

**Connecticut Public Transportation Commission**  
Minutes of August 6, 2009

Fourth Floor Conference Room  
Union Station, New Haven

**Attendance: Members:** Tom Cheeseman, Russ St. John, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Alan Sylvestre, Ed McAnaney, Bill Kelaher, Chris Adams, Kevin Maloney. **Ex-officio members:** Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Terry Hall, Brooke Hoberman, Glendine Henry, Sandy Fry.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:32 PM. The minutes of the meeting of July 9 were approved as written.

**Featured Speaker**

Sandy Fry, Transportation Planner with the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), gave a detailed presentation of the Northwest Corridor Study that her agency has performed to evaluate public transportation options from downtown Hartford through Windsor and Bloomfield. The study looked at much the same corridor that the Griffin Line Busway study considered. That earlier study did not identify sufficient potential ridership to have qualified the busway for any New Starts funding from FTA. So a second look at enhancements in this corridor has been taken. The three elements of the Northwest Corridor Study are:

- Strategies to build ridership in the Northwest Corridor to the Day Hill Road area and Bradley Field.
- Evaluate Union Station as to its condition, its role as an intermodal center, and offer recommendations for improvements at the station, and
- Develop an improved downtown Hartford circulation system.

Toward the initial strategy to build transit ridership, the corridor was evaluated for its demographics, employment statistics, travel patterns, development options, existing transit services, and attitudes toward transit. The three main corridors evaluated were the Day Hill Road corridor, Route 20 to the airport, and Route 305. Most employers in these corridors have 100-500 employees. There are few large employers in the area, though ING is moving 2000 employees to Windsor.

The pace of development has increased in recent years, mostly in the area of office space. Connecticut Transit has adjusted routes to meet transit needs from new development, and has seen growth in ridership. Walgreens has just opened up a major regional distribution facility at which one-third of all employee positions will be reserved for people with disabilities. The Hartford Insurance Group is consolidating facilities into the corridor. However, many of the development patterns are difficult for transit to serve. Many of the large facilities have long driveways, big setbacks and plentiful free parking. There are also few pedestrian amenities in the corridor, and many corridor employees work night and/or weekend shifts which are more difficult for transit to service.

One potential solution to meet at least some of the transit needs in the corridor and to overcome these hurdles would be to establish a local transit hub in the Day Hill Road area near the Poquonock exit off I-91. A Vernon-Manchester express bus could be added to this hub site and an express route directly from Granby established. Transit links to Hartford and Windsor from this site could be improved. Other recommended additions for this corridor include a new commuter lot at the hub location, four employee shuttle routes as mapped in the study, improvements to address big service gaps in the bus schedule between 5:30-9:00 PM, improved bus stop and pedestrian amenities, an expansion of the Guaranteed Ride Home program to provide eligibility beyond vanpoolers and monthly bus pass buyers, and the establishment of a transportation management association to promote pooling of resources among providers and employers.

Hartford's Union Station was evaluated as to its existing condition, how it will service new busway and commuter route trips, its potential for joint development projects, its potential as a transit center, its vehicular and pedestrian access and needed improvements to its physical structure. Access to the station was evaluated in terms of bus and taxi operations, pedestrian safety, traffic movements and concerns at Asylum and Spruce Streets, bicycle access, increased parking, and busway circulation (movement of buses coming on or off the busway). Union Station itself was found to be in generally good shape, except for the Amtrak trestle. It has mechanical needs relating to its boilers and chillers. Its water heater and piping need replacement. It also needs pavement improvements, correction of drainage problems, correction of roof drainage issues, and updates of its windows and lighting. It could also benefit from a car rental operations location there.

Recommendations for Union Station include short term improvements to drainage, plumbing, lighting and pavement, and long term expansion and renovation of the transportation center, multi-use development of the Spruce Street lot for residential, retail and office uses, and providing for a greater city bus presence at the station.

The third element of the Northwest Corridor Study was a consultant study of bus ridership patterns in downtown Hartford, particularly to look at key connections and transfers. North-south bus movements along Main Street are the dominant movement, followed by buses from east-of-the-river dropping riders off before looping back to the east. The study found that two-thirds of passengers use transfers; downtown is not their destination. This is a very high transfer rate. Those who are going downtown mostly want to go to Main Street, so the current system of bus stops serves them well. The downtown system is constrained by tight curb space for buses and by crowded sidewalks.

There are heavy pedestrian movements between the five principal downtown bus stops: Market Street, Travelers, the Old State House, Main Street between Pearl and Gold Streets, and the Athenaeum. Many street crossings are made by riders. A downtown area transfer center would eliminate many auto/pedestrian conflicts. It could provide an off-street place for buses to wait, improve on-time performance and make the system more understandable. For the existing conditions, the downtown circulation patterns are pretty much optimal, i.e., as good as it gets with downtown as the principal transfer point.

Strategies which were identified as important for improving downtown bus service include building a transit center, maintaining a downtown stop on all routes currently serving downtown even if a transit center is constructed, maximizing through routing, expanding service to the west side of downtown, and improving transfers and connections. If a transit center were to be added at Union Station, a capacity of 14-19 bus bays was identified as needed, with a minimum of 3 bays for bus rapid transit (BRT) vehicles and 11 for local buses. A climate-controlled waiting area should also be provided.

Four alternative locations have been considered for a transit center or hub. Alternative 1 is the SW side of downtown in the area of the State Office Building and Bushnell Hall where there are multiple parking lots which might be developed. Alternative 2 is the NW side of downtown, north of Asylum Ave and west of Main, where there are also large parking lots. Alternative 3 would be to construct three smaller hubs north, south and west of downtown. Alternative 4 would be east of Main Street in the Constitution Plaza area. Alternative 2 is the most efficient in terms of traffic flow. Alternative 3, the multiple smaller hubs, fell out of consideration as it turns out that each of the 3 small hubs would need to be about 2/3 the site of a central hub.

The NW side of downtown, alternative 3, was looked at in terms of effective use of a transit center, the efficiency and effectiveness of service, and traffic impacts for the purposes of sorting among several different options in this area of the downtown fringe. These location options are the Spruce Street lot, the parking lots on Church Street and Allyn Streets, a large lot north of I-84 from Union Station, and Union Place. The best performing options are the lots at Church and Allyn Streets and the lot north of 84 from Union Station.

Lastly, Sandy Fry discussed the projected costs of the study's recommendations. The Day Hill Road transit improvements have an estimated capital cost of \$5,000,000 and operating costs of \$1.4 million annually. The transit center would cost up to \$25,000,000 and have annual operating costs of \$1,500,000. The Union Station physical upgrades would cost \$5-10 million. Fry said the short term repairs identified for Union Station are moving forward.

Russ St. John asked if the moving of the Interstate 84 alignment and the lowering of the highway viaduct would throw a wrench in any of the planned improvements. Fry said the viaduct study is also being conducted by CRCOG so there is good coordination between these two efforts. The viaduct is nearing the end of its useful life and will need to be replaced. The study on the viaduct and the highway alignment is just getting underway now but will be completed well in advance of any improvements called for in the transit study.

Terry Hall cautioned that the transit projects should not do anything that would preclude improvements in the rail geometry.

### **Comments from the Public**

Glendine Henry of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services distributed copies of the Eastern Connecticut Accessible Transportation Guide and mentioned that similar guides for southwestern, south central, northwestern and north central Connecticut will be available shortly.

Terry Hall discussed the need for cooperation among northeastern states in developing proposals to tap stimulus money for high speed rail corridors if this region is to successfully compete with other regions for these funds. Hall said that almost every state has submitted some sort of proposal in order to preserve options for applying for high speed rail funds later.

### **Chairman's Report**

Tom Cheeseman reported that Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro held a forum at Union Station concerning the establishment of an infrastructure bank to cover rail and other transportation projects. The bank might be housed at USDOT or in the Treasury. The idea would be to speed up the development of transportation projects. Tom also mentioned that Middletown Transit District is getting \$300,000 in stimulus money for one new route and for capital improvements. He also mentioned that detours for construction of a gas pipeline to serve the Kleen Energy power plant are impacting the routes of Middletown Transit buses.

### **Reports from Operating Entities**

Richard Sunderhauf reported that Sunday service on Route 92, a Jobs Access-funded route in Hartford, will be ending as of August 30 due to budget shortfalls. Also, the ROADEO competition was held on June 7. A driver from Northeast Transportation in Waterbury won the body-on-chassis competition, while Greater Bridgeport Transit won the 35-foot and 40-foot bus classes. Lastly, he mentioned that since CT Transit buses began providing service from Waterbury to Bridgeport during the service outage on Metro-North's Waterbury Branch, passengers are getting to Bridgeport faster than they did on the trains. However, the buses do not serve all the station locations along the Waterbury Branch.

William Kelaher reported that the new Metro-North service to Yankee Stadium is running well, despite minor problems. Extra trains are being put on for the four Red Sox games this weekend, starting today.

Russ St. John reported things are quiet on the Providence and Worcester. Freight volumes are down, as is the case everywhere. P&W is putting a new siding into service for a new customer in Rocky Hill.

Richard Schreiner reported on continued local opposition to expansion of the Housatonic Railroad's transload facility in the Hawleyville section of Newtown. The town is now claiming that the railroad has a wetlands violation on its property.

### **Old Business**

Fred Riese reported that a report on the necessary improvements to reopen Wilton Station is due out on September 1. ConnDOT and Town personnel had toured the station to inspect just what was needed to reopen the facility and to get an estimate of the costs involved. Reopening of Wilton Station was a major issue raised at the Commission's Norwalk public hearing on May 23. Riese also mentioned that Jean Pottinger had called him regarding whether there were any new plans for rail service on the Griffins Line after hearing about the rail tour of the line at the Commission's July meeting.

Kevin Maloney asked Riese about the matter of ConnDOT's refusal to provide responses to the Commission's Annual Report recommendations this year. Riese said nothing new had occurred on this topic and it would likely be addressed via this year's Annual Report and a legislative proposal for the next General Assembly session. Tom Cheeseman said he would look into this issue with Dennis King.

**New Business**

Fred Riese asked for volunteers to moderate the Commission's four public hearings this fall. Kevin Maloney volunteered to moderate at Storrs on September 1. Mort Katz had volunteered previously to moderate the Windsor hearing on September 15. Fred volunteered for the Torrington hearing on October 6. Tom will take the Plainville hearing on October 20.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:22 PM.