

Commissioner Amey Morrella  
79 Elm Street  
Hartford, CT 06106

Commissioner Joseph F. Marie  
2800 Berlin Turnpike  
Newington, CT 06131-7546

**RE: Connecticut Valley Railroad State Park - Recent TIGER application to enable freight on the railroad line**

Dear Commissioners:

At their March meeting, the chief elected officials of the Connecticut River Estuary Region, meeting as the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization, held a productive discussion with staff and Board members of the Valley Railroad, relating to the recent TIGER application to upgrade the Connecticut Valley Railroad State Park rail line to carry freight. This application was submitted as part of the State Department of Transportation's seven part application for upgrading rail freight infrastructure statewide. Although the TIGER application was not approved at the federal level, the arguments set forth in the application continue to be of great concern to the members of the MPO.

When the application was prepared and submitted, there was no communication between the Valley Railroad, CONNDOT, DEP and the MPO. The MPO first learned about the proposal through a phone call from Congressman' Courtney's office, as his staff sought further information on the application. MPO members felt strongly that the application misrepresented the potential for freight service along the Valley line, especially when it speculated about transporting waste materials. The application referred to moving waste collected by the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority (CRRA), much to the dismay of the CRRA Chair, who is also the Chair of the MPO. CRRA staff present for the discussion stated that that organization has determined that moving waste by rail over a distance of less than 500 miles is not economical. CRRA had no prior knowledge of the pending application.

Concern was also expressed that the valley railroad line was purchased as a state park, for conservation purposes, not primarily as a transportation corridor. The TIGER application minimized the potential environmental impact of the improvement and subsequent use of the line for freight, particularly as the line closely follows the shoreline of the Connecticut River. This portion of the Connecticut River is recognized for its wetlands of international significance (Ramsar), as a National Heritage River, as a "Last Great Place" by the Nature Conservancy, and as a State of Connecticut designated greenway. The regional Gateway Commission was created by the General Assembly in 1973 to "preserve the unique, scenic, ecological, scientific and historic values" of the lower river and abutting towns "for the enjoyment of present and

future generations". The ecological and cultural heritage of the river requires careful consideration of projects of potentially significant impact.

The application claimed broad support for the proposal among area residents and businesses, but the town leadership and many residents in the towns of Old Saybrook, Essex, Deep River, Chester and Haddam had very strong objections. There was also anger that towns most affected were not informed of the application.

The March meeting resulted in an agreement by almost all present that any significant changes to the Valley railroad line would likely have long term consequences for the region. There was concurrence that any proposals under consideration for the State Park by the Valley Railroad, DEP or DOT should be thoroughly aired and integrated with the region's long range transportation plan, as prepared by the MPO. Officials of the Valley Railroad agreed that it was desirable and necessary to participate in regional transportation planning efforts of the Connecticut River Estuary Metropolitan Planning Organization to assure a future integrated transportation network that would be compatible with the future land use plans of the area.

The Connecticut River Estuary Metropolitan Planning Organization requests that the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Transportation keep the members of the MPO fully informed as to any plans to change the status or uses of the Connecticut Valley Railroad State Park. Thank you for your assistance.

For the MPO,

Linda Krause  
CRERPA Executive Director  
CREMPO staff