THE TRAIN CAMPAIGN

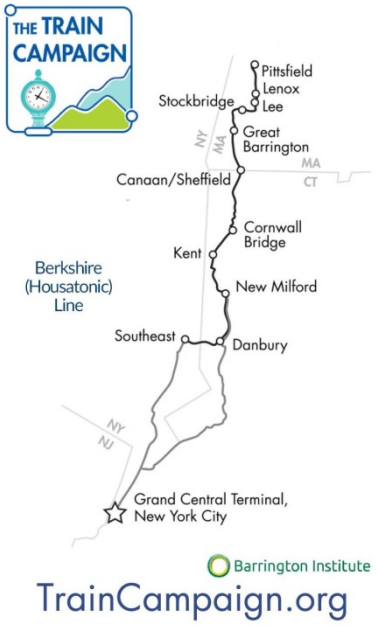
Summary Information
MA HD.2405, An Act Funding a Study of Passenger Service on the Housatonic Rail Line

The Housatonic Line—also known as the Berkshire Line—was the route to western Connecticut and the Berkshires from 1842 until 1971, when service stopped along with similar closures across the United States. It operates today as a freight line run by Housatonic Railroad Company.

The Massachusetts portion of the track was purchased in 2014. From the agreement: "MassDOT's acquisition of the Railroad Assets is intended to facilitate the Commonwealth's long-term plans to restore regional passenger train service linking the New York City metropolitan area and the Northeast Corridor megalopolis generally with the Berkshire region of western Massachusetts. The acquisition of the subject Railroad Assets is one step in what MassDOT anticipates will be an involved, multi-step process that ultimately will lead to the establishment of a new railroad passenger service route in the Northeast."

Restoration of passenger service will be consistent with the MA administration's commitment to meet the needs of all regions of the Commonwealth as set out in Choices for Stewardship, the 2018 report of the Governor's Commission on the Future of Transportation. The line is included in the North Atlantic Rail initiative, which has Hartford mayor Luke Bronin as co-chair.

A project of the Barrington Institute, a 501(c)3 corporation.



The majority of second-home owners and visitors to Litchfield and Berkshire counties travel from New York City. In addition, a 2018 survey found that 40% of the interest in NYC passenger rail came from residents who now travel by car or by train from Hudson (Amtrak) or Wassaic and other stations (Metro-North). The restored Housatonic Line will be compatible with existing travel patterns and will serve (and attract) county residents as well as tourists.

Upgrades, Repairs, and Research

- $43+ million: Housatonic (Berkshire) Line upgrade in Massachusetts (from the CT border to Pittsfield, MA). In Q4 2019, 45,000 new ties were installed. Rail-bed ballast was laid in 2020 along with more ties. The 136-pound welded rail now on-site will be installed in 2021.
- $8.6 million: Repairs to four railroad bridges on the Housatonic (Berkshire) Line in the New Milford area.
- $1 million: Feasibility study funded by New York Metropolitan Transportation Council for fast-track passenger service on the Maybrook portion of the line, from Danbury to Metro-North's Harlem Line in Southeast.

Background

- The line was ranked #1 in the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's 2020 Regional Transportation Plan.
- The restoration of passenger service on the Housatonic Line has had the vocal support of town officials & selectboards in both MA and CT, notably in North Canaan and New Milford.
- The Berkshire County Selectmen's Association stated in 2018, "The Massachusetts Rail Plan should pursue upgrades to the Housatonic Line that would sustain freight service and facilitate future implementation of passenger service."
- Three major studies have been done, two in 2010 and one in 2014, providing a valuable foundation for the research called for in HD.2405, An Act Funding a Study of Passenger Service on the Housatonic Rail Line.

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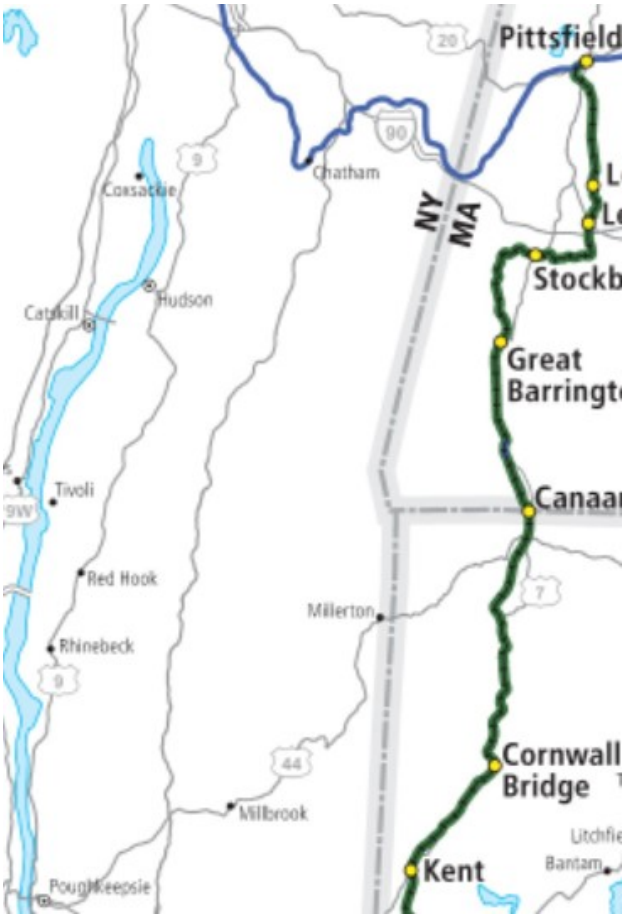
The Train Campaign is the rail advocacy organization for Berkshire County and Litchfield counties, sharing a vision for passenger rail as the essential framework for efficient, sustainable transportation in the 21st century. Our mission is to foster a robust network of rail transportation options. The Train Campaign is a project of Barrington Institute, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, EIN 20-1670260, and a founding member of the Western Mass Rail Coalition. Contact: thetraincampaign@gmail.com.