

Moulton, Mass. business leaders urge bigger study of North South Rail Link

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By Don Seiffert

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A dozen big-name Massachusetts business leaders — as well as 28 of the state’s mayors and three-dozen state legislators — have signed onto a letter penned by Congressman Seth Moulton urging Gov. Charlie Baker to conduct a full-fledged study of the benefits of the North South Rail Link.

David Torchiana, CEO of Partners Healthcare; Robert Beal, CEO of Related Beal; and John Fish, CEO and chairman of Suffolk Construction Co. are among the business leaders who are backing the request, which was delivered to Baker’s office Tuesday. The letter argues that the state needs to fund a federal Environmental Impact Statement on the NSRL, in order to weigh its merits versus a competing project to address congestion on the commuter rail, the South Station Expansion project. The state has already invested \$42.5 million in an EIS for the so called SSX, the results of which are expected next June, but has not yet broken ground on the \$1.6 billion project.



U.S. HOUSE OFFICE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Congressman Seth Moulton

“Before investing in a short-term solution like SSX, the commonwealth should rigorously evaluate alternatives capable of producing equal or greater transportation benefits,” he wrote in the letter. “Only a full Federal Environmental Impact Statement for the NSRL will enable the The letter cites several reasons that Baker — who has so far been lukewarm to the rail link idea — to authorize the study. He argues that the NSRL will likely have a better cost and longevity profile: The South Station Expansion would actually cost \$2.3 billion, including the cost of the relocation of the U.S. Post office, Moulton contends, but would relieve congestion at South Station for just 10 years. The NSRL would provide “at least 60 percent more capacity relief” at South Station, and would also help North Station, he said.

Moulton also says that annual savings due to the NSRL's ability to connect southern and northern lines "have been estimated to be between \$84.2 and \$106.7 million per year," although the letter didn't say where those estimates came from.

Contacted for this story, Baker's office said that the state has already commissioned a "feasibility reassessment" study of the project which is due to be completed next summer, the results of which will determine the next steps. "The North-South Rail Link Feasibility Reassessment will update a prior study on a proposed rail tunnel connecting North Station and South Station and determine whether further technical and financial analysis is warranted," wrote Joe Pesaturo, spokesman for the MBTA, in an email.

In an interview this week, Moulton said the rail link — a proposed tunnel between North and South stations that would connect commuter rail lines on both sides of the city, easing congestion — could have big implications for the state's ability to attract businesses like Amazon.com Inc.'s proposed second headquarters. Moulton said the rail link "should be the most compelling argument" for bringing Amazon here, since it would help two of the area's biggest drawbacks: its lack of affordable housing, and its traffic.

"I think the rail link should have been the centerpiece of this proposal," said Moulton. "There is no more important transportation proposal for the area's transportation initiative." Just today, the Boston Herald reported that industry experts cite Boston's traffic problems as a barrier to its chances of luring Amazon.

The support from the state's business leaders could be key to swaying Baker's stance on the project, which has been proposed for decades and is now regaining steam due in part to Moulton's support. The project's cost, which has been a big barrier, has recently been touted as smaller than originally thought after a recent analysis by students and faculty at Harvard University said the price could be as low as \$3.8 billion for a slimmed-down version or as much as \$5.8 billion for a larger one — lower than previously thought due to advances in tunnel boring technology.

Moulton also said he believes chances of federal funding for the NSRL is "strong," since the project completes a rail connection from Washington DC to Maine. Unlike the SSX, he said, that potentially opens it up to funds from the Federal Railroad Administration.

Other business leaders who signed onto the letter as of Tuesday morning (Moulton's office said more names may be added) include: Peter J. Griffin, president of the New Hampshire Railroad Revitalization Association; Yossi Sheffi, director of the MIT Center for Transportation and Logistics; Chet Atkins, CEO of ADS Ventures; David Begelfer, CEO of NAIOP Massachusetts; Jim Stone, CEO of Plymouth Rock Assurance Corporation; Patrick Moscaritolo, president and CEO of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau; David Hatem, attorney at Donovan Hatem; Bill Meaney, CEO of Iron Mountain; and Steve Grossman, former state treasurer and former head of Grossman Marketing Group.

Besides 36 state legislators and 28 mayors who signed the letter, six of the state's 9 Congresspeople also support the project, according to John Businger, a longtime supporter of the rail link, as well as both members of Congress from New Hampshire.

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