

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of March 5, 2009

Fourth Floor Conference Room
Union Station, New Haven

Attendance: Members: Tom Cheeseman, Russ St. John, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Mort Katz, Yvonne Loteczka, Alan Sylvestre, Ed McAnaney, Bill Kelaher, Richard Carpenter, Gail Lavielle, Robert Zarnetske, Jack Testani. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** James Redeker, Dennis King. **Guests:** Terry Hall, Leo Petry.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:30 PM. He welcomed James Redeker, the recently-appointed Bureau Chief for Public Transportation and turned the floor over to him.

Featured Speaker

Bureau Chief Redeker came to Connecticut following a 31-year career in public transportation in New Jersey. His original background is in civil engineering and computer science, but his whole career has been in public transportation. At the time he began his career, he did not find that sensitivity to the needs of the traveling public was second nature within New Jersey DOT, which was probably typical for that era. His responsibilities have included strategic planning, corridor planning, fare structures, ADA service and, ultimately, capital planning for New Jersey Transit. The ConnDOT bureau chief position is an excellent fit for his skills and experience. However, this position, which he assumed six weeks ago, will be his first one with direct responsibility for the actual operation of trains and buses.

Redeker sees a strong level of public and political support for transit in Connecticut. He assessed the Governor's budget as a very positive one for transit and, in fact, as a growth budget in that regard. He noted that the Bureau of Public Transportation staff is small but is very dedicated.

On his second day as bureau chief, Redeker was assigned responsibility for solving the rail parking problems along the New Haven Line and Shore Line East. He defines the problem not in terms of a parking problem but more fundamentally as an access problem, i.e., the public's access to the trains is being limited. Redeker is not starting out his quest for a solution by looking at governance issues. He believes in looking for solutions first, then looking at the proper governance structures to achieve those solutions. A one-size-fits-all approach is not likely to succeed. What will work in Town A may not work in Town B. Redeker has observed that all parties are not in agreement on the basic facts of the problem. Thus, he sees step 1 as a fact collection stage to accurately define the existing situation. He believes that future parking needs must also be considered; we cannot just focus on today's problems.

Dick Carpenter asked Redeker for his opinion on the stub-end tunnels to Penn Station being proposed by New Jersey Transit. Redeker noted that he was very much involved in the planning for these tunnels up until about six years ago. Originally, a regional partnership was

envisioned to fund the tunnels. That partnership did not materialize, and thus the project was scaled back to one meeting the needs of New Jersey Transit. Though the current design does not link into MTA's system, the tunnels could be extended to Grand Central Terminal in the future if funding to do this was identified. If this extension were incorporated into the project now, the project could not meet the federal funding tests that NJT needs to pass. Redeker also noted that a tunnel design that would connect directly into Penn Station at the main level, rather than being below it as currently envisioned, would have obliterated the Seventh Avenue subway line and would have increased costs by \$2 billion. He noted that the sunken tunnel terminus does not mean that people cannot move to Penn Station to connect to other trains, only that the trains do not connect.

Redeker next discussed the efforts to improve Shore Line East service to New London. He noted that Amtrak has developed and submitted its 2030 service plan on schedule, which has been incorporated into the planning for Shore Line East. Amtrak will also receive a pot of federal stimulus money. Those are encouraging developments. However, Shore Line East service upgrades also depend on the required schedule for bridge openings at Connecticut's moveable bridges. Indeed, the schedule for Amtrak's whole Northeast Corridor service from Washington to Boston is tied those five moveable bridges in Connecticut. Train schedules are attempting to maximize the number of trains which pass at the bridges so as to get maximum utility out of each bridge closure. However, ConnDOT will be looking to get permission to run more service by the end of the year and will need to revisit the bridge schedules with Connecticut DEP. Redeker notes that Amtrak's chief scheduler used to work for him and that he enjoys a very good working relationship which he can call on when necessary.

Lastly, Redeker noted that the State of Connecticut is required to develop and adopt a state rail plan in order to be eligible to receive federal funding for rail improvements. Peter Richter is working on the rail plan, handling all elements from A to Z.

Robert Zarnetske suggested to Redeker that ConnDOT would do well to increase its visibility in D.C. In his five years working at USDOT, Zarnetske noted that he saw the folks from the Virginia and Maryland DOTs so often that he knew them all by first name but he never once saw anyone from ConnDOT in the building. Redeker mentioned that Commissioner Marie is a good communicator and can be expected to make Connecticut's interests sufficiently known to USDOT.

Approval of February Minutes

The Commission voted approval of the minutes of the meeting of February 5 as written.

Comments from the Public

Leo Petry of Rideworks informed the Commission that the Greater New Haven Transit District's R Link service, which runs from North Branford to downtown Branford and then on to the Branford Shore Line East station, will now be free for all Shore Line East monthly pass holders. Also, NU Ride has issued the Earth Day Commuter Challenge whereby weekly winners of \$100 Peapod grocery and gas certificates will be selected from among participating NU Ride commuters from now through April 30, 2009.

Terry Hall reported that the federal stimulus bill designated \$302 million for transportation projects in Connecticut. Of this amount, \$9,061,000 is designated for mandatory transportation enhancements, \$62,172,574 is set aside for Urban Areas over 200,000 population, \$23,993,369 must go to Small Urban/Suburban Areas (under 200,000 population) and \$4,450,294 is set aside for Rural Areas. An additional \$202,376,150 of the transportation funds may be used in any area.

The federal government is looking to Amtrak and the states to identify problem areas which limit train speed for passenger services. Forty percent of the national funding for passenger rail will go to the Northeast Corridor. The Northeast Corridor will get the largest share of the eight designated high speed rail corridors nationally.

Chairman Cheeseman presented Terry with a plaque from ConnDOT and the Commission acknowledging Terry's ten years of service on the Commission and his valuable contributions over that time.

Reports from Operating Entities

Richard Sunderhauf reported that he observed three used Peter Pan buses on Connecticut Transit property last week. These buses will be painted Connecticut Transit blue. This is the first time in Rich's memory that Connecticut Transit has purchased used buses.

Bill Kelaher reported that he attended the Empire State Transportation Alliance meeting in Albany. According to reports announced there, MTA has a \$1.2 billion deficit to be closed by March 25 or else fares will be increased on buses and subways, and service cuts will be implemented to eliminate 23 bus routes entirely and eliminate weekend service on 26 routes, while other routes will lose evening service. Two subway lines would be eliminated under the proposed cuts, along with two Harlem Line, three Hudson Line and four New Haven Line trains.

Rick Schreiner reported that ridership on the interregional shuttles is still showing gains but much smaller ones than in recent periods. Ridership on the Ridgefield-Katonah shuttle is up 4.5% to 188 passengers per day, while Danbury-Brewster ridership is up 2.8% to 302 riders daily. The Route 7 LINK saw ridership inch upward 1.4% to 208 daily passengers. Rick also mentioned that the Northeast Passenger Transportation Association (NEPTA) will be holding its conference and expo in Hartford March 17-19. The conference is co-sponsored by FTA Region I.

Russ St. John informed the members that the Providence and Worcester has moved four turbines and two generators for the Kleen Energy power plant in Middletown. These were over-size, over-dimension loads but the moves went smoothly.

Fred Riese said that work was continuing on efforts to revise the lease agreement for Valley Railroad to operate on the DEP-owned Valley Line. Approval of the new lease is required if DEP, Valley Railroad and P&W are to enter into a license agreement to formalize P&W's access to the lower end of the Valley Line, as stipulated by the Federal Railroad Administration in its record of decision for the Northeast Corridor electrification project. Currently, DEP is attempting to address comments made by OPM in its review of the draft lease.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Cheeseman reported that Commission member Kevin Maloney did an excellent job testifying before the General Assembly's Transportation Committee on the issue of electronic tolling and congestion mitigation.

Tom also reported that the 3-year old Dial-a-Ride matching grant program may be in jeopardy. The matching grant program has provided \$5,000,000 per year to municipalities to match in-kind support for Dial-a-Ride and has allowed paratransit services to be expanded. Rick Schreiner added that a public hearing on Senate Bill 1093 to provide \$4,000,000 per year for the matching grant program will be held on March 11. In the absence of continued funding, Tom said there is funding available to support the municipal grant services for approximately another six months. Tom also mentioned a legislative proposal has been submitted to require that 35% of all Dial-a-Ride funds be used for dialysis patients. Tom finds this proposal puzzling as all requests for dialysis patient transport are currently being met without this mandate.

Lastly, Tom mentioned that after fourteen months of negotiations, an agreement has been signed between the Middletown Transit District and Local 671, covering the 21 employees who operate Middletown Area Transit.

Old Business

Fred Riese reminded those members who have not yet submitted their reimbursement requests for the second half of 2008 to do so very shortly.

New Business

Mort Katz attended a conference on the subject "Can Rail Save Connecticut's Cities?" held at the Hartford Law School on February 20. He found the conference very interesting. Tom Condon chaired the panel discussion. ConnDOT Commissioner Joseph Marie was also a panel member.

Gail Lavielle distributed copies of her February 24 testimony before the Transportation Committee in support of SB 425, An Act Concerning the Improvement of Norwalk/ Danbury Train Service. Her testimony cited the importance of continued progress in improving the Danbury Branch infrastructure and service.

New Commission appointee Jack Testani introduced himself. Mr. Testani was appointed by Senator John McKinney. Jack commutes from Bridgeport to Stamford every day on Metro-North and is also a frequent user of Shore Line East service. He is chairman of the Republican Town Committee of Trumbull. He also writes weekly columns for the Connecticut Post and the Trumbull Times.

Before adjourning, Chairman Cheeseman appointed Gail Lavielle and Rick Schreiner to the Commuter Rail Parking Task Force being chaired by Bureau Chief Redeker.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:20 PM.