

## **Dispelling the Myths Surrounding the Proposed New Bedford/Fall River rail line**

**Myth:** We can afford the cost of the proposed New Bedford/Fall River rail line.

**Fact:** The proposed rail is estimated to cost \$1 billion dollars (see, e.g., “SouthCoast rail price tag could rise to \$1B,” by David Kibbe, Standard Times, June 3, 2005; “Money Woes could derail New Bedford transit plan,” Casey Ross, Boston Herald, February 7, 2007). Moreover, annual operating costs were estimated to be \$17 million in the 2002 FEIR. The MBTA cannot afford this astronomical cost; in fact, the state is already planning to take over a portion of the T’s \$8.1 billion debt (see “Group seeks debt relief for the T,” Mac Daniel, Boston Globe, January 9, 2007). The T’s debt is currently the highest of any transit agency in the country, and payments and interest on its debt comprise 27% of its operating budget (Id.).

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**Myth:** The proposed New Bedford/Fall River rail line is cost effective.

**Fact:** The MBTA estimates that the proposed rail will bring in 2,953 new riders (see FEIR), although we believe that this ridership figure is incorrect and far too high. Nevertheless, using the T’s estimate, the proposed rail line would cost \$338,638 per person to construct, and a whopping \$8,260 per person, per mile of transit. While we understand that the rail is not meant to be profitable, we believe this additional debt is not warranted given the estimated ridership figures.

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**Myth:** The proposed rail line will improve air quality.

**Fact:** The proposed train will actually pollute the air more than the cars they replace on the roads (see “Questions and Answers: Diesel Commuter Rail Air Quality Impact,” prepared by Kevin O’Keefe, Technical Resources for Environmental Quality, March, 1998). Moreover, for identical numbers of commuters moved, MBTA diesel trains emit two to five times the amount of NO<sub>x</sub>, SO<sub>x</sub>, and particulate matter as diesel buses, and five to ten times as much as automobiles (Id.).

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**Myth:** Impacts to the Hockomock Swamp can be mitigated.

**Fact:** The Nature Conservancy has identified the Hockomock Swamp as “a resource of national importance based on its relatively undisturbed natural conditions....it is among the most important wetland complexes remaining in the North Atlantic Coast eco-region stretching from Delaware to Maine.” Former Secretary of the EOE John DeVillars stated that “[the Hockomock’s] uniqueness cannot be overstated...the resource value of this area is immense....as fragmentation occurs elsewhere, the ‘Hock’ will become one of the few places in eastern Massachusetts with relatively large and contiguous habitat.” Bisecting the Hockomock Swamp with a diesel train would result in water quality

degradation, including the degradation of drinking water supplies, and fragment a unique and irreplaceable ecosystem. Nothing can mitigate for these proposed impacts to the Hockomock.

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**Myth:** The proposed rail line will lead to “smart growth.”

**Fact:** The Commonwealth has been pushing “smart growth” and affordable housing, and they have declared that Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is the best way to accomplish these goals. However, creating dense residential developments near train stations does not result in smart growth unless there is a comparable transfer of development rights elsewhere in the town which will offset the potential for sprawl. In other words, TODs without a corresponding set aside of land in the same municipality simply speeds growth and adds to a town’s economic burdens. This is *not* smart growth - it is dumb development.

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**Myth:** The proposed rail line will be the silver bullet for the economic woes of Fall River and New Bedford.

**Fact:** The Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston at Harvard University recently released a report which stated that the number of people using mass transportation to get to work is largely unchanged by the addition of new stations (See “The Impacts of Commuter Rail in Greater Boston,” by Eric Beaton, Harvard University, September, 2006). Moreover, commuter rail is skewed towards serving the affluent (See “Commuter Rail’s False Promise,” Tom Keane, Boston Globe Magazine, December 31, 2006). It is unclear as to how the proposed rail line will help the economic situation of New Bedford and Fall River. The Commonwealth should investigate alternate ways to spur economic growth within the cities that do not involve the commuter rail.