

February 17, 2007

To:

Bernard Cohen, Secretary of Transportation
The Executive Office of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 3170
Boston, MA 02116

CC:

Governor Deval Patrick
Mayor Clare Higgins
Metropolitan Planning Organization
Kim Lundgren, ICLEI
Northampton City Council
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Dear Mr. Cohen,

We the undersigned actively and unequivocally oppose the highway ramp project planned for exit 19 of I-91 in Northampton. Orwellian in its moniker, the "I-91 at Route 9 Interchange Improvement Project" stands in violation of the stated goals and objectives of all existing land-use planning documents that affect Northampton and the Pioneer Valley region. This project will create a scar upon our landscape, defile the ecologically-sensitive meadows, exacerbate already-poor air quality, increase traffic flow and congestion, pave the way for massive development projects in Hadley, Holyoke, and Northampton, and create unsafe conditions for motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists alike. This project would stand as a permanent impediment to developing sustainable transportation in the valley.

The traffic congestion in this area does not warrant such a destructive approach,

and will not be solved by it. Projections for increased traffic on the Route 9 corridor are based upon current conditions, and do not take into consideration the ameliorative effects of instituting mass transit and other options.

We believe that the planning process up till now regarding this project has been invalid, and does not reflect the will of the people. Mass Highway claims in its ENF (Environmental Notification Form) that public participation in the planning process is evidenced and satisfied by the findings of the Connecticut River Transportation Study Advisory Group (SAG). The SAG was a small group of politicians, businessmen, and public administrators who met in private, unpublicized meetings. It is unclear to us as citizens how this group was appointed. This group included Northampton Mayor Clare Higgins, Senator Stan Rosenberg, and the president of UMass. (See page 45 of the ENF.) The SAG concluded by recommending the I-91 exit 19 project as currently promulgated by Mass Highway. The ENF also reveals the long-range plan of making Route 9 a four-lane highway all the way from Northampton to University Drive. The lack of an open and comprehensive public participation component invalidates the SAG's findings.

In addition to local concerns about livability, land use planning, and democratic process, we cannot in good conscience support a project which ignores the indisputable realities of both global warming and peak oil, and which turns a blind eye to the human suffering and ecological damage that American petroleum dependence has created in diverse areas of our planet.

The exit 19 project is in violation of the following land use planning documents and agreements:

The ICLEI Climate Protection Campaign adopted by the

Northampton City Council in 1991

The 2005 U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement (U.S. Conference of Mayors)

Vision 2020, the municipal land use plan of the City of Northampton

The 2005 Northampton SDAT (Sustainable Design Assessment Team) report, the "Sustainable Northampton" planning process commissioned by Mayor Higgins and led by the American Institute of Architects. The SDAT will serve as the basis for Northampton's updated comprehensive plan.

Valley Vision 2, the Regional Comprehensive Plan issued in 2006 by the Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Commission
The Meadows Land Use Plan

The Draft Pioneer Valley Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

The 2005 Northampton Comprehensive Transportation Plan

The ICLEI Transportation and Climate Change Project: I-91 Regional Corridor Strategy Recommendations

Our intent is to stop this project. We insist that comprehensive transportation planning in the Pioneer Valley be transparent and accessible to all citizens. We actively support the valid goals and objectives of our legitimately-conceived regional plans, which include enhanced PVTA service, light rail between Northampton and Amherst, a commuter rail connection along the I-91 corridor, park-and-ride lots, and safe roads for cyclists and pedestrians. We are asking the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and other stakeholders to help us realize the goals outlined in our community planning documents.

We want the State to help citizens of the Pioneer Valley create a transportation system that is in keeping with our community values and is consistent with our

existing, ongoing, citizen-based land use planning process and plans. The state transportation planning process must be transparent and inclusive. The I-91 exit 19 project should be taken off the table, and the recommendations of the Connecticut River Transportation Study Advisory Group (SAG) should not be used as a basis for implementing transportation projects in our region.

Signed,

M. Serrice

Mary Serrice
22 High St.
Haydenville MA 01039

James Lowenthal

James Lowenthal
181 Crescent St.
Northampton MA 01060

Sue Barone

SUE BARONE
66 CLARK ST
EASTHAMPTON MA 01027

Paige Bridgens

Paige Bridgens
12 Northern Ave
Northampton, MA 01060

Molly Hale

Molly Hale
96 Oak St.
Florence, MA 01062

Susan B. Lantz

Susan B. Lantz
74 Lyman Rd
Northampton, MA 01060