

**Connecticut Public Transportation Commission**  
Minutes of May 7, 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, Gail Lavielle. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Donald Shubert, Terry Hall, Leo Petry.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:30 PM. The minutes of the meeting of April 2 were approved as written.

**Featured Speaker**

Donald Shubert, president of the Connecticut Construction Industries Association, provided a synopsis of his background. He worked for Balfour-Savin for eight years. He serves on many transportation construction-related groups including serving on the executive committee of the American Road and Transportation Association.

Mr. Shubert explained that the Connecticut Construction Industries Association (CCIA) consists of nine divisions: Associated General Contractors of Connecticut, Connecticut Road Builders Association, Connecticut Ready Mixed Concrete Association, Utility Contractors Association of Connecticut, Connecticut Asphalt and Aggregate Association, Equipment Dealers Division, Heavy and Highway Division, Connecticut In-Plant Operators Division, and AGC/CCIA Building Contractors Labor Relations. Although many people think of CCIA as simply highway builders, this is no longer true. The CCIA's 2006 report *Keep Connecticut Moving* focused on all portions of the transportation spectrum. It is no longer a matter of viewing the transportation scene as highway versus transit. We have learned that we are all in this together.

Governor Rell appointed Mr. Shubert to her Stimulus Funding Work Group. Shubert shared outlines of the transportation projects currently included in Connecticut's Stimulus package. Connecticut received \$302 million of Stimulus funding which was slotted to the most flexible highway funding programs available to give Connecticut maximum discretion in its use. One third of this money will go to the Regional Planning Agencies/ MPOs for projects of their choosing. The RPAs/MPOs will have one year to obligate their funds. This will allow sufficient time to amend any Transportation Improvement Plans (TIPs) if necessary if proposed projects were not listed in a region's TIP as is required for funding.

Connecticut's Congressional delegation members put a priority on having a geographical balance in the selected projects in this state. This led to a project for rehabilitation work on the Moses Wheeler Bridge to be pulled from the stimulus list. The \$18.8 million in funding that was allotted to this project will now be split up into probably four smaller regional projects. Shubert also mentioned that, in contrast to the past practice of pursuing repaving work

with 100% State funding, stimulus money will be used for many resurfacing projects. However, since Federal projects are subject to many additional rules and requirements that State projects are not subject to, Federally-funded resurfacing work will get pushed off until 2010. State bond funds will be used to perform 2009 repaving work.

Two other specific stimulus projects mentioned by Shubert were funding to upgrade 106 transit buses currently on order to hybrid buses and \$30,000,000 toward installation of a centralized traffic control (CTC) signal system on the Danbury Branch of Metro-North. Overall, 7% of the Federal stimulus package is directed to transportation projects. Connecticut, and other states, may be able to grab additional unobligated money if other states do not meet timeframes for obligating these funds. To date, the outlay of funds to actual projects has been at very low levels nationwide.

The current surface transportation funding authorization known as SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) expires on September 30 of this year. Representative James Oberstar, Chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, will be addressing a Connecticut Road Builders Association-sponsored breakfast tomorrow at Bradley Field and will also be taken on a tour to see the Interstate 84 viaduct through Hartford. Shubert invited Commission members to attend.

Following the collapse of the I-35 bridge in Minneapolis, Congress had made \$1 billion available for road and bridge projects but had attached a lot of conditions to the use of this money. The result was that only nine states applied to use these funds.

The Federal Highway Trust Fund balance had gone to zero at one point last summer as money was being spent faster than it was coming in. Congress dipped into general funds last year to get through this period. The trust fund is likely to run dry again this summer as projects draw down the funds balance faster than new revenues replenish it. In recognition of this problem, FHWA has rescinded \$3.15 billion in trust fund disbursements nationwide, including \$44.6 million in funds to Connecticut. This will mean that all state highway appropriations are being cut roughly in half.

Shubert said the Senate is not yet focused on the new transportation bill, and indeed the whole matter of a new funding authorization act may be put off for another year. He pointed out that 67% of Connecticut's overall highway funding comes from Federal funds so a 50% reduction in this component is very significant. He mentioned that Mitch Warren in Sen. Dodd's office has been very focused on reauthorization issues and their potential impact to Connecticut.

Regarding spending for high speed rail projects, President Obama wanted \$10 billion to be included in the stimulus package for such projects. Congress gave him \$8 billion in that legislation but added another \$1 billion in the omnibus funding bill. Shubert is confident that the president will ultimately get the full \$10 billion he was looking for.

The trend to date, according to Shubert, is that the Federal stimulus money is rolling out more slowly than expected and the effects of this legislation will really kick in next year. In

Connecticut, Shubert sees the financial needs of the Quinnipiac River Bridge project forcing ConnDOT to be slow to commit money elsewhere.

Mr. Shubert then elaborated on the replacement Federal surface transportation legislation. Rep. Oberstar has stated a goal to cut the current 108 project funding categories of SAFETEA-LU down to four categories and to provide much more funding flexibility to the states. The new authorization will not simply be a rehash of the existing program. No one is yet sure how the program will be paid for. The Obama administration has thus far said it does not want to raise fuel taxes and it opposed a VMT tax. More public-private partnerships may be in the mix, according to Shubert. Rep. Oberstar has also said he wants a bill free of earmarks.

Formulas in the new transportation bill could hurt Connecticut since this state traditionally receives much more in Federal transportation funding than it generates in revenues. A 'hold harmless' provision may be inserted to protect states from cuts in allocation. Conversely, SAFETEA-LU contained a guaranteed rate of return of 90.5% of the revenues generated in each state going back to that state. Through the term of SAFETEA-LU, the guaranteed rate increased to 92.0%. Further increases in this guaranteed rate of return would hurt Connecticut.

Terry Hall mentioned to Mr. Shubert that three specific Amtrak projects in Connecticut which will need funding in the near future. These are the Niantic River Bridge, the Connecticut River Bridge and the Connecticut River crossing just north of Hartford.

### **Comments from the Public**

Terry Hall questioned the wisdom of the New Jersey Transit proposal for two new passenger rail tunnels under the Hudson River that will terminate at a new terminal adjacent to Penn Station but will not connect to any existing rail lines on the east side of the river. This project is estimated to cost \$8.7 billion and to require eight years to construct.

### **Reports from Operating Entities**

Russ St. John reported that the last large components of the Kleen Energy power plant in Middletown have now been delivered to the site. The last item was a 350 ton generator. Marino Crane and Providence and Worcester worked very well together to move this equipment.

Fred Riese mentioned that he would be attending the May 13 Transportation Strategy Board public hearing in Gorton on electronic toll collection. The TSB will be having another hearing the following evening in Norwalk. He also attended an April 16 meeting of the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail Advisory Committee and reported that current project plans now call for double tracking the entire line. This change resulted from recognition that freight operations on the line could not feasibly be confined to nighttime hours and therefore capacity needed to be provided to run both passenger and freight operations during the day. Also the town of Windsor Locks wants the passenger station there to be moved to a downtown location rather than the current location south of town adjacent to Interstate 91.

Rich Sunderhauf distributed the new Hartford Division Connecticut Transit bus schedules which go into effect on May 10. This schedule includes more extensive changes than usual. The

new service to the Walgreen's warehouse in Windsor is reflected on this schedule. He also mentioned that the three Peter Pan buses purchased by Connecticut Transit are being rehabilitated and repainted. These buses have a million miles apiece on them.

Susan Simmat attended the TSB toll hearing in New Haven where 25 people spoke. The Waterbury tolling hearing had only 14 attendees, four of whom spoke.

Bill Kelaher reported that substantial service cuts in MTA's Metro-North, LIRR and subway operations are imminent if no new funding is obtained. Express service from NYC to Stamford might be lost meaning that every train would make the 17 intervening station stops before Stamford. Possible station closures on the New Haven Line and its branches are also being considered. There is much pressure on the New York General Assembly to come up with the additional funding. On the positive side of the ledger, a new Metro-North service to Yankee Stadium is slated to begin on May 23. There is only a nominal additional charge to passengers to make this connection.

Kelaher also mentioned that summer construction work on the Northeast Corridor between New Haven and Old Saybrook will cause minor delays to Shore Line East and Amtrak service. Amtrak is not planning to publish schedules with the time changes due to the frequency of schedule changes during the construction, but the schedules will be available on-line.

Chairman Cheeseman reported that New York Governor David Patterson is pressing for transit fare increases of \$.25-.50 and taxi service fare surcharges of \$1.00 to help close the MTA budget deficit. Service on two subway lines and forty bus routes is in jeopardy if this budget deficit is not closed.

Rick Schreiner said HART's new Harlem Line shuttle service from New Fairfield to Southeast, NY will begin service May 18. NYDOT and Metro Pool are doing the marketing for this service. Three parking lots in Connecticut are being leased to provide parking capacity for this run.

### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Cheeseman reported that Governor Rell reiterated her opposition to new tolls on our highways during a recent radio interview. Tom stated that often this discussion of tolls becomes sensationalized with accounts of the Stratford toll booth crash that took seven lives. Sue Simmat supported this observation by noting that after the New Haven TSB hearing at which it was repeatedly stated that no physical toll booths were being proposed in the study, the Channel 8 reporter covering the hearing filed his report standing next to a toll booth (in this case a park toll booth) in the background.

Gail Lavielle mentioned that the concept of the reinstallation of tolls has engendered much opposition in Fairfield County, not so much from any misunderstanding about the use of toll booths but from concern about the use of local roads by drivers seeking to avoid the tolls. Sue Simmat mentioned that 95% of comments to the TSB web site were in opposition to the idea of tolls. Gail added that the differentiation between general tolls and a congestion pricing plan is largely lost on the public.

**Old Business**

Fred Riese mentioned that the May 5 Norwich public hearing had four speakers in addition to Peter Richter's presentation of the draft State Rail Plan at the hearing.

**New Business**

Gail Lavielle has done an extensive amount of public and media outreach for the May 19 public hearing in Norwalk. Articles and editorials have been printed in several newspapers. She promised that the hearing will have a lot of publicity.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:39 PM.