

**Connecticut Public Transportation Commission**  
Minutes of October 4, 2012

Greater Hartford Transit District Conference Room  
Union Station  
Hartford, Connecticut

**Attendance: Members:** Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Richard Sunderhauf, Alan Sylvestre, Yvonne Loteczka, Mort Katz, Robert Rodman, Chris Adams. **Ex-officio members:** Fred Riese, ConnDEEP. **ConnDOT staff:** Lisa Rivers, Dennis King. **Guests:** Kim Dunham (GHTD).

Chairman Maloney opened the meeting at 1:32 p.m. The minutes of the meeting of September 6 were accepted as written.

**Featured Speaker**

Lisa Rivers, Transportation Supervising Planner at ConnDOT, spoke on the New Freedom Program, the accessible taxi voucher program, and the State Matching Grant Program.

The New Freedom Program was enacted in August 2005 as an element of the then new SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act- A Legacy for Users) Act. The New Freedom Program was intended to allow states to provide transportation services for disabled citizens that were 'above and beyond' the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Eligible enhancements of public transportation services to meet the 'above and beyond' goal could include: enhancing paratransit beyond the ADA minimum requirements, operation of feeder services, accessibility improvements, and travel training. Coordination of services via trip planning software and the installation of GPS devices on vehicles are two examples of improvements that could be funded.

About \$1.1 million per year was made available to Connecticut to fund New Freedom transportation improvements, subject to a 50/50 local match for operating expenses and an 80/20 federal/local match for capital expenditures. ConnDOT did not have any funding set aside for the local match so municipalities or other recipients needed to come up with their matching share to run the new services. ConnDOT operated as the designated recipient for the New Freedom funding though municipal, or even private, entities could apply for the funds through ConnDOT. Services proposed to be funded under the New Freedom Program had to address needs previously identified in a Locally-Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan or LOCHSTP. This required plan evaluates existing transportation systems and identifies gaps in the provision of services and measures to mitigate those gaps.

The major categories of gaps in the delivery of public transportation services as identified through the LOCHSTP process are: an information gap concerning the services that are available, urgent transportation needs, lack of service in small towns and rural areas, a complete lack of service in some areas, and the need for evening and weekend service.

Of these five gaps, the information gap is the one most frequently raised by regional planning entities in their LOCHSTP plans. The ramification of the information gap is that many citizens and would-be transit users simply do not know that services that would be of value to them are already operating. Rivers said that ConnDOT has discovered many services that it was unaware of. ConnDOT is using several strategies to address this information gap. One is more advertising and marketing. Rivers mentioned that ConnDOT has provided \$5,000 to the Northwestern Connecticut Transit District for more advertising of its services in that region. The United Way's 211 Info Line service is often a very valuable resource for transit information. Thus, for 10 towns in the Waterbury area, ConnDOT provided \$40,000 for extended hours at Info Line including extra effort for call backs to find out whether clients found the suggested services met their needs.

Mobility managers have also been used in the Eastern Region and Southwestern Region to bridge the information gap. Functions of the mobility managers have included preparing mobility guides of all available services, providing "Transit 101" travel training through the Kennedy Center, and other methods to inform citizens of all the options available to them.

New Freedom funding to provide paratransit services during times or in places that local bus (and complementary ADA paratransit) does not operate was implemented prior to the start of expanded evening and weekend fixed route bus service hours in Waterbury. This is one example mentioned by Rivers of how such funding can address gaps in evening and weekend service. Other examples are funding for extra service by the Northwestern Connecticut Transit District and funding the new Mid-Shore Shuttle service, a deviated fixed route service running between Old Saybrook and Middletown.

Examples mentioned by Rivers of bridging the 'urgent needs' gap are the new wheelchair-accessible taxi vehicles, the voucher system providing discounted access for disabled riders using taxi service, and the new local bus service which will begin operation shortly in Enfield, a town which lacked any bus service other than a commuter express to Hartford.

Rivers mentioned that the key to a successful program to enhance mobility options is often finding a local person who can take hold of the project and run with it. Finding someone to do this is often a big challenge.

New Freedom funding was used to purchase several wheelchair-accessible taxis. Rivers said these are not the CNG-fueled taxis that the Commission saw last month but rather standard gasoline taxis. Currently there are three in service in New Haven and two in Hartford that were purchased with New Freedom funding, with two CNG-powered wheelchair-accessible taxis in process for New Haven and two gasoline taxis just awarded in the Hartford/Middletown area to a different taxi operator.

Results of the New Freedom funded accessible taxi program for FY 2012 for the New Haven Metro Access program showed that the three vehicles there provided 12,026 rides including 458 wheelchair trips. One hundred and thirty-four of the trips were taken using the pre-purchased half fare vouchers.

A subsidized voucher program for disabled riders allows those riders to pre-purchase vouchers for half price fares for taxi service. These programs go by the names of Metro Access in the New Haven and Bridgeport areas, Freedom Ride in the Hartford area and Taxit Voucher in eastern Connecticut. The Federal Transit Administration reimburses ConnDOT for the subsidized half of the fares.

From July 2011 through June 2012, the pre-purchased taxi voucher program in the New Haven area, Metro Access, provided a total of 544 trips made under the program, including 276 wheelchair trips. The total voucher subsidy for these trips was \$10,500. Rivers foresees that participation in the voucher program will grow as more accessible vehicles are added to the taxi fleets.

ConnDOT is evaluating how to make better use of taxis in meeting the need for ADA service. Taxis can be cheaper than operating ADA service vans, especially during off-peak hours. However, taxis providing ADA service must meet ConnDOT insurance requirements and USDOT drug testing requirements for the drivers.

When SAFETEA-LU expired on September 30 and was replaced by MAP-21, the New Freedom Program was merged into the Section 5310 program. Approximately the same amount of funding will be available under the combined program but ConnDOT and other recipient agencies are still awaiting official guidance on the requirements and operation of these programs under MAP-21. This will likely delay the 5310 application process since those applications would normally go out in the next couple of months. Alternatively, if guidance is not yet available, ConnDOT may try to cobble together an RFP for the van grants under this program.

Rivers then moved on to discussing the State Matching Grant program operated pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes sec. 13b-38bb. This program was originally budgeted at a level of \$5,000,000 per year but was only actually using approximately \$4,000,000 per year. In the last budget cycle, possibly due to a misunderstanding, the level of funding was cut to \$3,000,000 per year, necessitating a reduction in service levels by 25%, in some cases to levels where the remaining service became totally ineffective. Smaller municipal programs were especially hurt, Rivers said, citing Roxbury as an example. Looking into the future for this program, Rivers said that Commissioner Redeker has promised to find the funding to restore the State Matching Grant Program so that it can fund the services it was supporting before the recent budget cut. Restoration of these funds will occur in the 2014 budget.

Rivers said that 130-135 towns participate in the State Matching Grant Program. Towns must be able to demonstrate their ability to provide the required local match. Towns apply for funding that is allocated to them based on the formula set in C.G.S. 13b-38bb.

In response to a question concerning the upcoming Enfield bus service, Rivers said it will be operated by the town using body-on-chassis vehicles leased from the Greater Hartford Transit District until the town can procure new vehicles. The service will be a fixed route service.

### **Comments from the public**

None.

### **Comments from Operating Entities**

Richard Sunderhauf mentioned that the latest CT Transit newsletter discussed the safety issues arising from baby carriages and grocery carts being brought onto the buses. Company policy requires the child to be removed and the carriage or stroller to be collapsed so as not to block the aisle. However, often the carriages are broken and will not fold up. Though the drivers have to ask that the carts and carriages be removed from the aisles, there is really nothing that they can do if the offending equipment cannot be moved. Rich also mentioned that CT Transit drivers must now meet enhanced physical requirements to secure their commercial drivers licenses (CDLs). A new, more stringent law regarding CDLs requires the reporting of information such as the use of CPAC breathing devices or incidences of atrial fibrillation, among other conditions.

Richard Schreiner mentioned that HARTransit has completed its Greater Danbury Commuter Rail Parking Plan of existing and future planned lots for railroad parking on the Danbury Branch. This plan can be found on the HVCEO website.

### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Maloney reported that the new Airport Authority is looking to expand domestic and international service from Bradley including adding non-stop service to Phoenix and the West Coast and service to Europe. He also mentioned that a cell phone parking lot has been instituted at Bradley, fulfilling a long-time recommendation of the Commission.

Maloney also reported that a September 27 Wall Street Journal article spoke of the popularity of bus rapid transit systems and the efforts to make buses look more appealing, often by making them look like something other than buses.

Ed McAnaney added to the Bradley discussion by mentioning that Terminal A at Bradley will be eliminated and replaced with a new terminal located closer to the road and which will incorporate room for potential future rail access even though there are no plans for rail access currently.

### **Old Business**

Chairman Maloney again mentioned that in his August 16 meeting with Commissioner Redeker, the Commissioner suggested that the CPTC could assist the Department with public outreach. Kevin asked Dennis King if we could make the Commission's website interactive including the ability for the public to comment on the meeting minutes or public hearing summaries. Yvonne Loteczka suggested that the public should be able to suggest featured topics for the public hearing legal notices, while Robert Rodman said that links to our webpage should be added to other appropriate sites. Alan Sylvestre cautioned that we need to be careful how we solicit comments; we don't want to receive comments such as "my bus driver was rude to me today."

An extensive discussion on publicity for the Commission's public hearings followed. Car cards and seat drops on buses and other transit vehicles were mentioned as publicity options. Kim Dunham volunteered to forward the press release for the October 16 hearing in Windsor to member towns of the Greater Hartford Transit District. Kevin also inquired of Lisa Rivers whether she or other ConnDOT staff would be interested and willing to appear at some future hearings to discuss the range of transit services that are available to the public, thereby addressing some of the 'information gap' mentioned in her remarks.

Fred Riese briefly reprised the testimony given at the Bridgeport and Storrs public hearings held last month.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.