

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of February 3, 2011

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room B
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Mort Katz, Russ St. John, Richard Sunderhauf, Ed McAnaney, Yvonne Loteczka, Alan Sylvestre, Robert Rodman, Ron Kilcoyne. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Tom Maziarz, Michael Sanders, Sherry Osterling, Patrick Zapatka.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:40 pm. The minutes of the meeting of January 6 were approved as written.

Featured Speaker

Chairman Maloney explained that, due to weather-related issues, Bozzuto's had to cancel our tour of their driver training simulator. On extremely short notice, Tom Maziarz, Bureau Chief for Policy and Planning at ConnDOT, agreed to step in and provide a briefing on the current status of the Springfield Line Commuter Rail Service project.

Maziarz began by providing some context on the passenger rail system in Connecticut. There are over 600 miles of active rail lines in Connecticut, over half of which are in public ownership. The New Haven Line passenger service, operated by Metro-North, provided 37.1 million passenger trips in FY 2009 and ran 287 train trips per weekday. In addition to these trips, Shore Line East provided 571,723 passenger trips in FY 2009 and operated 23 trains daily.

Connecticut has worked with Massachusetts, Vermont and Amtrak to develop a "Regional Vision" plan for passenger rail service which includes the Inland Route service from New York City to New Haven to Springfield to Boston and passenger service from New Haven to western Massachusetts, Brattleboro and Burlington, VT and on to Montreal along Amtrak's Vermonter service corridor. The New Haven to Springfield service is just one element of this larger regional plan but it is the backbone of the regional vision and will support both services.

Connecticut did not get the full amount of federal funding we sought for the Springfield Line commuter service. Connecticut was awarded \$420 million, about \$100 million less than requested. This means that the project will need to be phased in. ConnDOT is currently working on determining the proper structure and best sequencing to implement the project. Ultimately, the combination of Amtrak trains and ConnDOT-operated trains will provide 30 minute headways at peak times and roughly hourly service off-peak. This will provide not only more frequent service but also better regional connections to NYC, Boston, Vermont and Montreal. It will also provide better connections to Penn Station. Although all ConnDOT-operated trains will make connections in New Haven, some Amtrak trains will continue through NYC to Washington.

Physical elements of the Springfield Line Commuter Rail Service plan include:

- 29 miles of double tracking and sidings
- Bridge and drainage improvements
- Upgrades to 38 at-grade crossings
- High level platforms and 'up & over' crossings
- Four new stations at North Haven, Newington, West Hartford and Enfield
- New train equipment

Services will initially begin with rolling stock transferred from the Shore Line East service. The availability of equipment will in part be dependent on the decision to exercise the 38-car option on the M-8 car order. This purchase is currently before the State Bond Commission.

Although the final phasing of the project has not yet been nailed down, at this point the likely elements of Phase 1 are:

- Expanded peak hour service to existing Springfield Line stations
- 10-15 miles of double tracking and infrastructure improvements
- Station platform upgrades at existing stations in the double-tracked segment
- Bus shuttle service to Bradley Airport as a possible element of Phase 1.

Phase 2 of the project improvements will provide for 30 minute peak hour service and will include:

- Full double tracking and infrastructure upgrades
- The construction of the four new stations
- New train equipment.

Beyond Phase 2, future work will include major bridge and infrastructure work principally to the Connecticut River bridge and the Hartford segment along the I-84 Aetna viaduct.

The 2030 service plan calls for 25 round trips per day on the Springfield Line, up from six daily round trips at present. Of the 25 daily 2030 trips, fifteen would be operated by Amtrak and ten by ConnDOT. Of the fifteen daily Amtrak trips, three would be on the Vermonter service, six would run to Brattleboro, Vermont serving what has become known as the Knowledge Corridor because of the high number of colleges and universities along that route, and six would be Inland Route trains. In addition to more frequent service, a faster service is also envisioned, with travel time between Hartford and Penn Station being reduced from 2 hours and 46 minutes at present to 2 hours and 10 minutes in 2030. Springfield to Penn Station travel time would be reduced from 3:10 now to 2:42 in 2030.

The improvements in train service frequency and travel times are expected to draw 1.26 million new annual trips to the Springfield Line by 2030 and result in 1.15 million car trips diverted from the highways. Based on an assumed average vehicle mileage of 31 mpg, this would save 4.8 million gallons of fuel per year.

ConnDOT is working closely with Amtrak on engineering, construction, fare structure and coordinating a service plan and trip connections. ConnDOT is working with Massachusetts and Vermont to coordinate environmental studies and to develop regional support for the two planned services of the Regional Vision. Coordination with municipalities along the line is being undertaken to optimize station area development and to address at-grade crossing concerns. Lastly, Maziarz stressed that the department is working with the affected freight railroads to avoid impacts to their services.

The next step now is to complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process by updating the prior environmental assessment to reflect the full regional vision and its impacts and benefits. On the design front, Parsons Brinckerhoff has been selected as the lead design firm and is already on board. They will serve as the project manager and will progress the project design work to the 30% stage. They will also coordinate the three other design contracts for 1) track and signals, 2) bridges and structures, and 3) stations. Requests for qualifications (RFQs) are already out for the first two of these contracts and the station design RFQ will be released shortly.

The start of actual construction is anticipated for 2013. It is anticipated that Amtrak will manage track and drainage work while ConnDOT will manage station and platform work. Enhanced service is expected to begin in 2015. Initial service levels will be less than the 2030 full service levels.

Maziarz responded to a question about a train connection to Bradley Airport by saying that rapid bus shuttles to the airport are planned. These will go directly to the terminal buildings. As to coordination of the Springfield Line train schedules to connecting trains, Maziarz said that the Amtrak trains will be coordinated with other Amtrak train schedules at New Haven, while the ConnDOT-operated trains will be coordinated with Metro-North service at New Haven.

In response to other questions, Maziarz mentioned that alternative routes for moving north-south freight were evaluated and that the study planners are aware of the needs of over-dimension freight, that the new station locations in West Hartford and North Haven have not been finalized, and that the Springfield to Worcester segment of the Inland Route has significant infrastructure needs in order to accommodate faster passenger service. He also said that the first year of the boating survey at the three moveable bridges along the Shore Line East corridor showed a relatively low level of boating traffic that required bridge openings. Lastly, Maziarz noted that the new House Transportation Committee chairman, Rep. John Mica of Florida, has expressed the view that high speed rail investments should be concentrated on the Northeast Corridor where the ridership and population density is.

Discussion of the value and merits of Amtrak's long range Vision Plan for High Speed Rail took place. [Note: This plan is Amtrak's long range plan to provide high speed rail service in the Northeast Corridor and should not be confused with the Regional Vision plan for New England rail service as discussed by Tom Maziarz.] In southern New England, this would include the development of a completely new rail corridor between New York and Boston. Mike Sanders noted that the plan lays out a baseline for what would really be involved in terms of cost and impacts to achieve true high speed rail service in the region. It can't be accomplished on any

existing corridor. Some supporters of high speed rail often do not understand what the impacts of developing a new corridor in Connecticut would be. Amtrak's Vision Plan does not even contemplate a stop in Connecticut on its high speed corridor. Sanders contrasted this reality with those who make statements like "I can't wait until high speed rail comes to Elmwood." The reality of true high speed rail is that Connecticut would be lucky to get a single stop at Hartford or maybe at Bradley if the Vision Plan alignment oriented the route in that area.

Sanders also mentioned that Metro-North is about to announce a temporary reduction in its schedule due to the high number of cars currently out of service due to weather-related strains. The only hope of Metro-North being able to catch up on its backlog of cars needing repairs is to temporarily reduce the level of service.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Rich Sunderhauf informed the Commission that a new 33-month labor agreement for Connecticut Transit is now in place. It runs retroactively to July of 2010. Mike Sanders explained that the reason for a contract length of 33 months is so that the new contract will expire on the same day as the current health insurance package, on April 1, 2013.

Russ St. John noted that Providence and Worcester has borrowed an oversized snow plow from Vermont Railways to catch up on snow removal from its tracks.

Mike Sanders responded to a question about a proposal to restore evening bus service in Waterbury by noting that a ConnDOT study had recommended doing this in 2008. The current proposal represents a good collaborative effort by all stakeholders including Naugatuck Valley Community College and Waterbury UConn. But Sanders cautioned that this is a very tough budget environment in which to push for any new service. ConnDOT's budget request to the governor would cover current services only. ConnDOT also offered a budget option that included a bus fare increase. If the department receives a flat budget but can get a fare increase, it will be able to sustain current services. However, if it receives a flat budget and cannot increase fares, there will be problems maintaining current services.

In response to a question about the M-8 cars being manufactured by Kawasaki rather than by an American company, Sanders said that the cars are made in Nebraska and meet all federal and State "Buy America" requirements. Even though the M-8s are being paid for entirely with State funds, the car specifications called for them to meet the federal requirements also in case some federal funding had been used.

Chairman's Report

None.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Fred Riese reported that the four spring public hearings sites will be New Milford, Willimantic, Meriden and West Haven. Sherry Osterling said these four hearings have already been scheduled and all four will be held in May.

Chairman Maloney said he would attempt to reschedule the meeting at Bozzuto's for May. He will also seek to have Connecticut Motor Transport Association president Mike Riley address the Commission, perhaps in June.

Mike Sanders volunteered to provide some analysis of the impacts of the Governor's budget on public transportation at the March meeting.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:22pm.