

**Comments of Roy Nascimento
President & CEO
New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce**

**Before a public hearing of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the Draft Environmental
Impact Statement on SouthCoast Rail**

**Wednesday, May 4, 2011
Qualters Middle School
Mansfield, MA**

7:00 P.M.

Good evening, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment today on the draft environmental impact statement prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the SouthCoast Rail project. My name is Roy Nascimento and I am President and CEO of the New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce.

The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce is a private, non-profit business association that serves nearly 1,000 member businesses of all sizes from virtually all industries in ten communities in the SouthCoast region. Our mission is to serve the interests of member businesses while advocating business advancement, economic growth and job creation for the benefit of New Bedford and the SouthCoast region of Massachusetts.

Let me begin by thanking and commending the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its partners for a thorough and objective analysis of the South Coast Rail Project in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement dated February, 2011.

The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce remains a strong advocate for the extension of commuter rail service from Boston to New Bedford and other communities in the SouthCoast region of Massachusetts.

The Chamber agrees with the conclusions that identify the Stoughton alternative as providing the best service to the communities in the SouthCoast region and providing the least environmental impact. The fact that the Stoughton route is served mostly by trains already in service as opposed to dozens of new trips on an already heavily traveled corridor make the Stoughton alternative the only viable choice from a transportation perspective. Also, the fact that the Stoughton route follows rail beds that were in use a little over fifty years ago is an obvious factor in minimizing the environmental impact.

We believe the final report should include double tracking the rail lines to provide future capacity and faster service. It is important that any design, permitting, and building of the rail service be completed with an eye towards enhancing or expanding the service in the future.

In addition, the Chamber also believes that travel time and frequency of service will be important factors to the success of this project. To provide the greatest impact, we urge that travel time

from the SouthCoast to Boston South Station be no more than seventy minutes. Shorter commuting time gives businesses greater access to more workers with specialized skills, while residents of the region gain connectivity to employment opportunities along the Route 128 corridor and in the business districts of Boston. We also encourage full service throughout the day to meet demand and encourage ridership. A minimum of three trains in the morning peak period and three trains in the afternoon peak period should be utilized. This includes full weekend service and inter-city service between Taunton, New Bedford and Fall River to encourage regional mobility. We would also like to see a late evening train service to Boston to be considered for residents and visitors. Weekend and evening service would help support our growing tourism economy by connecting the Boston area to our new hotel, our national park, our ferry service to Martha's Vineyard, and our vibrant arts and restaurant scene here in the SouthCoast.

The Chamber believes commuter rail extension is critical to economic development and growth in the region and in keeping with long-range "Smart Growth" planning strategies that support the environment and encourage development around priority development areas. Commuter rail extension to the SouthCoast will also help meet existing and future demand for public transportation and enhance regional mobility for residents, businesses, and visitors to the region by reducing congestion and increasing travel choice.

On behalf of our Chamber member businesses and their thousands of employees, we encourage the Army Corps and its partners to complete the review and make the determination of the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) as quickly as possible. This is an important project for the SouthCoast region. The cities of Fall River and New Bedford are some of the largest municipalities within a 50-mile radius of Boston without rail transit service, service that will provide a much needed link between job opportunities and affordable housing for the residents of the state. We have been waiting for the restoration of this rail service for more than two decades and we are anxious for this process to be completed, so that the state can move onto the next critical step in the project.

Thank you. We appreciate your consideration of our views on this very important economic development issue.

Roy M. Nascimento, IOM
New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce