

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of October 1, 2009

Fourth Floor Conference Room
Union Station, New Haven

Attendance: Members: Tom Cheeseman, Russ St. John, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Alan Sylvestre, Ed McAnaney, Chris Adams, Kevin Maloney, Gail Lavielle. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Terry Hall, Michael Piscatelli, Jean Stimolo, Leonard Honeyman, Richard Stowe.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:37 PM. The minutes of the meeting of September 3 were approved as written.

Comments from the Public

Richard Stowe asked about bicycle accommodations on the new M-8 rail cars. Stowe attended a public showing of the M-8 prototype in January 2008. ConnDOT had asked for proposals for bicycle racks on the cars at that point but Stowe has heard no news on this issue since. He has written to Metro-North asking for an update on the status of any contract for on-car bicycle racks but has received no response to date.

Stowe mentioned the case of Phil Riggio of Darien who rides his bicycle 40 miles to his employment site in Mid-town Manhattan. Mr. Riggio needs to be able to use Metro-North for the return trip on occasions when the weather deteriorates during the work day. Under existing policy, Mr. Riggio must wait until after 8:30 pm when he is allowed to bring his bicycle onto the off-peak trains. This costs Metro-North a peak fare passenger who now pays an off-peak fare rate instead.

A second item addressed by Mr. Stowe is the under-utilization of State Street Station. At present, New Haven Line service does not extend to State Street Station on weekends. The State Street area is rich in night life and leisure attractions but, unlike say the South Norwalk (SoNo) area which is accessible on weekends by train travel, this market is not available at State Street. Ideally, Mr. Stowe would like to see New Haven Line services extend, at least with some trains, eastward to Old Saybrook, if not to New London.

Mr. Stowe's third topic concerned the proposed Springfield Line commuter rail service and access to New Britain. New Britain is the most populous city in the tri-state area without any passenger rail service. He recommends that at least some Springfield Line trains be routed through New Britain, leaving the Springfield Line at Berlin, traveling to downtown New Britain, and rejoining the Springfield Line at Newington Junction, in the case of northbound trips.

In response to questions about Mr. Riggio's bicycle commute and Metro-North bicycle policy, Stowe said there would be adequate room on the peak hour trains for Mr. Riggio and his bicycle, in part because Metro-North ridership is down. In any case, the conductor would always have the discretion to turn him or any bicycle commuter down on a particular train if that train

was too crowded. That authority is available without the blanket prohibition on bicycles on peak-hour trains. Stowe also noted that the PM peak ridership is more spread out than the AM peak trains. The current policy is a 10-hour per day prohibition on bicycles on trains, and 10 holidays per year when bicycles are also prohibited. He also noted that the bicycle racks on trains would be required to meet FRA standards for strength and security. Regarding bicycle racks on the older M-2, M-4 and M-6 cars, Stowe was unaware of any specific discussions but felt one option might be to allow bicycles on the older bar cars once the new ones go into service.

Featured Speaker

Michael Piscitelli, Director of Parking and Transportation for the City of New Haven, spoke concerning efforts to take full advantage of the synergies of New Haven's transportation assets. He noted that more people walk or bike to work in New Haven than in any other city in Connecticut. New Haven is also a Top Twenty market nationwide in terms of economic growth during this recession. Even in the area of hotel and motel occupancy rates, which are always an early casualty in any economic downturn, New Haven's rates have stayed flat and this despite more rooms being available.

Transportation services and synergies are the key to New Haven's economic attractiveness and growth. For example, the 360 State Street development currently under construction will include 400 units of housing and a grocery store at its downtown location near State Street Station. Developer Bruce Decker chose this site because of its proximity to that station and with the expectation of the location becoming more attractive when the Springfield Line commuter rail service goes into operation.

Just as State Street Station is a key to economic development, Union Station can also be an economic engine for downtown New Haven, though it does not currently serve that function, in large part because it is filled with Amtrak, Metro-North and ConnDOT offices and, as such, represents a wasted opportunity for economic spin-offs. Parking is also a constraint on development. This is true not only of parking for cars but also for bicycles, despite the recent doubling of bicycle parking capacity at Union Station.

Piscitelli cited the disconnection between Union Station and downtown New Haven as a barrier that needs to be overcome. Toward this end, more effort is needed on wayfinding, including signage and planters. The city is growing toward the train station as more development occurs on that edge of downtown. Though there are many facilities and much employment within ¼ or ½ mile of the station, the lack of pedestrian amenities keeps people from using Union Station to access these employment sites on foot. The land use layout and development patterns are built for cars, as evidenced by the large amount of space devoted to surface parking.

One amenity that can be used to overcome this divide between Union Station and Downtown is transit. A downtown circulator shuttle is now operating on a 20-minute schedule connecting Union Station to Downtown and also serve the Temple Street parking area. Several other shuttles operate from the train station to the medical district but are limited to employees of specific institutions only.

A *New Haven Union Station Transit-Oriented Development Study* was performed by noted land use consultant firm Jones Lang LaSalle which has done similar work at other large train stations. The study looked at mixed use development opportunities around Union Station and developed a phased approach to such development. Phase I involves the construction of a 667-space South Garage and the re-merchandizing of the entire Union Station with restaurants and private office space to replace the existing Amtrak and ConnDOT offices. Phase II would involve the expansion of North Garage to add 530 spaces and bring the total parking capacity at Union Station to 2,000 spaces. Phase III would include additional parking, as well as office, retail and residential use adjacent to Route 34. It is also anticipated that during the timeframe for this study (2025), a new police station will be constructed in the city, freeing up the site of the existing police station for additional development activity.

In relation to incorporating parking needs into a mixed use development, Piscatelli pointed to the use of 'liner' buildings as one desirable concept. In liner buildings, the parking structure is hidden behind the residential component of the development, usually in such a way that it is not easily seen from the street. For the development envisioned at Union Station adjacent to Route 34, a balancing of office, residential and retail uses leads to a preliminary estimate of incorporating 130-150 residential units. The mixed use development can be market driven by the rents of all three classes of tenants. If the proposed rail station at West Haven becomes a reality, the parking needs for New Haven will be reassessed.

On the subject of parking, Piscatelli cited shuttles and pedestrian enhancements as necessary to better connect the Temple Street lot to Union Station. He noted that there is a huge latent parking demand at Union Station. One evidence of this is the large number of people who are dropped off at the station because there is no parking. He again noted that Route 34 represents a big barrier to connecting Union Station to downtown New Haven.

ConnDOT has been very cooperative with this mixed use development concept for its property. When asked what types of retail uses might be incorporated into the mixed use development, Piscatelli mentioned a small hotel as one option which makes sense, along with a restaurant, a fitness center, a dry cleaner, and later on as the residents move in, one or more markets. Other upcoming enhancements that will affect Union Station are the provision of Zip Cars for very short-term rentals and the implementation of the Smart Street Traffic Campaign to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Comments from the Public (continued)

Jean Stimolo of Rideworks noted that the weekday downtown shuttle operates from 6:15 AM to 10:00 PM and that Union Station is on its service route. She circulated a map of the shuttle's route.

Reports from Operating Entities

Richard Sunderhauf reported that all floors of the Connecticut Transit Hartford Division garage are being resurfaced in a process which will take up to 10 months to complete. The concrete is being stripped from the floors and a new epoxy coating is being applied.

Richard Schreiner attended the first meeting of the technical committee for the Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study being undertaken by the South Western Regional Planning Agency and the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials. He anticipates four or five more meetings during the course of this 18-month study.

Russ St. John reported that Smurfit Stone is closing its plant in Portland, which has been a major customer for Providence & Worcester. On the positive side, a new siding has been opened for a new customer in Rocky Hill. Russ also reported that the Valley Railroad may be getting some federal stimulus money to extend its line northward toward Middletown.

Chairman's Report

ConnDOT has issued its report on the repairs and improvements needed to reopen Wilton Station. A meeting between the department and local officials took place last week. Two site inspections performed on July 10 and August 4 identified needs of \$97,000 and \$47,000, respectively, which translate to project costs of \$190,000 and \$78,000 after various contingency allowances are added (all figures rounded to nearest \$1,000) for a total cost just under \$268,000 to reopen Wilton Station.

The new entranceway gate at the Middletown Area Transit terminal has been completed. The exterior of the station has also been repainted. Improvements and upgrades to the board room at the station are underway and should be completed within the next two weeks.

MAT is awaiting final resolution of State budget issues before it is clear what will be happening to the fare structure. Some fare increase is likely but it will be less than the 40% increase previously proposed. Tom also reported that the new bus service between Old Saybrook and Middletown is doing very well.

Old Business

Gail Lavielle elaborated on her remarks of last month relative to making a public notice early in the year about the Annual Report. What she had in mind is a public presentation of the recommendations of the Annual Report at the Capitol. She also mentioned that the CPTC website contains some very dated and no longer relevant material which needs to be removed as it can cause confusion to visitors to the website.

New Business

Fred Riese reported that five speakers gave testimony at the September 25 hearing in Windsor. Most of the testimony concerned the role of transit in supporting economic development in Windsor, with a very clear recognition by the town planner, the economic development director and a major land owner/developer that transit is a powerful partner in promoting economic development. The obstacles that past development patterns, where warehouses and other businesses are situated with large setbacks off the road, present to service by transit are recognized. Shuttle services were seen as one strategy to meet local needs.

Gail Lavielle reported that Redding, Ridgefield and Wilton are in the early stages of looking to develop a greenway along the Route 7 alignment. The towns have worked with

DEP's greenway coordinator and are seeking a grant to produce a trail design. Though the Super 7 highway proposal is officially dead, State Senator Duff continues to push that idea, using a recent Stamford UConn study to show that the proposal has public support. Gail said the defect in that argument is that the UConn study used a 'snowball survey' technique whereby a small number of initial selected survey respondents forward the survey on to their contacts to expand the survey pool. Since the respondents are more likely to forward the survey to others of like viewpoint, this introduces substantial bias into the survey. A snowball survey is not a random survey. Rick Schreiner mentioned that from the standpoint of the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials, Super 7 is a dead issue.

Alan Sylvestre mentioned that has been appointed by Governor Rell to serve on a new Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Board where he will serve as the sight-impaired member.

Gail Lavielle reported that there has been no further activity of the New Haven Line Parking Task Force since the initial kick-off meeting.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:19 PM.