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State legislature approves \$10M for environmental study of North South Rail Link

[Don Seiffert](#) Jun 7, 2018, 1:07pm



State legislators will send a bill to Gov. Baker's desk authorizing him to spend \$10 million on an environmental study of the North South Rail Link.

As the results of a year-long study of the North South Rail Link are expected within days, the state legislature is expected to send Gov. [Charlie Baker](#) a bill today that includes \$10 million for an environmental study of the idea.

The question remains whether Baker — who has been a skeptic of the plan in the past — will act on it.

On Thursday, the Senate was expected to approve a \$3.87 billion bond bill that's already been passed by the House. It includes money for “updating and completing the draft environmental impact report... on the North South Rail Link.”

The money was secured by Sen. [Jamie Eldridge](#), a Democrat from Acton. According to a statement from his office, Eldridge believes that the long-proposed tunnel between North and South stations would “allow for easier movement across the region’s 138 stations and link lines north of Boston to Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor... with the potential to reduce the amount of cars driving into Boston by as much as 55,000 vehicles a day.”

“If we’re serious about dramatically improving Massachusetts's crippled transportation system, and improving the quality of life for all Massachusetts workers, then we must be bold in our 21st century vision of public transit in the commonwealth,” said Sen. Eldridge, who chairs the legislature’s MBTA caucus. The bill now goes to Gov. Baker, who has 10 days to sign it. A spokeswoman for the administration declined to say whether Baker plans to sign the bill, nor whether he would be likely to spend the money for the environmental study once it’s authorized.

In the past, however, Baker has been lukewarm to the idea, which was part of the original Central Artery Project, but was cancelled to get federal funding. The plan has had a resurgence in recent years — largely thanks to the vocal support of U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton — and last year [was endorsed as part of the state Democratic party's platform](#).

Baker has endorsed a separate plan to add new tracks at South Station and to expand the station overall as a way to address congestion in the commuter rail system. Many rail link supporters believe that the \$1.6 billion South Station expansion would be unnecessary if the rail link project was completed instead, and say that the link would do a better job of making the entire system faster and more efficient.

In an acknowledgment of Baker’s past reluctance to embrace the rail link, Eldridge said that the \$10 million earmark in the bond bill “sends a strong message to Governor Baker of the growing support the North-South Rail Link has in the legislature, and amongst the public at large.”

Baker’s view of the idea will be influenced by a study of its costs, which is due to be made public later this month. Last July, [the state hired](#) Boston-based Arup USA Inc. to conduct the study. While the original intent of that study was to put a price tag on the project and to estimate its potential benefits, some rail link supporters have since soured on the effort, saying that very little of the study's \$1.5 million cost is being spent to examine the project’s benefits.