

North-South Rail Link study still in planning stage nearly 1,000 days after directive

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By Michael P. Norton State House News Service

Supporters of an underground rail tunnel linking North Station and South Station in downtown Boston have long called for Gov. Charlie Baker to come on board and claim the rail link could at least soften the need for or scope of the long-planned expansion of South Station.

And while Baker has so far not come around to the points of view of rail link backers like Govs. Michael Dukakis and William Weld, he has agreed to update the state's antiquated study of the rail link, an idea that's been around for a very long time.



Hopefully, clearer skies ahead for the MBTA.

Before Baker took office, the Legislature and Gov. Deval Patrick on April 18, 2014 - 997 days ago - directed the executive branch to spend \$2 million to update draft environmental impact statements and reports concerning the North-South Rail Link.

"Let's do the study and see what it says," Baker said in a May 2016 radio interview, which came after project proponents prodded his administration. "I mean we should do the study. Sometimes we end up on what I would describe as sort of a ready, fire, aim when it comes to some of this stuff. When you're talking about billions of dollars I think it's appropriate that we be cautious and careful."

In October 2016, the News Service inquired about the study's status. Massachusetts Department of Transportation spokeswoman Jacquelyn Goddard said then, "Several weeks ago MassDOT provided a draft scope of work to members of the Task Force and once the scope of work is finalized next steps will be taken."

Asked about the rail link study's status on Friday, MBTA spokesman Joe Pesaturo said in an email, "Staff is putting... final touches on the study's scope of work. An RFP will be released soon."

According to MassDOT, state officials last performed planning work for the North-South Rail Link in 2003, based on a concept design last modified in 1997.

State transportation officials say the state must initially identify and cost right-of-way needs, confirm or amend engineering assumptions, update cost and ridership estimates, examine potential service plans, and examine potential project benefits. After that first phase of work, MassDOT will decide whether to move to a second phase which would involve preliminary design and engineering, developing a more detailed cost estimate, examining procurement and ownership options and analyzing funding and financing options.