

**Connecticut Public Transportation Commission**  
Minutes of March 3, 2011

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room B  
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

**Attendance: Members:** Richard Schreiner, Mort Katz, Russ St. John, Richard Sunderhauf, Ed McAnaney, Yvonne Loteczka, Alan Sylvestre, Robert Rodman, Ron Kilcoyne, Richard Caprenter, John Zelinsky. **Ex-officio members:** Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Michael Sanders, Dennis King, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Terry Hall, Jan Lindberg, Jean Stimolo.

Vice chairman Rick Schreinter called the meeting to order at 1:35 pm. The minutes of the meeting of February 3 were approved as written.

**Featured Speaker**

Michael Sanders, Transit and Ridesharing Administrator at ConnDOT, provided an analysis of what Governor Malloy's proposed budget will mean for public transportation. Sanders said that, as far as he knew, ConnDOT was the only State agency receiving an increase in non-mandatory expenditures. ConnDOT's current services budget was largely approved intact. One significant change is that insurance coverage is being transferred from ConnDOT to the Department of Administrative Services. This change is, on its face, revenue neutral as ConnDOT is giving up both the expense of the insurance coverage and the funding it receives for it. However, this change removes the risk of a large claim settlement out of ConnDOT so that will help the agency.

Another significant change for public transportation is the elimination of the contract of First Transit to administer the bus systems in Hartford, New Haven and Stamford. This saves \$1.1 million by eliminating the five managers who run Connecticut Transit. These functions are proposed to be moved in-house to ConnDOT with existing personnel. Among the potential difficulties with this arrangement is the issue of who will become the final arbiter for labor grievances at Connecticut Transit. First Transit has served as final arbiter. Does this responsibility now come to the State to arbitrate private labor grievances?

Sanders also said funding has been cut 25% for the State Matching Grant Program under CGS section 13b-38bb. This program has been receiving \$5,000,000 per year since its inception in 2004, but it has typically only awarded \$4,000,000 per year in grants. This year, for instance, \$3,900,000 in grants was awarded. The program will now only receive \$3,000,000, if the level proposed in the Governor's budget is enacted.

There are no significant changes to the rail side of the budget.

Sanders characterized the transit budget overall by saying this would be a decent budget even in a good year, but considering where the State is financially at the moment, this is a great budget.

On the capital side, Sanders reported that the Governor's budget envisions \$320 million of State bond funding, which is an increase of \$240 million above the normal capital funding level for transit. This will provide a cushion of State bond money in the event that federal funding levels are cut.

The 3c per gallon increase in the State gas tax will yield approximately \$45-50 million in new revenues. Also, Gov. Malloy is proposing that 100% of the petroleum products excise tax, aka the gross receipts tax, go into the Special Transportation Fund, not just part of the tax revenue as is currently the case. This extra revenue will help keep the Special Transportation Fund solvent and keep the rating agencies satisfied about the Fund's ability to pay its obligations.

No bus or rail fare increases are proposed in the budget. So fares will remain at current levels except for the previously scheduled small rail fare increase to help pay for the new M-8s. Speaking of those cars, the first M-8s went into revenue service earlier this week. Testing of the cars had continued through February despite the bad weather. Approximately 10-12 new cars per month should be delivered now and added to the New Haven Line fleet.

Regarding the New Britain Busway, Connecticut is still awaiting word on final approval of \$266 million in New Starts funding from FTA. This grant amounts to roughly one half of the remaining funding needed to build the busway.

This coming Monday, trains will be restored to the Waterbury Branch service. Sanders reported that this time there were a few bumps encountered with switching the Waterbury Branch service to buses, mostly due to the lack of planning time to implement the switch. Approximately 60-70 Metro-North cars are still in the shop for repairs, which is about 20 cars more than are normally out of service at any one time.

In response to a question on fuel prices, Sanders mentioned that ConnDOT is currently paying \$2.80 per gallon for diesel fuel for transit use due to long term contracts it had entered into. Ron Kilcoyne mentioned that Greater Bridgeport Transportation Authority was paying \$2.77 per gallon.

Jean Stimolo of Rideworks asked about the status of Shore Line East service in the Governor's budget, and specifically about the expansion of Shore Line East service. Sanders said that funds for station modernization had been approved by the Bond Commission to allow for 2-sided operation on Shore Line East by placing platforms on both sides of the track at station locations.

### **Reports from Operating Entities**

Russ St. John reported that Providence and Worcester is upgrading its Plainfield to Willimantic track which will improve interchange capabilities with the New England Central.

Rich Sunderhauf mentioned that the Union Station Shuttle in New Haven is now carrying 14,000 passengers per month, its highest ridership since it began operation in August 2009.

Mike Sanders related that, at least for a brief time, Connecticut Transit will be tied with Oakland, California for the largest fleet of fuel cell buses in America, with five fuel cell buses each. (Oakland will retake the lead after one bus returns to service following major repairs.) A new fueling facility for these buses is being built at the Connecticut Transit Hartford Division garage so the buses don't have to make the run up to UTC's facility for refueling.

Fred Riese reported that Chairman Maloney testified before the General Assembly's Transportation Committee on February 18 in support of a bill authored by former Commission member Gail Lavielle which would restore the statutory requirement for ConnDOT to provide formal written responses to the recommendations contained in the Commission's Annual Report.

### **Chairman's Report**

Rick summarized a Wall Street Journal editorial forwarded to him by Chairman Maloney. The editorial questioned the feasibility of President Obama's goal of providing 80% of Americans with access to high speed rail service and more generally the value of high speed rail projects. Some states have turned back funds allocated to them for high speed rail initiatives while others are rethinking projects to which they were previously committed. The editorial singled out the Northeast Corridor as the region where high speed rail projects make the most sense but notes that Amtrak estimates true high speed rail service in the corridor would take 25 years to achieve and cost \$117 billion.

### **Old Business**

Dick Carpenter inquired of Mike Sanders whether the State has a position on the preferred corridor for Amtrak's Vision Plan for high speed rail service. Sanders replied that the Vision Plan is a very long-range plan and that Connecticut might not even get a stop in the high speed service, if it were to be implemented. No State position has been developed at this time.

Carpenter also read from an article from the April issue of *Trains* magazine which highlighted how far behind China the US is in high speed rail mileage. Sanders said we do not have a goal of competing with China in this area. Also, China does not have to construct their lines to meet FRA standards for track and rail beds. The Chinese safety record for rail projects is not good. Sanders also mentioned that, in his opinion, FRA is funding too many small pieces of too many separate high speed rail projects. This may be done to satisfy political considerations but it does not make for the most efficient rail projects.

Terry Hall mentioned that two areas highlighted for priority investment in Amtrak's long range plan are the Washington-to-Baltimore and the New Jersey segments of the Northeast Corridor for improvements to achieve true high speed rail service. The former segment needs to have some old rail tunnels upgraded while the latter suffers due to the high traffic density there.

### **New Business**

Rick Schreiner asked for volunteers to moderate the four spring public hearings. He volunteered to chair the first one which is on May 4 in New Milford. Alan Sylvestre will moderate the May 19 hearing in Meriden. Ron Kilcoyne volunteered for West Haven on May 26. As both Kevin Maloney (via e-mail) and Fred Riese expressed a willingness to fill in as

necessary for the spring hearings, one of them will chair the Willimantic public hearing on May 11.

Fred Riese mentioned that an article on the New Britain Busway in Monday's Waterbury Republican American discussed the continuing controversy between the bus and rail options for that corridor. Fred e-mailed Waterbury Republican reporter Andrew Larson, the author of the story, the leadoff recommendation from the 2010 CPTC Annual Report to clarify that the so-called rail option is not a viable option to replace the busway proposal anytime in the foreseeable future due to its highly conceptual nature and the lack of any planning, design, or permitting work and no assurance it would qualify for federal funding.

Fred also asked any members who have not yet submitted their reimbursement requests for the last half of 2010 to do so soon.

Rick Schreiner adjourned the meeting at 2:40 pm.