and modern electric trains, not more noisy diesel trains, are procured. Regional rail service could start almost immediately with a few small investments on the Providence Line, but additional lines should be transformed over time and transferred to through service as the North-South Rail Link is completed. When finished, it will provide myriad health and economic benefits to cities like Lynn, Chelsea, Lowell and Salem while improving the speed of travel for everyone in Eastern Massachusetts.

***Action Needed:** Establish a regional rail pilot on the Providence Line, start electrifying and building high platforms on Environmental Justice Corridors first, transfer lines to continuous service through the rail link as the tunnel and additional electrification is completed.*

This is a pivotal moment for the MBTA. Under new leadership, we must invest in smart projects that don't squander the opportunities in front of us. Because we face unprecedented failures at the T at the same time as unprecedented federal resources are available for investment, only transformative change can meet the moment.