

# DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT SOUTH COAST RAIL

A myth is a falsehood or fairy tale that takes on a life of its own when repeated often enough. For those of us who have been planning and living with the South Coast Rail project for over two decades, it is disheartening to hear half truths and uninformed opinions being trotted out as facts and truisms. And when they are repeated often enough, they become self-perpetuating myths that are accepted by those who do not have the facts. Here are some common myths about South Coast Rail and why they are simply that – myths.

MYTH 1	MYTH 2	MYTH 3	MYTH 4	MYTH 5
<p><b>Building South Coast Rail will hinder the development of the South Coast Economy.</b>  <i>The thinking behind this myth is that by connecting the South Coast to Boston, we are making the region more dependent upon our capital city and thwarting efforts to grow our economy from within. The myth assumes that our cities and towns will become bedroom communities to the greater Boston area and we'll discourage home grown economic development.</i>  <i>This myth ignores the facts. First, the rail line will run north and south. Riders will be able to come to the South Coast from Boston. It is not a one way trip. South Coast Rail will help promote tourism, investment and a broader awareness of our region's wonderful assets.</i>  <i>Secondly, and more importantly, the rail will position our region to become an attractive location for young Boston area workers seeking a more affordable lifestyle and highly desirable environment to settle in. These new residents may in turn become the entrepreneurs and workforce who will help transform and update our regional economy. We are working to develop home grown economic catalysts, but importing a few won't hurt and may jump start the process.</i>  <i>And finally, improved mobility consistently catalyzes development – development that benefits the entire Commonwealth. South Coast Rail accomplishes that goal.</i></p>	<p><b>South Coast Rail is harmful to the environment.</b>  <i>This feels like a time warp. We are in the twenty-first century trapped in a twentieth century debate about environmental impacts of this project. Project opponents have been loudly claiming that the project will, for example, cause harm to spotted salamanders and disrupt vernal pools (which endless studies have shown won't be the case), while ignoring the most pressing environmental issues of our time – climate change, urban sprawl, air quality, traffic congestion and environmental justice. These twenty-first century concerns are at the core of this project's purpose. When evaluated all together, the environmental indicators are overwhelmingly positive for South Coast Rail. As an added bonus, the project will provide mitigation to correct past environmental mistakes.</i>  <i>Today our current sole regional transportation connection to the Boston area is the highly congested and wholly inadequate Route 24. This road acts as a choke point in accessing southeastern Massachusetts while adding significant quantities of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. South Coast Rail will provide immediate and significant relief to this overburdened road while reducing a major pollution source at the same time.</i></p>	<p><b>We cannot afford it; it's too expensive.</b>  <i>Opponents and skeptics want to hold South Coast Rail to a different standard than all other transportation projects. Transportation projects do not pay for themselves. Not the Red Line. Not commuter rail to Worcester. Not that bridge you crossed this morning. Not Amtrak to New York. Not I-95. They are all projects that require public support. We all benefit from a significant return on investment and get paid back through economic opportunities and a better quality of life. Projected South Coast Rail operating costs are in line with all other commuter rail lines in the state, and its fare box recovery is projected to be above most other lines.</i>  <i>At nearly \$2 billion, South Coast Rail is a big investment. The good news is that it will be built by transportation agencies that we are now holding to higher standards of transparency, responsibility and accountability. But like the train itself, the investment is not a one way expenditure of funds. The Commonwealth will enjoy a welcome return on investment in the form of up to 3,800 directly related new permanent jobs, 7,000-8,000 construction jobs, private investment around well planned train stations (six of which are in Gateway Cities), and millions in new income and property tax revenue to the state and cities and towns. The project's Corridor Plan estimates up to \$487 million in annual business output associated with the South Coast Rail.</i></p>	<p><b>It is not a smart investment; we could use the money more wisely for a different purpose.</b>  <i>This is an old bait and switch tactic. Maybe if the proponents of this notion were willing to support the money for an alternate purpose, the region would listen. But there is no choice on the table. South Coast Rail is what the region has asked for, hoped for, planned for and prepared for, and we will turn it into the best catalyst we possibly can. That's not to say that investments in education, business parks, workforce training, highway connections, and port development are not important - they are all integral to the region's future. We are pursuing a balanced, integrated strategy for the development of the region, and South Coast Rail is only one piece-albeit a critical piece-of that strategy.</i>  <i>We have maximized the beneficial impacts of the project by integrating it with other developments, planned for transit oriented development around stations, and designated priority development and priority protection areas throughout the corridor communities. Working with other state agencies, we have ensured that all state investments in the region support smart, sustainable growth.</i></p>	<p><b>There may be better alternatives; we are investing in an old technology.</b>  <i>This myth is popular among politicians who want to sound supportive without actually supporting the project. What about maglev trains? Trains in the median of Route 24? An enhanced bus alternative? In fact we have been engaged in thoughtful and thorough planning since Gov. Deval Patrick restarted the process in April 2007. Every mode of travel, every potential route, and every possible impact has been examined and studied for seven years in excruciating detail. The chosen option is the most feasible and practical from among the 80+ alternatives we started with. We believe in it. It is time to build the project. It has been studied and found to be a smart investment with positive environmental and economic benefits for the region and the Commonwealth. Let's get behind it and make South Coast Rail the best investment ever.</i></p> <p><b>Stephen C. Smith</b>  <i>Executive Director, SRPEDD</i></p>