

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of November 5, 2009

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room A
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Attendance: Members: Tom Cheeseman, Mort Katz, Russ St. John, Kathleen Anderson, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Ed McAnaney, Chris Adams, Kevin Maloney. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** James Redeker, Michael Sanders, Dennis King, Lisa Rivers, Dennis Jolly, Sherry Osterling, Aimee Marques. **Guests:** Margaret Smith Hale, Alan Baer, G. W. Frazier, Leslie Wolf, Stephen Troster.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:30 pm. The minutes of the meeting of October 1 were approved as written, with Richard Sunderhauf clarifying that the floors of the Connecticut Transit Hartford Division garage had the oil and grease stripped off their surfaces. The actual concrete was not removed.

Featured Speakers

Margaret Smith Hale, Alan Baer, G. W. Frazier and Leslie Wolf of the Independent Transportation Network provided a detail description of the structure and function of their organization, which provides transportation to seniors (60+ years) and visually-impaired citizens. Margaret Hale of the Independent Transportation Network (ITN) of North Central Connecticut, which serves a 10-town region, explained that individual local affiliates such as hers operate under the umbrella of ITN America, based in Portland, Maine. Currently there are thirteen affiliates of ITN America nationwide, with two in Connecticut. Besides ITN of North Central Connecticut, a second Connecticut affiliate, ITN of Central Connecticut, represented by G. W. Frazier, serves ten towns in the Middletown area. A third Connecticut affiliate, to serve Westport and five neighboring towns, is currently in organization. Leslie Wolf is working on that effort.

The goal of ITN America and its affiliates is to provide transportation to seniors and visually-impaired adults, as an alternative to seniors driving themselves and to provide trips for those who have no other transportation options. According to Hale, people today outlive their ability to drive by 6-10 years. ITN of North Central Connecticut began operation on April 29, 2009 and has already provided over 1,300 trips. Trips are provided on a door-through-door basis, meaning that network drivers can go beyond a door-to-door service to assist riders on both ends of their trips, and can even stay with the clients as necessary during a doctor or hospital visit or for other needs.

ITN operates as a subscription service. Clients pay annual dues of \$40 per individual member or \$60 per household, and then pay for individual rides at a rate of a \$4.00 pick-up charge and \$1.00 per mile. Most trips are short local ones, with an average trip costing \$10. Forty-six percent of the trips provided are for medical purposes. The remainders are trips which truly replace private auto use. The volunteer drivers use their own vehicles and are reimbursed

for mileage when a passenger is actually in their vehicles, while receiving credits for mileage driven to make a pick-up or a return from a trip. These credits go into a driver's account and can be used if the driver wants to use the service.

Hale pointed out that ITN's services help the economy by allowing clients to get out and shop or attend entertainment events. Regarding savings realized by the clients themselves, Hale cited figures from AAA that estimate the cost of owning an automobile at \$15.88 per day. This is a savings that clients can realize if they can give up their personal vehicles. ITN clients who give up driving and sell their vehicles can put the proceeds into an account at ITN to pre-pay future rides.

In response to a question about transporting younger passengers, Hale said that riders under 60 cannot be transported, unless they are visually-impaired, in which case 18 years becomes the age requirement. ITN of North Central Connecticut is bound by the terms of its contract with ITN America, which sets these limits. In regard to its organization and financial structure, Hale noted that ITN America and its individual affiliates are all organized as 501(c) 3 non-profit organizations. The affiliates do fund-raising and seek grants to fill in the difference between their revenues and costs. ITN of North Central Connecticut has received a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and it also holds an annual walk to raise funds, but additional financial support is still needed. At present, 31% of its costs are being covered by members/riders. Many of the volunteer drivers donate their reimbursement payments to a Road Scholarship Fund for low income riders who cannot otherwise afford to use ITN services. Hale also noted that the ITN concept was piloted for 10 years in Portland before the idea was expanded.

ITN is exempt from livery regulation. Initially it appeared as though this might not be the case, but State Senators DeFronzo and Harris sponsored legislation to exempt community-based volunteer transportation organizations from livery regulation. This legislation was passed last May 6.

Hale distributed maps showing the areas served by the two existing ITN affiliates in Connecticut and the affiliate in organization in Westport, which plans to begin service in 6-8 months. ITN of North Central Connecticut serves the 10 towns of Enfield, Suffield, Somers, Granby, East Granby, Windsor Locks, Windsor, Bloomfield, East Windsor and South Windsor. ITN of Central Connecticut serves Middletown, Cromwell, Rocky Hill, Wethersfield, Portland, East Hampton, Middlefield, Durham, Haddam and East Haddam. The ITN Westport affiliate will serve Westport, Fairfield, Norwalk, Wilton, Weston and Easton. Leslie Wolf mentioned that the Westport service will take riders out of the area for specific needs such as access to Yale-New Haven Hospital or the Veterans' Administration Hospital in West Haven.

In response to a question concerning what due diligence is done for candidate volunteer drivers, Hale said criminal background checks are performed, rides are taken with the candidate drivers, and the drivers' vehicles are inspected. ITN also plans to select a week's worth of riders and contact all of them to survey their experiences.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Mike Sanders, ConnDOT's Transit and Ridesharing Administrator, said that the agency fared well under the new budget compared to other agencies. Transit received an overall 3.5% increase. ADA transportation is a little underfunded, perhaps by \$1,000,000. Bus ridership is starting to reach a plateau as current months are not competing against gas prices as high as those of a year ago. On the rail side, ridership is down. Although transit will fare OK under the current budget, if there are any rescissions of funds due to state revenue shortfalls, then matters could get worse. No bus fare increase is planned for this year. We will have to look at the budget and revenue pictures before deciding what happens next year.

Jim Redeker, Bureau Chief for Public Transportation, noted that passenger revenues are a very important part of the equation on the train side, and that the decline in ridership will leave a \$15-16 million hole in the budget. New York State is not planning any cuts, and has restored some services which had been cut. This reduces the options available for Connecticut to address the budget shortfall.

Sanders reported that the RFP for new buses is currently bouncing back and forth between the department and the Attorney General's office for review and revision. Four vendors have expressed interest in supplying the five different types of buses which will be ordered. Overall, 132 buses will be ordered, with the first buses going to the New Britain and Bristol service, which currently has the oldest vehicle fleet. The first new buses should arrive in March 2010.

The first two M-8 rail cars are now on the boat on the way from Japan to Connecticut for systems work and testing here. Additional cars must arrive before actual operational testing can be performed.

Redeker also reported that early materials have been ordered for the Danbury Branch CTC system. Some vendor contracts have already been signed. The CTC project will happen next year.

Richard Sunderhauf reported that Alvin Douglas played a major role in the new state legislation concerning assaults on bus drivers.

Richard Schreiner informed the Commission that HART and the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials were working to update the Five Year Transit Development Plan and a comprehensive operational analysis of the HART fixed route system. Following up on the preceding ITN presentation, Schreiner noted that some volunteer-based transportation programs have been eliminated in the HART service region. Jim Redeker noted that when such programs are lost, it adds to the demands placed upon the state-funded ADA providers.

Fred Riese noted that this has been a busy season for various ConnDOT-sponsored project advisory committees. He, along with Jim Redeker and Sue Simmat, attended the kick-off advisory committee meeting for the development of an environmental impact statement on the

expansion of Interstate 84 from the New York state line to the end of Waterbury on October 22. An advisory committee meeting on the Route 8 Needs and Deficiencies Study from Seymour to Waterbury will occur on November 10. The Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Line Study will have an advisory committee meeting December 1 in Bridgeport. Riese is also working on reviewing the draft State Rail Plan.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Cheeseman asked for a vote on sending a letter of endorsement from the Commission for the mixed use transit-oriented development plan for Union Station and the surrounding area in New Haven, as presented by Michael Piscatelli at the October 1 meeting. The motion was passed unanimously.

Old Business

Fred Riese read a short e-mail update he received from Gail Lavielle concerning an agreement between ConnDOT and the Town of Wilton to renovate and re-open Wilton Station. Gail reported that there is now a firm schedule for the contracting, renovation and reopening of Wilton Station, with an opening date set for October 2010. The cost of the work is approximately \$190,000, most or all of which will be paid with stimulus funds. A press conference to announce the agreement was held at the station on October 26, with First Selectman Bill Brennan, State Senator Toni Boucher, State Representative John Hetherington, town planner Bob Nerney and Gail speaking at that event.

Bureau Chief Redeker elaborated on this development noting that the process has worked out to provide a good agreement. Wilton will have the local responsibility to open the station, probably through a resident vendor at the site, while ConnDOT will have the continuing maintenance responsibility at Wilton Station. ConnDOT will advertise for a vendor to operate the station and manage parking. The overall cost for repairs at Wilton Station will be approximately \$200,000.

Redeker also mentioned that the second meeting of the New Haven Line Parking Task Force will occur on November 9. There was good representation and participation at the initial task force meeting on July 7 including a long discussion on parking permits, capacity at parking facilities, and finding better ways to administer the permit process. He noted that pricing for parking varies from town to town. There are thousands of people on waiting lists for parking spaces while there are also thousands of vacant spaces according to parking inventories. With the downturn in ridership, more spaces have recently become available. Increased shuttle service at New Haven has also made more parking available. One topic that will be discussed at the second task force meeting is proposals to have the municipal planning organizations (MPOs) conduct a parking survey based on a standardized methodology as an element of their annual work programs.

New Business

Yvonne Loteczka reported seeing a story that the train museum in Willimantic had been vandalized recently.

Fred Riese mentioned that ConnDOT had submitted TIGER (Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery) grant applications for infrastructure improvements on seven of Connecticut's eight freight railroads. One of these applications in particular has generated some interest and controversy, that being the application for the Valley Railroad to repair and upgrade its existing track from Old Saybrook to Haddam and to restore the five mile gap on its right-of-way from milepost 12.75 in Haddam, which is the northern limit of its existing operation, to the Maromas section of Middletown, where it would link up with the existing operations of the Providence and Worcester Railroad. Jim Redeker said he was also aware of the public interest in this particular application. The potential use of this segment to handle limited amounts of freight traffic appears to be the source of the concern.

Fred also reminded members that the annual work session to develop recommendations for the Annual Report will be held on Thursday, November 19 at Union Station in New Haven at 5:00 pm. in the Fourth Floor Conference Room.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:50 pm.