

DATE: December 29, 2006

TO: Honorable M. Jodi Rell, Governor

Honorable Donald DeFronzo and Antonio Guerrero
Co-Chairpersons of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

Honorable Ralph J. Carpenter, Commissioner of Transportation

FROM: Thomas Cheeseman, Chairman
Connecticut Public Transportation Commission

I am pleased to submit to you the 2006 Annual Report of the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission as required by the Connecticut General Statutes section 13b-11a(e). The 2006 Annual Report contains 18 recommendations covering a very broad range of transportation issues with the common theme of enhancing the delivery of public transportation services. Areas covered include passenger and freight rail services, enhancement of local bus services, a program to increase bus ridership by State employees, easing traffic congestion at Bradley International Airport, and the incorporation of new technologies into our transit system. These recommendations are briefly described in the overview below.

Though the primary focus of this Annual Report is the recommendations based on information from the Commission's public hearings and monthly meetings, I would be remiss if I did not highlight the financial constraints facing public transportation systems in Connecticut at this time as growing numbers of our citizens are taking advantage of public transportation as their means of travel to access employment, health care, education, and other services. During the last two years, substantial investments have been made to maintain and enhance passenger rail services, for which this Commission and other transit advocates are deeply thankful. However, Connecticut's bus services continue to operate on very constrained finances, and in many cases are not supporting as much service as they operated several years ago.

Currently, over 35,000,000 trips are provided annually by Connecticut's bus systems. However, the operators of these systems estimate an unmet need for \$82 million in capital and operating costs to support and add service on existing routes; \$40 million in funding needed to provide priority service expansions like urban cross-town routes, more shuttle routes connecting to Metro-North rail stations, and expanded service on the Coastal Link between Norwalk and Milford; and \$23 million needed to expand interregional and commuter express bus services. These are substantial needs, but the operation of a successful statewide

system of bus transit is increasingly important to the attainment of many statewide employment, economic development, land use, environmental and energy use goals.

Overview of Recommendations

The first two recommendations advocate improved rail services on the Danbury and Waterbury Branches of Metro-North. Completion of the Danbury Branch Study will shed light on the best strategies to address the need for some level of mid-day service on this line and the extension of the passenger service to Brookfield and New Milford. The Waterbury Branch rail service could see ridership increases if promoted with a marketing effort to improve awareness and with some low cost improvements at the Waterbury railroad station. The third recommendation of this report calls for the installation of signs to mark the location of the bus stops in the Waterbury area bus system. The bus stop markings in that system, which are mostly indicated by stripes on utility poles, have not been maintained in decades, creating a situation which is an impediment to existing riders and to efforts to attract new riders.

The dedication of funds raised by the gross earnings tax on petroleum products to transportation uses is called for in the fourth recommendation, while recommendation #5 calls on the State of Connecticut to take a leadership role promoting transit use by encouraging this form of commutation for its own employees. Adoption of a budgetary mechanism to address the effects of rising fuel prices on transit providers as they occur, rather than after the fact, is advocated in the sixth recommendation. The following two recommendations address issues confronting the disabled population by requiring the adoption of policies to handle the needs of disabled travelers who encounter equipment malfunctions with power wheelchairs or scooters, and requiring that some percentage of taxicabs be wheelchair accessible.

The establishment of a 'cell phone lot' at Bradley International Airport is called for in the ninth recommendation. Such a lot would be a free, very short term lot limited to attended vehicles awaiting calls to pick up arriving passengers. The purpose would be to lessen congestion and improve security on the terminal access roads. Recommendations #10 and 11 would seek to improve the access for rail freight shipment into Connecticut on the New Haven Line as a strategy to lessen reliance on trucks and to reduce congestion on Interstate 95 and other highways.

The twelfth recommendation advocates further investigation of, and investment in, alternate fueled vehicles for public transportation. The subsequent recommendations call for timely pursuit of two rail passenger studies mandated by the General Assembly in 2006, support for tourism-related transit services in southeastern Connecticut, and the incorporation of intelligent transportation systems (ITS) technologies into Connecticut's transit vehicles and facilities. Greater reliance on the Connecticut Transportation Institute at UConn to do transit research such as ITS and alternate fuels applications is advocated in recommendation #16, along with provision of the appropriate staff and financial resources for the Institute to fulfill an expanded role in transit research.

The Commission expresses its appreciation to the General Assembly for funding the State matching grant program to support Dial-a-Ride transportation services in recommendation #17, while the final recommendation offers a solution to lessen the impacts to downtown Derby of the heavy levels of truck traffic using Route 34 as a connection between Interstate 84 and Route 8.

In addition to these 18 recommendations, this Annual Report contains an overview of the activities of the Commission during 2006, comments on a major regional freight rail study currently underway, and summaries of the eight public hearings held by the Commission during the past year.

Members of the Commission welcome your comments on the recommendations contained in the Annual Report. We appreciate your consideration of these proposals and we welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss actions that can be taken to implement these recommendations. The Commission looks forward to receiving the Department of Transportation's responses which are due February 1, 2007.