

**E. Zell Steever
81 Main Street
Groton, Connecticut. 06340**

April 15, 2020

Re: Statement on Train Service for SE Connecticut to the Ct Commuter Rail Council

Dear Chairman and Council Members:

I am Zell Steever and I live in Groton, Connecticut. I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you tonight to consider passenger train service. I am here to propose and support new passenger rail services for southeastern Connecticut.

This proposal has two parts that are interconnected: The **first** part of the proposal is for additional train service going east to Rhode Island. The proposal is for the State of Connecticut to develop a new train stop in **Groton Center** at the intersection of Route 1 and Poquonnock Rd. (SW side of Amtrak RR Bridge), and add **Shore Line East (SLE)** train service to the schedule for **Groton Center, Mystic** (Stonington) and **Westerly, RI**. The schedule should be revised and extended to serve commuters in the region. In the future, connecting **SLE** train service beyond Westerly to West Kingston and Wickford Junction, and then to Providence and Boston will be important and key to a good **regional commuter train** system for all. This will, of course, require Connecticut to cooperate and partner with Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

This additional **SLE** service expansion would finally link east-west regional rail service connections between **New York** and **Boston** for the general public and specifically for commuters with the new train stops that would make it attractive for people to get out of their cars and onto the train.

The **second** part of this proposal is to establish a **new commuter rail shuttle service**, referred to hereafter as the **Norwich Branch Line (NBL)** (possibly light rail), as part of the **CT-rail** train service on existing **Providence and Worcester Railroad (P&W)** tracks that run along the east bank of the Thames River. The **P&W** already connects Norwich and points further north to Massachusetts with the US Navy Submarine Base (Sub Base) and to Pfizer and Electric Boat Shipyard (City of Groton) at the southern end of the line. The existing **P&W** rails and track infrastructure have been recently upgraded and support regular daily freight train traffic. The existing switching system and track infrastructure currently allow **P&W** freight trains to go either west or east on **Amtrak** rails. **Amtrak** and **P&W** rails run parallel to each other in Groton (three tracks). With a new train stop at **Groton Center Station**, this would allow passengers to change trains from **SLE** to the new shuttle service of the **Norwich Branch Line**. Initially this new service (three new stops – about 7 miles) might run from the south gate of the **US Navy Sub**

Base with a new platform off-Base to a new **Groton Center Station** platform and then on to a third and final train stop at the intersection of **Pfizer and Electric Boat** gates and Route 349 in the City of Groton. This would make commuting feasible by train to and from the Sub Base, EB and Pfizer, three of the larger employers in the region. It also connects New London to Groton on existing track. The **NBL** solves one of the “last mile problems” of public mass transit in Groton, New London and Southeastern Connecticut by having commuters end up at the gates of their employers.

The new **NBL** service would start a new **north-south** commuter rail service with a passenger connection to an expanded **east-west SLE** train service. (See Map 1 & 2) Additional new train stations/stops might well be considered in the future for both the **SLE**, and the new **Norwich Branch Line** with station stops in Norwich and other communities north to Worcester, MA.

Attached is a map showing the current rail beds and where three new train stations/stops might be located in Groton. (See Map 3) Expanded passenger train service on existing rail beds in the region makes good sense - no new digging required. It is nearly “shovel ready,” utilizing existing railway systems.

Current Plans:

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) 2019 to 2045’s** principal focus is on roads and highways and on the continued use and growth of automobiles and trucks in our region. The **2019 MTP** cites the fact that the most prominent method of commuting to work in SE Connecticut remains as “drivers alone in a personal vehicle.” In fact, people drive to everything in the region, while walking, biking, buses and trains are the least prevalent modes of transportation. Both air and marine transportation continue to play limited but key roles in the transportation of materials and people in the region today. The **2019 MTP** lists 114 highway projects and only 12 bus projects and five train projects -- a \$2.5 billion construction program over the next 25 years with by far the most funding going to roads, bridges and highways.

The **2019 MTP** calls for **SLE’s** “expansion to the east, with more trains, new stops and expanded hours.” **SLE expansion is one of eleven regional priority projects of the 2019 MTP plan.** (Other specific rail projects included are: a study for a station stop in Niantic; parking/SOGR; various track improvements; and fare collection improvements.)

Furthermore, **extended SLE service east to R.I.** is listed in the **2016 Connecticut State Long-Range Transportation Plan.**

History:

The focus on highways and roads was not always the case, as rail service dates back to 1834 in our region. This rail service was linked to marine transportation making the region a strong economic and industrial engine in southern New England, particularly along the Thames River and its tributaries in the communities of New London, Groton, Stonington, and Norwich. By 1900 trains and trolleys connected much of the region. For example, nearly 500 people regularly commuted to Noank to work in the shipyard by trolley each day in the early 1900s. The region's history shows that the train systems worked well both locally as a commuter system and later, as bridges were built, as a regional transportation link between NYC and Boston. Good train service is not a new mode of transportation for our region.

The introduction of the automobile and later heavy trucks resulted in the development of a network of roads and highways during the last 70 years. The auto/truck system has largely replaced the extensive network of rails, trains, trolleys and ferries that existed. The highway system has resulted in suburban sprawl in our region with new development being located away from our city centers of New London, Groton and Norwich and into farm fields and woodlands. After World War II and construction of the Interstate Highway system, suburban growth dominated the region, generally spreading outward along I-95 and I-395. More roads, bigger roads and wider highways for more and bigger automobiles and trucks have resulted in more traffic, congestion, accidents, reduced air quality, increases in CO2 emissions, and the ills of suburban sprawl development. Cars and trucks turn out to be both expensive and inefficient modes of transportation requiring big government subsidies for highways, bridges and roads.

Is it now possible to change the present situation where roads and highways dominate transportation and development? While automobiles and trucks, particularly electric vehicles will continue to play important roles in our region, it is now possible to increase the use of modern train service, particularly for moving people to and from work, while using existing track already in the ground, as a starting point. Just maybe, if we "build it they will come!" - this time, using modern passenger train service and transit technology – and it is happening worldwide.

What has recently changed in Southeastern Connecticut?

The good news was unexpected. It was announced late in 2018 that there is an estimated **6,000 to 18,000** new jobs at Electric Boat (EB) to build one additional advanced submarine each year for the next 20 years. EB has started the \$850 million addition to the shipyard facilities at the south end of the shipyard. **EB** now needs more new employees. Currently **80% of all EB employees commute by automobile and live outside of Groton**. This commute is increasingly unpleasant and costly and will only become more difficult as thousands of new commuters are added to the local roads and highways, and parking lots. This will turn I-95 into a more congested highway – a linear parking lot during rush hour!

With a significant increase to the work force, Groton and the region need to consider if a linked commuter train service will be attractive for employees to travel to and from work? In addition, a number of municipalities support “smart growth,” and a few of the larger communities support mixed-use development. This new passenger service will encourage and support **transit oriented development** (TOD) which, to be successful, requires well-connected mass transit systems of trains and buses.

Benefits to the Region:

The connection of these two rail systems at a **Groton Center Train Station** presents great potential for employees, employers and the public, as well as great opportunities for businesses. Improved train service will have many other important benefits: reduced air pollution; reduced auto traffic; reduced congestion; reduced commuting times; reduced need for additional parking at the major employers; reduced road and highway maintenance costs; and reduced CO2 emissions, to mention just few a benefits. The transportation sector contributes 38% of our greenhouse gases (GHG) in Connecticut. The proposed two commuter networks support smart growth policies, mixed-use development and transit-oriented development (TOD). Trains are a component of a modern, efficient, future transportation infrastructure for all, an investment in the future, which will stimulate economic development in Groton and SE Connecticut. It will support the ongoing relationship between shipbuilding, the US Navy Sub Base and Connecticut.

This plan would also reduce the need for Amtrak to provide regional commuter service so it might focus on the high-speed train service along the east coast. It would also reduce the demands for road repair and expensive capital expenditures for expanding the interstate highway and state road system.

I am delighted to work with Groton, other local communities, CTDOT and others to refine and promote the expanded use of mass transit, particularly commuter train service on existing rail beds in the Southeastern Connecticut. I hope this will assist you as you look forward in providing balanced public transportation for Connecticut and particularly southeastern Connecticut.

I ask you to support this proposal and send a letter to Governor Lamont and the Commissioner of Transportation for Connecticut, Joseph Giulietti, expressing your support for expanded train service in the region. Thank you.

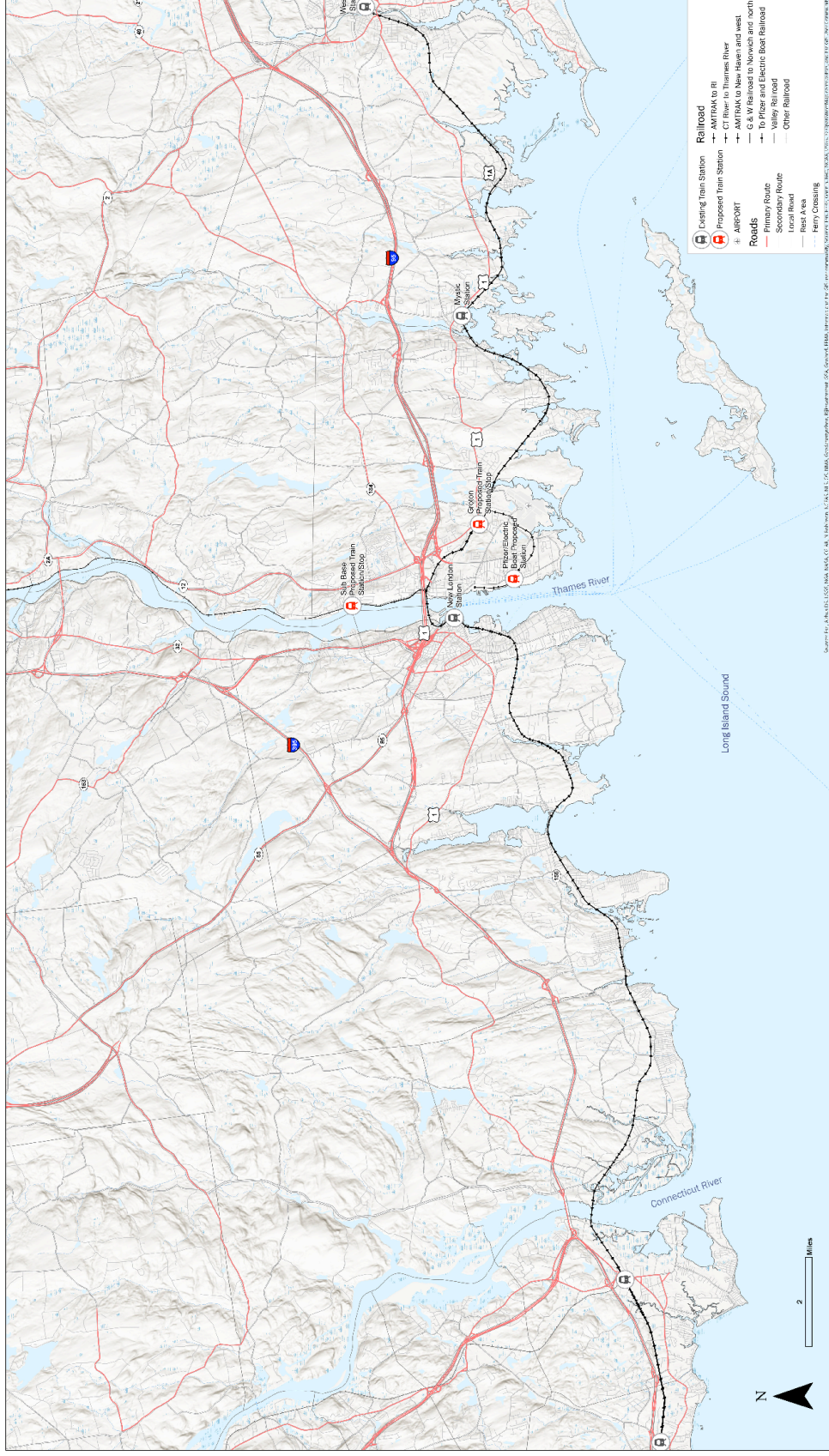
I can be reached by email: zsteever@aol.com, or by phone at 202-251-2230 (c).

Sincerely,

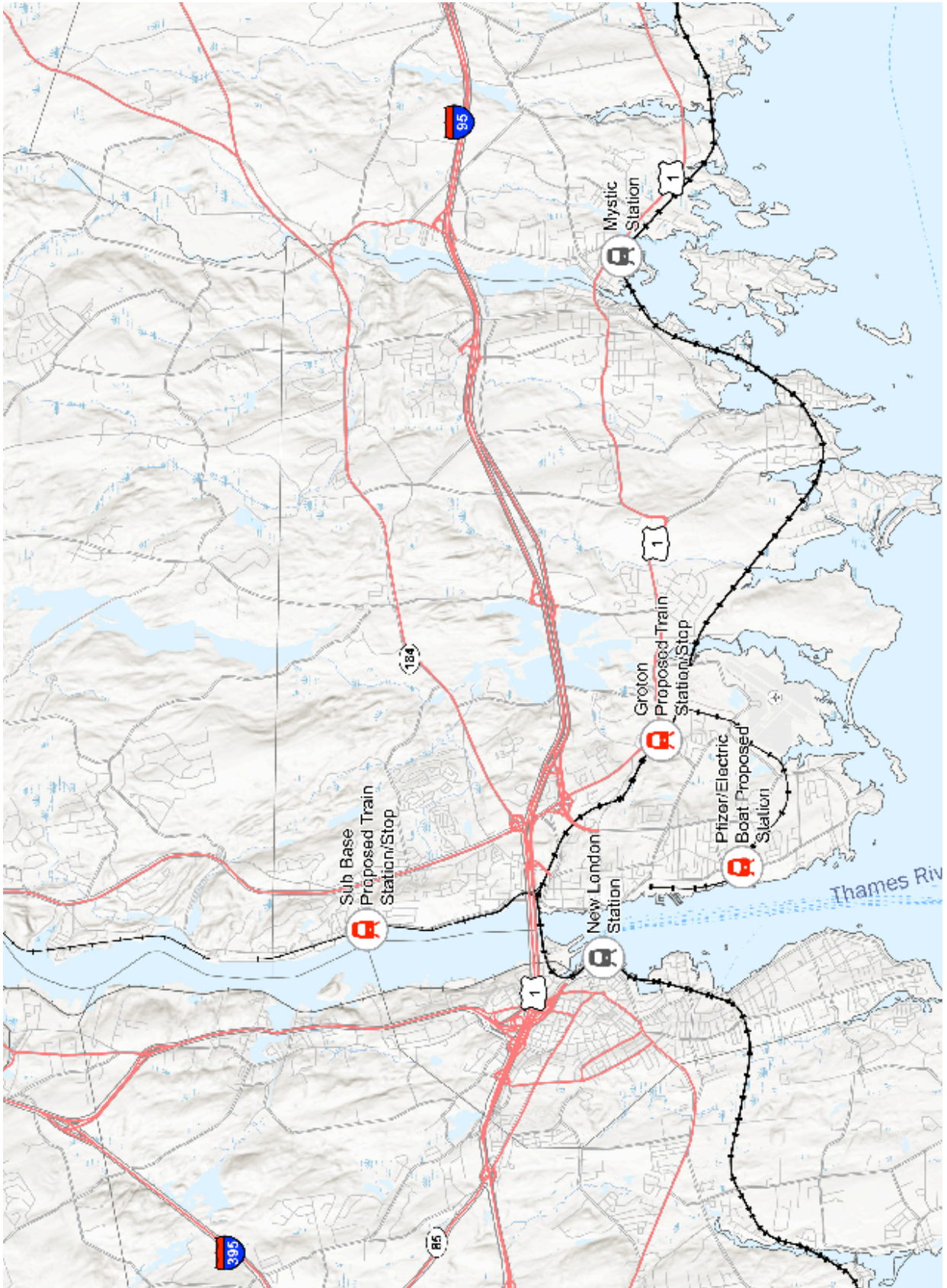
Zell Steever

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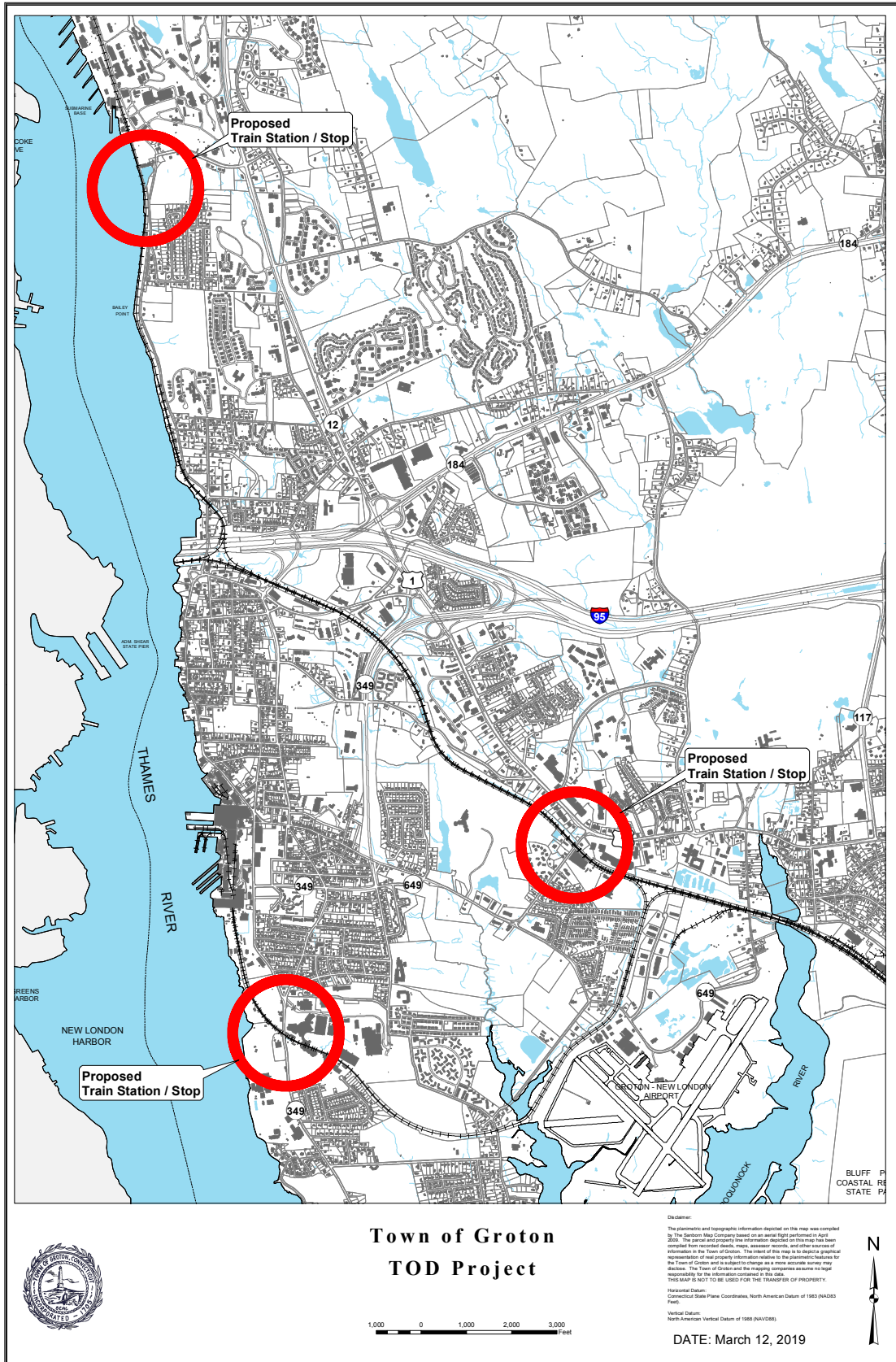
Proposed Extended & New Passenger Train Service for Southeast Connecticut and Western Rhode Island



MAP 1



MAP 2



**Town of Groton
TOD Project**

1,000 0 1,000 2,000 3,000
Feet

Disclaimer:
The planimetric and topographic information depicted on this map was compiled by The Seaborn Map Company based on an aerial flight performed in April 2008. This planimetric and topographic information depicted on this map has been compiled from historical data, maps, satellite imagery, and other electronic information in the Town of Groton. The intent of this map is to depict a graphical representation of map property information relative to the planimetric information for the Town of Groton and is subject to change as a more accurate survey may disclose. The Town of Groton and the mapping companies assume no legal responsibility for the information contained in this data.
THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR THE TRANSFER OF PROPERTY.

Horizontal Datum:
Geographical State Plane Coordinates, North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)
Feet

Vertical Datum:
North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD88)

DATE: March 12, 2019

