

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of July 9, 2009

Legislative Office Building
Hearing Room 1-A
Hartford

Attendance: Members: Mort Katz, Russ St. John, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Ed McAnaney, Kathleen Anderson, Jack Testani, Gail Lavielle, Chris Adams, Richard Carpenter, Tom Cheeseman, Alan Sylvestre. **Ex-officio members:** Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Stephen Troster, Bradshaw Smith.

Vice-chairman Mort Katz opened the meeting at 1:38 pm. Chairman Cheeseman had reported just before the meeting that his arrival for this meeting would be delayed. The minutes of the meeting of June 4 were approved with one correction. Rich Sunderhauf noted that the former Peter Pan buses mentioned by Mike Sanders at the last meeting were manufactured in 1993 and 1996, not 1983 and 1986 as listed in the minutes.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Rich Sunderhauf reported that Connecticut Transit would be supplying five buses and eleven drivers to provide transportation between Waterbury and Bridgeport while the Waterbury Branch rail service is suspended for track work. He also mentioned that the former Peter Pan buses recently added to the Connecticut Transit fleet will be used for express service to Colchester, Marlborough and Avon.

Rick Schreiner discussed the proposed expansion of Housatonic Railroad's transload facility in Newtown which has been locally controversial. Housatonic would expand the facility to a capacity of 2000 tons per day. The railroad would like to ship more solid waste from the facility, though not municipal solid waste or hazardous waste. Local concern appears to center around increased truck traffic to the facility. A permit from DEP will be needed for the proposed expansion.

Rick also attended a meeting of the Danbury Branch Rail Study Advisory Committee on June 23 in Ridgefield. He noted that the mood of the participants around the table was uniformly positive and supportive of the study and of efforts to improve the service. Gail Lavielle, who also attended the meeting, expressed her concern that the study may underestimate the potential ridership because of the many commuters who have not considered using the service due to deficiencies in the schedule and in parking. She said suggestions were made regarding surveying commuters who take the train from mainline stations to ascertain their towns of origin. Fred Riese noted that the combined existing state funding for the Danbury Branch CTC system combined with federal stimulus money for that project may be sufficient to fund the signal

system for the entire line rather than just a first phase of the CTC, according to an update from Sue Prosi of SWRPA.

Russ St. John noted that the recent mini-tornado of June 26 had shut down the Providence and Worcester tracks in Wethersfield. Two very large trees of 32"-36" diameter, and many smaller ones, had fallen across the line. Crews were able to clear the track on July 3 and, the Town of Wethersfield was very cooperative in providing for disposal of the resulting debris.

Gail Lavielle reported that the first meeting of the New Haven Line Station Access and Parking Task Force was held in New Haven on July 7. The Task Force began by assessing a previously completed parking study undertaken by SWRPA. Several sources of inaccuracies in that study were identified, including that not all parking permit holders regularly use their spaces, permits can be used for multiple cars, people have lost their jobs but retained their permits, and there is a lack of coordination and cross-checking between towns concerning parking permits. SWRPA is developing a more accurate survey methodology to be used in a new parking survey. The Task Force is also assembling an inventory of parking projects already underway. Gail said the mandate of the Task Force is at this point open-ended as to the timeframe over which it will perform its mission.

Dennis King reported on the upcoming ConnDOT fare increase hearings. Eleven afternoon and evening hearings are being held in nine municipalities during late July and early August for the proposed bus fare increase of 40% and rail fare increase of 10%. The locations and dates of the hearings are: Stamford on July 21, New Haven on July 22, Waterbury on July 29, Wallingford on July 30, Meriden also on July 30, Bristol on August 4, New Britain also on August 4 and Hartford on August 5.

Fred Riese reported that progress is being made on renegotiating the lease agreement between the Valley Railroad and DEP. An attorney from OPM has become involved in the redraft of the lease agreement and the project is definitely on the front burner. The revision of the Valley Railroad's lease is necessary in order to conclude a subsequent three-party agreement between DEP, the Valley Railroad and Providence & Worcester to formalize P&W's access rights for occasional use of a portion of Valley's leased track at Old Saybrook. The Federal Railroad Administration is extremely eager to see this matter, which dates from the Northeast Corridor Electrification project of the 90s, wrapped up.

Dick Carpenter asked if it is true that increased service on Shore Line East will require an approval from DEP. Riese replied that the Coastal Consistency Determination issued by DEP for the electrification project included a schedule for the bridge closures along the Northeast Corridor in Connecticut. This approval included a set number of bridge closures per day. It can be revised if it is demonstrated that the increased level of bridge closures do not violate DEP and Coast Guard guidelines for boat access at the five moveable bridges. Preliminary discussions between DEP and ConnDOT on this issue have already taken place.

Gail Lavielle reported that Fourth District Congressman Jim Himes spoke at the last meeting of the Coastal Corridor Transportation Investment Area TSB Committee. His topic was the formulation of the next surface transportation bill to replace SAFETEA-LU, which expires

this September 30. The declining ability of the gas tax to raise revenues in this era of improving fuel economy and the economic downturn is leading to the investigation of other revenue sources to support the Federal Highway Trust Fund, which is currently almost empty and projected to run out of funds later this year. So Congress is looking at a reconfiguring of the transportation landscape for the post-automobile phase, both in terms of revenue sources and of federally-supported transportation infrastructure. Floyd Lapp of SWRPA cited a figure of \$225 billion a year for 50 years as necessary to bring the US in line with other developed countries in terms of fully meeting all identified transportation needs. Congress is looking at a funding level of approximately \$450 billion over the next five years.

Report of Scheduled Featured Speaker

Chairman Cheeseman arrived at the meeting at 2:20pm. He first read some testimony provided by Michael Krauss of the Regional Growth Connection, a New Haven area job development and Jobs Access transportation coordinator. The Regional Growth Connection (RGC) has supported transportation to work programs since 1998. The RGC partnership includes 39 cities and towns and has assisted in transporting workers to job sites in 50 different communities. More than 7,500 low income workers have been given transportation assistance to access over 1,500 employers.

Mr. Krauss's testimony noted several examples of RGC-sponsored or assisted employment transportation programs. These examples included the shuttle service run by the Greater New Haven Transit District operating from New Haven to Old Saybrook with stops at various intervening employers; extension of the hours of CT Transit bus service both later at night and earlier in the morning, and increasing the frequency of service along the Post Road between New Haven and Milford; the M-Link service between Middletown and Meriden; the Nite Owl service in Middletown that addresses the needs of workers beyond the once typical 9 to 5 work day; and the Coastal Link bus service that provides single ride trips seven days a week between Norwalk and Milford along Route 1. RGC also administers the Auto Emergency Fund to assist individuals with up to \$600 for auto repairs, registration, license fees or insurance, and the Job Starter Program to provide one month of free transportation for new entrants to the job market.

RGC services are offered to TANF recipients or clients who are TANF eligible. The transportation providers who work with RGC to provide employment-related services are Connecticut Transit, Middletown Transit District, Milford Transit District and the Greater New Haven Transit District. Other partners working with RGC are the Workforce Alliance, Rideworks, ConnDOT, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Labor.

Cheeseman then discussed funding and revenue issues facing transit providers in Connecticut. A 25% funding reduction in DSS support for Jobs Access transit services is being proposed. Middletown Transit is slated to lose only \$1,000 in funding, which can be accommodated within its budget.

Chairman's Report

The proposed 40% bus fare increase will represent a major hardship for many riders of Middletown Area Transit as well as others statewide. This increase would hike the base fare

from \$1.25 per trip to \$1.75. Tom intends to speak at the fare increase hearings, not to oppose the fare increase but to oppose the amount of the increase. While the proposed fare increase would still be lower than fare rates in Boston or New York, it would impact lower income riders who are already hurting financially. Chris Adams suggested that the fare increases should be phased in rather than having a single steep fare hike. He also asked when the last general fare increase occurred and was informed by Rich Sunderhauf that it occurred in January 2005.

Jack Testani noted that Bridgeport is not on the list of public hearing sites despite being an important New Haven Line station. He inquired as to who prepared the list of hearing sites. Dennis King replied that ConnDOT prepared the list of sites and did not include Bridgeport. Rich Schreiner noted that the Greater Bridgeport Transit District already has a base fare of \$1.75 and thus would not be affected by the fare increase, which is very likely the reason that Bridgeport was not selected as a public hearing site. Further, the Greater Bridgeport Transit District has a separate rate setting procedure from the State-run systems. Testani also noted that Bridgeport has no rail-dedicated parking facilities but that most riders rely on private garages at either Harbor Yard or the Holiday Inn.

New Business

Russ St. John mentioned that a dead peregrine falcon chick was found on the Portland swing bridge. The chick, one of four in the nest, had been banded by DEP. Its death and location were reported to the Wildlife Division of DEP.

Fred Riese reported that Representative David McCluskey has organized a rail tour of the Griffins Line today, beginning at 4:30 from Union Station. Commission member Dick Carpenter had been invited to participate, which he indicated he planned to do. As to the purpose of the trip, Russ St. John said it was likely being done in conjunction with the International Model Railroad Convention being held in Hartford this weekend. Many model railroaders collect mileage, meaning they keep track of all miles they have personally logged on the American rail network. Special trips like this allow them to earn miles that they could not otherwise collect.

Connie Mendolia reported that DEP earned two trophies for participating in NuRide's Earth Day Race to the Finish Challenge. DEP earned a first place for participation rate among the participating companies and agencies for the percentage of employees using transit, ridesharing, biking, walking or telecommuting to work. DEP also earned a third place for the number of new riders using these means of reaching their jobs.

Fred Riese mentioned that the reimbursement request forms for the first half of the year have been distributed and asked members to fill those out and submit them as soon as possible. He also noted that the schedule for the fall public hearings has been released. The locations and dates are: Storrs on September 1, Windsor on September 15, Torrington to October 6 and Plainville on October 20.

The Commission meeting was adjourned at 3:45 PM.