



Boston City Council
July 29, 2019 hearing
Docket #0879, North South Rail Link
Statement by John Kyper, Massachusetts Sierra Club

Thank you on behalf of the Massachusetts Sierra Club for inviting us to appear at this afternoon's hearing. I am Co-Chair of our Transportation Committee with Clint Richmond.

The Chapter has been a longtime supporter of the North South Rail Link. In 1990 it filed suit in federal court against the vent stacks of the Central Artery Project for their adverse effects on the ambient air quality in the adjacent neighborhoods, arguing that incorporating the Rail Link into the project would be the most effective means to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gases by cutting the number of cars that would be traveling into and through the city.

I've long been very interested in transportation policy, and it was about this time that I was just beginning to advocate for improved public transportation in Boston's urban core as a longtime Roxbury resident and member of the MBTA's "captive audience" of riders who depend upon its services every day.

I first learned of the North-South Rail Link in the mid-1970s while a student at UMass-Boston, through a story in the Boston *Phoenix* detailing the proposed "Big Dig" to tunnel I-93 under downtown Boston. The article mentioned that a rail connection between North and South Stations would be included, and I was intrigued—it made such perfect sense! Thus, I was sorely disappointed a decade later when the Rail Link was cut out of the Central Artery Project in the congressional effort to get federal funding.

To me, it remained a good idea—one that was too good to be forgotten.

In 1987 the new Orange Line opened through my neighborhood. For nearly 30 years until I retired, I boarded daily at Roxbury Crossing on my way to work here in City Hall. The logic of a rail connection between North and South Stations would occur to me every morning on my way to work when my train pulled into Back Bay Station, to behold a wall of commuters waiting to transfer to my already overcrowded train. (And subway riders from Charlestown and Lechmere have the same uncomfortable experience coming into North Station.) A rail link that carries commuters directly into downtown without the necessity of switching modes would avoid the mutual inconvenience to both sets of passengers. And riders on the Downeaster from Maine would not have to transfer twice to continue on to Providence or New York.

For over a decade I have helped formulate transportation policy for the Mass. Sierra Club, where I have weighed in on many issues affecting Boston and the region. In recent years, I found myself devoting more and more energy addressing issues like the North South Rail Link and the current, inadequate plan to expand South Station as a stub-end terminal, that I was directed to concentrate on the North-South Rail Link and comment for the Chapter whenever appropriate.

The problems that would be further aggravated by the South Station Expansion (SSX) project, with increasing numbers of diesel locomotives spewing their fumes and particulates over densely

settled urban neighborhoods from Downtown to North Dorchester, demonstrate why an electrified Rail Link would be of major environmental benefit to many thousands of inner city residents.

The Rail Link would allow for one seat or single transfer rides across the city, encouraging people to take public transportation who cannot do so today due to the inconvenience of repeated transfers. This would help decrease vehicle miles traveled and get people off the highways, reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.

The Rail Link would also give better service and rail connections to the Fairmount Line, allowing for one-seat or one-transfer rides to many destinations north of Boston. This would allow more access to jobs for many residents of Greater Boston and the region.

A news story by Aidan Ryan in the June 27 Boston Globe, “Chinatown has worst air quality in Massachusetts, report says,” quotes Richard Chang, former headmaster of Josiah Quincy Upper School, on how “dangerous” air pollution can be—even on a seemingly clear day: “[T]oday you got the blue sky and the sun, and it feels like it should be perfectly fine to play out here. What’s unseen are these very dangerous particles emitted by cars, the diesel train, and then the passing highway vehicles. And the kids are just inhaling it in.”

Several years ago, I participated in a series of public meetings on the North Station Area Mobility Action Plan, convened by the Boston Planning and Development Agency and the Boston Transportation Department.

Unfortunately, the Action Plan made only perfunctory mention of several potential projects, small and large, that have been conceived by outside agencies and would also have major impact on the study area. The most significant of these is of course the North South Rail Link, which would immeasurably expedite the journeys of many commuters and long-distance travelers arriving at North Station. The Rail link would relieve thousands of passengers from the burden of having to change transportation modes here, taking pressure off our overburdened subway system and the surrounding streets. Constructing this project would give these riders direct access to South Station, a proposed Central Station, and points south—providing better connections to many areas including the Seaport and obviating the need for many of the buses that currently congest the neighborhood during rush hours.

This forward-looking city should not be constrained by the limited thinking of MassDOT with its already obsolete plan to expand South Station. We must see the larger issues at stake and craft the most appropriate solutions! The Massachusetts Sierra Club urges the Boston City Council to approve Docket #0879 and support the North South Rail Link.