

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of April 1, 2010

Connecticut Motor Transport Association
60 Forest Street, Hartford

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Russ St. John, Richard Schreiner, Richard Sunderhauf, Gail Lavielle, Bill Kelaher, Alan Sylvestre, Yvonne Loteczka, Mort Katz, Ed McAnaney, Chris Adams, John Zelinski. **Ex-officio members:** Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Michael Riley, Terry Hall.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:36 pm. The minutes of the meeting of March 4 were approved as written.

Featured Speaker

Chairman Maloney introduced Michael Riley, president of the Connecticut Motor Transport Association, and thanked him for hosting this meeting. Maloney also thanked Riley for filling in as speaker on very short notice due to a scheduling conflict which arose for the previously scheduled speaker.

Mike Riley began with an overview of the current state of the trucking industry, both nationally and in Connecticut, and then discussed issues of the economic downturn, taxation and safety. Based on 2008 national statistics, the trucking industry is a \$600 billion revenue industry which moved 10.2 billion tons of freight, or 68.8% of all freight moved in the US that year. Riley noted that the remainder moved by rail, pipelines and waterborne transportation. Air freight volumes are barely a blip in the overall national picture.

The current rate of federal diesel fuel tax is 24.4c per gallon. This contrasts with the 18.4c per gallon tax on gasoline. On the state level, Riley said Connecticut has the highest diesel fuel tax in the country at 45.6c per gallon. However, under the International Fuel Tax Agreement, all truckers pay fuel tax based on the mileage they actually log in each state regardless of where they purchase their fuel.

Most trucking companies are small in size. Nationally, 87.5% of trucking companies operate six or fewer vehicles. This is borne out in Connecticut also where most of the CMTA member companies operate 5-10 trucks. Nationally, 5% of truck drivers are women, while one third are minority drivers. The percentage of minority truck drivers continues to increase.

Riley cited household movers and construction-related trucking as two segments of the industry that have taken the biggest hits locally in this recession. He noted that Amodeo movers had recently gone out of business. Freight haulers have also obviously taken a hit in this economic environment. The firms that manage to survive this recession will be in good shape to prosper once the economy starts to improve.

There are 2,000 tractors registered in Connecticut; only Delaware and Hawaii have fewer. Connecticut now exempts large trucks (new vehicles for 'for hire' carriers registering trucks over 26,000 GVW and for private carriers registering trucks over 55,000 GVW) from five years of property taxes, so that factor is not a significant one in determining where trucks are registered.

Moving on to safety, Riley observed that fatal accidents involving trucks have been on the decline for several years. The accident rate for truck fatalities is 1.85 fatalities per 100 million miles traveled. This includes all fatalities involving a large truck, regardless of which party is at fault. Blood alcohol levels exceeding 0.08% were found in 27% of motorcyclists, 22.8% of passenger car drivers, and 23.3% of light truck drivers involved in fatal accidents. In contrast, blood alcohol levels above 0.08% were found in 0.9% of drivers of large trucks involved in fatal accidents. Random drug testing and a strict drug testing protocol have also helped keep truckers clean.

In response to a question about reducing the need to idle at rest areas, Riley mentioned that Idle Air has gone bankrupt and ceased operations. This company made utility gantries to supply trucks at truck stops with television, air conditioning, internet and electric service so that trucks did not need to idle. Idle Air's closing has set back the effort to reduce truck emissions attributable to idling. Another company, Control Module, Inc, of Enfield markets a similar product which is used at the truck stop in North Stonington.

Riley next spoke about the Special Transportation Fund which supports all highway and transit spending, debt service on transportation bonds, and the personnel costs of ConnDOT and DMV. The Special Transportation Fund receives revenues from gasoline and diesel fuel taxes, traffic fines, license and registration fees and permit fees. The STF is a dedicated fund, meaning that the users pay into it knowing that these revenues will only be used for a specific purpose, in this case, to support transportation. Riley then cited four examples where fees that should go to the STF are being diverted or have been proposed for diversion from the Fund. Three years ago, the General Assembly passed a bill that allows municipalities to get \$10 for each traffic ticket issued within its town borders. This provides \$2-3 million a year to the towns that now does not go into the STF. Three proposed bills would designate that: 1) 50% of fines from tickets generated from red light cameras would go to Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport, (the towns which are the proposed sites of those cameras), 2) 25% of fines for texting while driving go to the municipalities and 3) certain traffic fines be raised, with the additional revenue used to subsidize lower hunting and fishing license fees, which were recently doubled. All of these proposals represent drains on the revenue stream of the Special Transportation Fund and are precedents for more such proposals. Riley noted that it is very difficult to keep dedicated funds sacrosanct despite the covenants that are made with taxpayers when such taxes and funds are instituted.

Another example of a fuel tax that is diverted to a use other than transportation purposes is the gross receipts tax on fuels, the revenue from which goes into the General Fund.

In response to a question about the lack of growth in trailer-on-flat-car (TOFC) and container-on-flat-car (COFC) rail traffic in Connecticut, Riley agreed that there has been no real

progress in growing the volume of this traffic locally. The run is just too short to justify this intermodal move. Most of this potential intermodal rail freight traffic bound for Connecticut arrives in metro-NYC, so the trip to Connecticut is too short to justify putting the trailers or containers on a train.

In response to a question on the availability of qualified truck drivers, Riley said that this has been an issue, but it is not one at the moment due to the economic downturn and the number of drivers who have been laid off. When business picks up again, this will likely be an issue again. Some areas of the country are considering raising the weight limits for trucks as a measure to address the driver shortage. There is no movement to consider such a change in Connecticut.

The last topic addressed by Riley, again in response to a question, was the shortage of rest stop capacity for trucks in Connecticut. On any given night, there are 1,200 truck drivers who need a space to park above and beyond the capacity of available at public and private locations in the state. There has been no real progress on this issue. There is an effort to reconfigure some existing service plazas to add to their capacity.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Rich Sunderhauf said that the current Connecticut Transit labor contract expires in June. Connecticut Transit management is talking with health care insurance providers to see what can be offered in a new contract.

Fred Riese reported on the March 17 meeting of the Danbury Branch Electrification Study Advisory Committee. The major news of that meeting was the laying out of a construction schedule for the installation of the centralized traffic control (CTC) system. Although some smaller contracts have already been let, the major work effort will begin on May 15 of this year. An 80-day continuous service outage on the Branch will begin on August 22. During this time, as well as during 15 subsequent weekend service outages, service will be provided by bus. Beyond the CTC installation, major elements of the proposed improvements on the Branch include track upgrades, curve realignments, passing sidings, bridge replacements, yard layout work, station upgrades, utility relocations, and potentially, electrification.

There are 61 significant curves along the Danbury Branch. Increasing the super-elevation of five of these curves will get most of the line from Norwalk to Danbury to 60 mph operating speed, though two sections will still stay at 35 mph. There are 27 additional curves between Danbury and New Milford, of which 10 are proposed for super-elevation and five for realignment. If all of these curve realignments and improvements are performed, the operating time from New Milford to South Norwalk would be reduced from 1:31:36 on the existing alignment to 1:13:36, assuming diesel power. If the line were to be electrified all the way to New Milford, the operating time would drop from 1:10:41 on the current alignment to 1:00:41 with the improved curve geometry.

Open deck bridges along the Branch will be replaced with ballast deck bridges. Lastly, Fred mentioned that, depending on whether the northern terminus of the passenger service remains at Danbury or moves to New Milford, yard improvements would be made at Danbury Yard, including the construction of a new maintenance shed, or a new yard would be built on the former Century Brass property at New Milford.

Gail Lavielle added that currently there are 11 trains daily in each direction on the Branch. She had asked how many trains might run following the completion of the proposed improvements and was told that 22 trains per day would be the maximum that could be accommodated but that 18-20 trains was a more likely schedule.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney distributed a draft letter of endorsement for the New Britain Busway. The letter was prepared from the Commission to ConnDOT Commissioner Marie. With only minor formatting corrections, the Commission approved the sending of the letter.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Fred Riese mentioned that the major topic of the New Haven public hearing on March 24 was accidents involving buses and pedestrians. Two such accidents in New Haven and one in Meriden were discussed. Fred inquired of Rich Sunderhauf as to just what screening and training procedures bus drivers must pass. Rich suggested that Connecticut Transit be contacted directly for this information and specifically that Nancy Ferrantella or Pat Smith of the Safety Training Office be contacted.

After a short discussion concerning the upcoming Danbury (April 20) and New Britain (April 27) public hearings, Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:40 PM.