Rebooting New England
Building a Network of Super-Connected Economies from NYC to Boston

Purpose: Rebooting New England (RNE) will bring together key leaders in a series of roundtable discussions in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Long Island to launch a new non-governmental organization, the New England Powerhouse Partnership (NEPP). NEPP will promote creation of a long-term economic development strategy for New England and its mid-sized cities. From this strategy will emerge a network of super-connected economies from NYC to Boston, using high performance rail to provide the critical enabling infrastructure for an integrated economic development strategy focused on amplifying the region’s prime economic capabilities to create the largest and most powerful innovation ecosystem in the world.

Current Programs, Partners: This project is being undertaken as an ad hoc project by three of New England’s leading regionalists — Bob Yaro, Kip Bergstrom and Lyle Wray. Its fiscal agent is the Capitol Region Council of Governments, through its non-profit arm the CRCOG Foundation. It is being initiated in partnership with Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in Cambridge, MA. Two of Lincoln’s top staff members, Armando Carbonell and Lourdes German, will also play an active role in the project.

Background: Rebooting New England is advancing a comprehensive, long-range strategy to rebuild the economy of Southern New England and its mid-sized older industrial cities founded upon a high-performance rail-based regional economic development investment program that integrates their labor markets with each other and with those of metro Boston and New York. This strategy is long overdue: Over the past four decades, the de-industrialization of the New England’s economy has left a dozen mid-sized former manufacturing centers, including New Haven, Waterbury, Bridgeport, New Britain, New London and Hartford, CT, Springfield, Holyoke, Worcester, Fall River and New Bedford, MA and Providence, Woonsocket and Pawtucket, RI, with declining populations, tax bases, household incomes and increased poverty and racial and social isolation.

The decline of these cities and their counterparts in Northern New England has been reflected in growing state structural deficits in all six New England States. As a result of these trends, Connecticut’s yawning budget deficit this year will only get worse, with severe adverse consequences on municipal finances across the state. The nonpartisan Office of Fiscal Analysis has predicted that the current two year budget, if continued into the 2019-20 and 2020-21 fiscal years, would amass red ink totaling $1.9 billion and $2.7 billion respectively — gaps of 10 and 13 percent — or $4.6 billion across that biennium. (As reported by the Connecticut Mirror 11/2/17.) Smaller, but still significant deficits have been experienced in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.
At the same time, the metropolitan economies of nearby Boston and New York have boomed, creating ever-greater disparities between the economic prospects of these places. Contributing to the decline of New England’s bypassed cities has been the deterioration and congestion of the region’s aging road and rail systems, which has left these cities increasingly isolated from each other and from the fast growing New York and Boston regions.

Rebooting New England is proposing to create a high-performance rail-based economic development strategy for the region and its mid-sized cities, that will reconnect these places to the thriving economies of metro NY and Boston and link the entire region into a single labor and housing market — becoming, in effect, the world’s largest innovation district.

The proposed route for the New York - Boston service would run east from Manhattan though Long Island to Port Jefferson with stops at JFK and MacArthur Airports and major employment centers on the Island. From Port Jeff it would run in a tunnel under Long Island Sound to Milford and New Haven, and on to Boston via Hartford and Providence. This route would avoid the need for the Federal Railroad Administration’s controversial proposal to add two tracks to the existing Northeast Corridor route through the fragile ecosystems of the southeast coastal communities of Connecticut.
The proposed Long Island route would provide enormous benefits to the Island, while at the same time connecting Connecticut with Long Island’s airports and employment centers. For this reason, Rebooting New England is engaging business, civic and government leaders on Long Island, as well as the Southern New England states. At the same time, proposals to upgrade the New Haven Rail Line and branch line services will strengthen the connections through Fairfield County to New York City. And the proposed network will include the provision of new commuter rail service from Springfield through Worcester to Boston, as well as further upgrades to the existing Springfield/Hartford/New Haven service and its extension north.

This concept builds upon the precedent of the United Kingdom’s “Northern Powerhouse” (NP) initiative, whereby the UK Government is investing upwards of $100 billion on new high-speed rail links and related urban economic development strategies to promote revitalization of several mid-sized former industrial cities across the North of England. In 2016, Professor Yaro led a graduate planning studio from the University of Pennsylvania to meet with leaders of the NP initiative and to outline how a similar revitalization strategy could be developed for New England’s mid-sized cities. These five cities are a directly analogous context to the small New England cities between New York City and Boston. Big, “hairy,” audacious investments are being made successfully and rapidly in the UK. We can, and must, do it here, where it would have even greater impact than in the UK.

**Approach: Bottom Up and Top Down:** The roundtable discussions of the proposal are the first step in a 2-3 year, three-step process:

- Identify, convene and inspire key existing and emerging leaders in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Long Island who can form the base of grassroots demand for federal investment in both the high performance rail infrastructure and the comprehensive economic development strategy.
- Convene members of the New England and Long Island Congressional delegations to discuss the role that a major investment in high-performance rail could play in underpinning this urban and regional development strategy; and
- Establishment of the New England Powerhouse Partnership — a non-profit organization that will coordinate ongoing infrastructure and economic development strategy across the region to be modeled after the UK’s successful Northern Powerhouse Partnership.

**Energizing Local Leadership:** Find and mobilize both existing and emerging state and local leaders. A “leader” is someone who has a following and who can get their following to show up. Organize a group of scouts with the credibility and connections to get the right people engaged, first by one-on-one outreach, and then by a roundtable in each of the three southern New England states and Long Island that creates a “conversion experience” for the attendees, such that they become proselytizers of the idea and insistent advocates for its implementation. These roundtables will get people talking, because people learn and engage through talking more than by listening, but it will not just be another nice “issue discussion” roundtable. Attendees should come away from the roundtables thinking that this is the biggest and best idea they have ever heard, and excited to help drive it to completion as the most important work of their lives.
**Engaging the New England Congressional Caucus.** New England’s most critical competitive advantage is that we have 12 U.S. Senators, an amazing potential power block in an institution where a single Senator can derail major legislation. This initiative will not succeed unless we can get the New England Congressional Caucus to embrace it and spend political capital on getting it done. With major infrastructure legislation emerging on the horizon in Washington, there will be a short-to-mid-term opportunity for New England to use the leverage of its numbers to get its share of the pie for an infrastructure project which will have enormous economic impact for the region and the nation, and which will create a road map for the transformation of older industrial cities in the rest of the country. Following the state roundtables, there will be convenings of the New England House and Senate Caucuses in Washington aimed at mobilizing them as the force they need to be for this idea to happen.

**Creating the New England Powerhouse Project:** Capture and harness the energy created by the four local roundtables and the two Washington convenings in a new organization, the New England Powerhouse Partnership (NEPP) that would continue to evolve a specific NYC-Boston high performance rail routing, costing and financing plan, and the comprehensive economic development strategy that would leverage it. Seek funding for the New England Powerhouse Partnership from a combination of federal, state, foundation and corporate resources. The UK's Northern Powerhouse Partnership is a compelling model for what we need to create here.

**Building a New Economic Geography...**