

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of June 6, 2013

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room A
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Mort Katz, Richard Sunderhauf, Alan Sylvestre, Yvonne Loteczka, Robert Rodman. **Ex-officio members:** David LeVasseur (OPM), Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Holly Parker, Terry Hall, Stephen Troster.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. The minutes of the meeting of May 2 were approved as written.

Featured Speaker

Holly Parker, Director of Sustainable Transportation Systems at Yale University, began her presentation saying “we are attached to our cars as if they were an extension of ourselves”. She noted that today’s cars offer all the comforts and functions of our living rooms. One downside of this she noted was that New Haven drivers now spent the equivalent of 3 ½ days per year sitting in congestion, according to the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University. New Haven is now #2 in asthma prevalence in the US, behind Atlanta. And whereas we allocate an average of 72 square feet per employee for typical office cubicle, in that same office building we allocate 200 square feet to park that employee’s vehicle.

Parker next focused on the new bike sharing program being undertaken on the Yale campus. The program is starting with 50 bicycles at 10 separate locations. There is a \$20 membership fee to participate in the bike sharing program but that fee is refundable if a bicycle safety class is taken and completed. All Yale students, faculty and other employees are eligible to participate in the program. Although only operating on campus now, it is the hope to extend the program to Union Station and then perhaps to other downtown locations.

The bike sharing program is run through a vendor, Zagster, who supplies and maintains the bikes and runs the reservation system. A user sends a text message to notify Zagster of his or her intent to use a bicycle. A code is sent back for the lock on the bicycle. As currently structured, all bicycles must be returned to the location where they are picked up; there are no one way trips. Most of the 10 bike share locations are within garages. Zagster charges Yale \$110 per bicycle per month. The program was intentionally begun at the end of the academic year to allow for a gradual start. To date, 300 bike trips have been made in the first six weeks of the program.

One other program mentioned by Parker was the transit display board set up by Roadify outside the Dunkin Donuts at Union Station. It is a real time, variable message display of the times until arrival of the next CT Transit buses on routes serving Union Station.

Comments from the Public

Terry Hall made brief mention of three rail-related items. He first cautioned that the final NTSB report on the Metro-North derailment at Fairfield could take up to a year to complete. He then mentioned that Shore Line East service to New London and Old Saybrook was expanded beginning on June 1. Lastly, he mentioned that ConnDOT had awarded \$8.0 million in grants to improve track infrastructure on four freight railroads in Connecticut.

Reports from Operating Entities

Richard Sunderhauf mentioned that the annual ROADEO will be held this weekend at the Buckland commuter lot in Manchester.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney mentioned that 340 bike racks were provided at the new Barclay Center in Brooklyn. So far, only 6 bicycles have used these racks. To encourage bicycle use to the arena, a new, free valet parking service for bicycles is being offered.

Kevin also mentioned that Capt. Marc Denno, the Commission's newest member, has been transferred from the Groton Submarine Base, where he served as base commander, to the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

Saving the most important news for last, Kevin said that SB 975 had passed. Section 74 of this bill included the CPTC's implementing statute language in its entirety, with an effective date of July 1, 2013. Thus, it in effect nullified the language of HB 6363 which repealed C.G.S. section 13b-11a, the Commission's implementing statute. Kevin mentioned that we had Jim Cameron to thank as the person who first pointed out the inclusion of the Commission in HB 6363. Section 95 of that bill included the Commission in very inconspicuous fashion, simply by listing C.G.S. sec. 13b-11a in a list of 40 or so sections of General Statute to be repealed, but not mentioning the Commission by name.

Report on the Spring Public Hearings

Fred Riese summarized the testimony of the three CPTC public hearings held last month. The May 8 hearing in Norwalk was very well attended, with nine speakers giving testimony. Much of the testimony at this hearing concerned the Coastal Link bus service. It now carries 1.2 million passengers per year. However, after eight years of operation, the Coastal Link is still not considered part of the core service of its three operators (Milford Transit District, Greater Bridgeport Transit and the Norwalk Transit District) and thus does not share in the 3.5% funding increase they received for transit operations. As a result, the buses are very crowded and on repeated occasions, the Coastal Link buses must pass by would-be passengers because there is no room to squeeze them onto the buses. Two speakers criticized the plans and the process for redevelopment of Stamford Station and the replacement of the parking garage there. State Representative and former Commission member Gail Lavielle criticized the priorities for major capital funding for transit projects. She also discussed the need for a 'lock box' to ensure that funds raised for transportation purposes and placed in the Special Transportation Fund are not then appropriated for other purposes, as has occurred again in the new budget for this biennium.

John Filchak, Executive Director of the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments and the Northeastern Connecticut Transit District, was the only speaker at the public hearing in Putnam on May 14 but he gave 90 minutes of testimony. Filchak first gave an overview of the demographics and economy of the 12-town Northeastern Connecticut Region. He described the unique to Connecticut arrangement by which the NECTD is operated by the Council of Governments, with the 12 first selectmen of the region serving at the board of directors for the transit district. Filchak described the operations and services of the transit district. He cited one deficiency of the system as its lack of visibility to the public and the lack of any funds for marketing to increase public awareness of the system.

The Bristol hearing on May 22 also featured only one speaker, again from the local regional planning agency, when Francis Pickering of the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency gave over an hour of testimony. Local issues in Bristol include the Central Connecticut Rail Study evaluating the potential for rail passenger service on the corridor from Waterbury to Berlin, a TIGER grant application by the region to fund bus service between Waterbury and Bristol, a desire to post bus stop signs for the local bus service and a concomitant need for better ridership data to determine the best locations for these signs, continuing efforts to bring local bus service to Plymouth and Terryville, pedestrian safety issues on Route 6 in Bristol, and difficulties accommodating large passengers and their wheelchairs (sometimes 700-800 pounds in combination) on the lifts of the local paratransit vehicles.

Old Business

Fred Riese mentioned that the just-released newsletter on the Danbury Branch CTC signal project listed the work as 85% complete and mentioned that the two substations at Norwalk and Danbury which will provide power to the signal system have been energized. Completion of the CTC project is expected by year's end.

As mentioned by Terry Hall, Shore Line East service was expanded as of June 1, with most of the additional service going to New London. Fred mentioned that part of the approval process for the expanded schedule involved an analysis of the effect of the additional trains on the three moveable bridges between Old Saybrook and New London, namely the Connecticut River, Niantic River and Shaw's Cove bridges, and how the additional closure times at these bridges would affect boater access to and from Long Island Sound.

Lastly, the second meeting of the Central Connecticut Rail Study Advisory Committee took place yesterday morning at the offices of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce. Much of the update on the study was covered in the May 3 presentation by Stephen Gazillo and Andy Davis to the Commission. Additional information was provided on possible station locations in Terryville, Bristol and Plainville. Two open houses have been scheduled to present the project and gather public input. These will be June 17 in Waterbury at the Silas Bronson Library and June 20 at the New Britain Public Library, both set for 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm.

New Business

Kevin Maloney observed that the new state budget again takes \$70,000,000 from the Special Transportation Fund and moves it to the General Fund. The increased revenues from the gross receipts tax on petroleum products will also go to the General Fund instead of the Special

Transportation Fund. So Commissioner Redeker and ConnDOT will once again be forced to do more with less.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 2:34 p.m.