

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of October 7, 2010

Connecticut Transit New Haven Division Bus Storage and Maintenance Facility
2061 State Street, Hamden

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Ron Kilcoyne, Robert Rodman, Alan Sylvestre, Chris Adams, Yvonne Loteczka, Russ St. John, Richard Sunderhauf, Mort Katz. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** James Redeker, Michael Sanders, Brenda Jannotta, Dennis King. **Guests:** David Lee, Victor Marques, Terry Hall, Linda Krause, Kathleen Griffin, Jean Stimolo.

Preceding the meeting, Victor Marques, David Lee and Steve Warren led a tour of Connecticut Transit's very recently opened new bus storage and maintenance facility.

Chairman Kevin Maloney opened the meeting at 1:30 P.M. The minutes of the September 2 meeting were adopted as written.

Featured Speakers

Michael Sanders, ConnDOT's Transit and Ridesharing Administrator, began his presentation on multiple bus issues by discussing several aspects of this new bus facility. A permanent certificate of occupancy for the facility was due by October 1 but the facility is still operating under a temporary CO. When Sanders joined ConnDOT in 1994, the plan for the New Haven Division was the rehabilitation of the existing CT Transit facility on James Street in New Haven. Shortly thereafter, a decision was made to construct a new facility. Sixteen years were ultimately required for site selection, design, environmental work and construction of the new facility. The \$72,000,000 garage was built on the site of the former Detroit Steel Company plant. ConnDOT acquired the site for \$1.00 but was responsible for the environmental clean-up of the site. Sanders said that there was surprisingly little contamination on the site considering its former use. After testing confirmed that the contamination on the site was not leaching, DEP allowed much of the area to be capped and the garage to be built over the waste area, which minimized the cost of remediation.

Four acres on the rear of the Detroit Steel Company site were contaminated with hydrocarbons due to vandalism at a heating oil company on an adjoining property. The hydrocarbons are 8' under a functioning wetland so the decisions on remediation are complicated.

Sanders then discussed other bus systems needing new bus storage facilities. Northeast Transportation in Waterbury runs out of an old foundry. It is the last of the CT Transit-branded systems operating out of a leased facility. Development of a new facility at the site of the former Watertown Drive-In theater has been held up by issues of where to send the sanitary sewer flows and by a need to revise the original design to accommodate a larger vehicle fleet. The State Bond Commission just approved \$400,000 to match \$2,000,000 of federal funds to do the design work for the new facility.

Design work has been completed for a new bus facility for the Windham Regional Transit District. ConnDOT plans to replicate this design for use at the Northwestern Connecticut Transit District facility in Torrington. Work on the latter facility is complicated by the sale of the preferred site, so another site needs to be found. The Windham Regional Transit District facility is probably a couple of years away from construction while the Northwestern Connecticut Transit District facility is 3-4 years off.

Moving back to the James Street bus facility in New Haven, Sanders said it will be offered to other State agencies, then to the City of New Haven. If neither one is interested, it would be declared surplus and offered for sale. It is believed that the City of New Haven is interested in the facility, so the standard procedure may even be waived so the facility can be offered to the City first.

Sanders next described the competitive bidding process which is currently underway for the five Connecticut Transit operating divisions in Waterbury, Meriden, Wallingford, New Britain and Bristol, the paratransit operations in Waterbury, Meriden and Wallingford, and the commuter express routes in Hartford. Proposals for operating these individual services or any combination thereof are due by October 25. Winning proposers must be prepared to assume operations by December 13. The proposals will be graded on cost, experience and quality of service. The contracts will be awarded for one year with two one year options. Sanders mentioned that the Hartford-New Haven bus route was originally begun as a SNET employee route but was later taken over as a State route.

In response to a question concerning how much future growth can be assumed when designing a new facility, Sanders said that FTA will allow for a 20% growth factor when a new bus facility is proposed. He also mentioned that a recent \$14.7 million FTA grant for bus capital projects in Connecticut included funds for the proposed Waterbury and Torrington bus garages.

Sanders final topic was the New Britain Busway. Chairman Maloney had referenced opposition to the busway from interests in Bristol who preferred a rail option. Sanders feels that the Bristol parties have some legitimate concerns but noted that Bristol was involved in the original corridor selection. The busway was the less costly option and had the great ridership. There is not enough population density to Bristol to justify a rail project and it is very remote that FTA would fund it. ConnDOT has had repeated discussions with Bristol interests concerning the merits and drawbacks of the two options but these discussions have not moved the issue. Sanders mentioned cases of rail options being chosen over busway options in Houston and in the Dulles Airport to Tyson's Corner, Virginia corridors but he explained why neither of these options was relevant to the Bristol example. Jim Redeker responded to the point that some rail interests have made that the busway project should be deferred to investigate the rail option further. This can't be done, he said. If we defer the busway project, it will fail due to new competition for funds the next time it is submitted to FTA. As things stand now, the Full Funding Agreement grant decision by FTA is due by December of this year. It has been 11 years now since the initial corridor studies to reach this point. A new project would take that long again.

The second featured speaker for the meeting was Brenda Jannotta of the ConnDOT Office of Rails who presented the draft State Rail Plan, which is now posted on the ConnDOT website. Work on the plan was begun by Peter Richter before his retirement. The federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 contained a requirement for each state to develop a state rail plan and submit it to USDOT, with updates due every five years. The plans would serve as a basis for federal and state investments in rail infrastructure.

Connecticut's State Rail Plan (SRP) was developed in coordination with ConnDOT's Long Range Transportation Plan and its Master Transportation Plan. The SRP was also coordinated with the regional planning agencies. The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act outlines the required content of state rail plans, which are mandated to cover freight, intercity and commuter rail operations. In Connecticut, Amtrak, Metro-North and all the freight railroads were involved in the development of the plan. The Connecticut SRP contains an inventory of existing rail infrastructure, a discussion of the role played by freight, commuter and intercity rail in the state, and it looks at both intermodal and interstate rail connections. Safety, security, environment, energy and community impact issues must be considered in each state rail plan, which is the case for the Connecticut SRP. The plan takes a 20-year look at both long range investment needs and a public financing plan. The list of projects presented in the SRP is not fiscally constrained.

The overall top priority cited in the SRP is to maintain Connecticut's rail assets in a state of good repair. Specific top priorities are identified for each category of rail service. Specific to the New Haven Line, the priority is to increase speed and capacity and to expand access and parking. For Shore Line East, the priority is to increase market share. On the Springfield Line, the priority is to improve intercity rail service and return commuter rail service to the line.

ConnDOT will conduct two public hearings to receive input and comment on the SRP. The plan must also be submitted to two committees of the General Assembly, namely the Transportation and the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committees, for their approval. This submittal must be made at least 60 days before the plan is submitted to USDOT. These committees will also conduct a joint public hearing on the plan. Lastly, the metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) will review the plan again before it is submitted to USDOT.

Fred Riese suggested that the plan, in order to better serve as a guide for directing investments in rail infrastructure, should prioritize the needs of each of the three categories of rail service, not necessarily by specific projects but by objectives. For instance, if, for freight service, achieving a 286,000 pound rating on all lines was seen as the top objective, then projects consistent with this objective would be prioritized for investment. For the capital projects of the individual freight railroads, rather than just including a wish list of projects for each railroad in the SRP, perhaps a strategic plan for each railroad would be more useful in directing investment.

Bureau Chief James Redeker mentioned that he had just seen a copy of the Massachusetts SRP for which that state paid a consultant \$2,000,000 to prepare. The Massachusetts SRP looks very similar to Connecticut's plan. Brenda Jannotta prepared Connecticut's plan for far less cost and with fewer resources available.

Redeker was asked to explain the difference between the original ConnDOT proposal for commuter rail service on the Springfield Line, which did not involve electrification, and the high speed service proposal, which assumedly does involve electrification. Redeker explained that electrification is not being proposed for the Springfield Line. That would be beyond the available funding and would take considerably longer to implement. The Springfield Line proposal would better be described as 'higher speed' than 'high speed'. It does qualify for federal High Speed Rail initiative funding and will cut 30 minutes off Springfield to New Haven to New York City times.

Comments from the Public

Kathleen Griffin of Fairfield spoke on behalf of herself and other Fairfield residents who do not think the name Metro Center is appropriate for the new train station in Fairfield. Many local citizens prefer a station name that is more geographically specific to the area and more in character with other New Haven Line station names. She suggested either Ash Creek or Black Rock for the station name. Griffin asked Jim Redeker how much longer her group would have to try to influence the selection of the station name and to whom should such suggestions be made. Redeker stated that the station is scheduled to open in 15-17 months, so there is still time to discuss this issue but the local input should be made sooner rather than later. He mentioned that at one point there was a more significant contribution contemplated from the private developer than ultimately turned out to be the case. He was not aware if any contractual obligation with the developer required that the station use that name.

Linda Krause, executive director of the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency, complimented the State Rail Plan as offering a wealth of information in one place. As a member of the Connecticut Maritime Commission, she feels that freight connections between marine shipping facilities and rail at the state's three major ports should receive more emphasis.

Jean Stimolo of Rideworks mentioned a new ridesharing initiative called *Share a Ride to the Train Station*. Rideworks is working with MetroPool to coordinate this new program which offers \$25 commuter check vouchers toward Metro-North tickets for sharing a ride to the train station at least twice. Recipients can only receive one such voucher. The new program hopes to conserve parking space at the New Haven Line train stations.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney was planning to discuss inviting the New Britain Busway opponents to the December Commission meeting to create a dialogue on the issue, but in view of ConnDOT's information about multiple meetings with the opposition groups having occurred already, he sees no value in pursuing that avenue.

Old Business

Bureau Chief Redeker mentioned that Brenda Jannotta was also responsible for getting security cameras installed at the Waterbury train station.

Fred Riese gave brief updates on the salient issues of the three public hearings in Waterbury, Newington and Stamford which have occurred since the Commission's September 2 meeting.

Mike Sanders said that ridership was up 2% on the Connecticut Transit system in September. Ridership has now been up for six months in a row, at about a 2% increase each month. Jim Redeker mentioned that rail ridership was up also, particularly in late summer. Ron Kilcoyne related that ridership on the Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority's system was up in August, but there had been a slight drop in July. Chairman Maloney mentioned that testimony at the Commission's Stamford hearing indicated that ridership had increased lately on the New Canaan Branch.

Jim Redeker noted that today the MTA board adopted fare increases for New York but that there would be no fare increases for Metro-North service in Connecticut.

New Business

Russ St. John read an article that ridership on the Estuary Transit District system was up and that Mass Transit Magazine had named Estuary TD executive director Joe Comerford as a member of its Top 40 under 40 transit leaders. Mike Sanders concurred that Comerford has done an excellent job on the Estuary system.

Dennis King did not yet have a confirmation for October 20 as the briefing date for the CPTC legislative briefing at the Legislative Office Building.

Chairman Maloney mentioned that the Commission has been offered the opportunity to submit comments to the Transportation Strategy Board on the Board's 2007 plan *Moving Forward: Connecticut's Transportation Strategies*. Any comments must be submitted by November 1. Sue Simmat clarified that this request is in connection with a scheduled update of the 2007 plan. Commission members suggested that Chairman Maloney inform the TSB of the Commission's endorsement of the New Britain Busway and its support of the Springfield Line commuter rail service proposal.

Chairman Maloney welcomed new members Robert Rodman and Ron Kilcoyne to the Commission. He then closed the meeting at 3:20 PM.