

## ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION IN 1999

Rail issues and welfare-to-work transportation occupied center stage for the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission during 1999. Among the former, the foremost issue was the continued effort to achieve reductions in Amtrak's trackage fees for freight entering Connecticut over its Springfield Line, which is the primary rail freight gateway into Connecticut. As will be detailed later, substantial progress has been made on this issue, in part due to the Commission's efforts.

Aware of the vital connection between the success of welfare clients in obtaining and holding employment and the transportation services necessary to access job sites, the Commission continues to keep abreast of jobs access transportation enhancements and to advocate adequate and secure funding for these transportation services. The societal and fiscal benefits achieved as public assistance clients are transitioned to employment are, to a very large degree, dependent on the necessary transportation services being in place. This linkage must be recognized at all levels of government as fiscal priorities are determined.

Frederick Riese served as Interim Chairman of the Commission in 1999, his second year in this role. Morton Katz was elected to serve as Vice Chairman. One new member, Gwenn Fischer, joined the Commission during the year, while one member, Mary Drost, resigned.

### Public Hearings

As required under C.G.S. Section 13b-11a(b), the Commission conducted eight public hearings to gather input from transit users, service providers, transportation planners and local officials, among others. During the spring, the Commission held hearings in Killingly, Berlin, Norwalk and Norwich. For the fall hearings, the Commission visited Manchester, Waterbury, New Haven and Torrington. As might be expected, the issues of concern varied from region to region. Cross-regional themes included the need for a more balanced transportation system (i.e., less dependent on the highway mode), greater coordination among various transit services and modes, more funding to meet identified needs and specific welfare-to-work needs. Regionally, calls for more Shore Line East service, specifically mid-day, late evening and Saturdays, were heard in New Haven and increased elderly services was repeatedly called for at the Torrington hearing.

### Monthly Meetings

Twelve monthly meetings on the first Thursday of each month were distributed between Union Station in New Haven (6), ConnDOT headquarters in Newington (4) and the Legislative Office Building in Hartford (2). This year, for the first time, the meetings at the Legislative Office Building were televised by the Connecticut Television Network, increasing the visibility of the Commission.

In order to gather information for use in this Annual Report and to be kept abreast of current transportation issues and developments, the Commission hears from a wide range of speakers representing many facets and interests of public transportation. In January, Michael Brimmer of CSX, who is the Regional Vice President Northeast for that carrier, discussed CSX's plans for serving Connecticut and the opportunities to generate more business after CSX became owner and operator of Conrail's New England properties. Peggy Heatherington, Director of Marketing for MetroPool, discussed efforts to promote transit use to Fairfield County employment sites at our February meeting. Dennis Coffey, Manager of Governmental Affairs for the New England Central and Connecticut Southern Railroads, spoke in March about some of the factors hindering the growth of rail freight usage in Connecticut and gave an overview of the levels of business and types of commodities handled by those two railroads in Connecticut.

In April, the Commission heard from Thomas White, Transportation Coordinator for The Work Place, about the steps taken to accommodate welfare-to-work transportation needs in southwestern Connecticut, and further enhancements contemplated through an upcoming Federal grant. Truck inspections and weigh station operations were explained by Donald Bridge, an inspector with the Department of Motor Vehicles' Commercial Safety Division, in May. Allocation of enforcement efforts and limitations caused by the number of inspectors were key points in Inspector Bridge's presentation. The June meeting featured presentations by ConnDOT's James Boice about electronic fare collection on Metro-North trains and by Peter Lynch of Frederic R. Harris on the various improvements underway at New Haven Yard.

The July meeting featured presentations by Michael Sanders, ConnDOT's Transit and Ridesharing Administrator, on the recently awarded \$2.95 million Federal Transit Administration grant for jobs access transportation, and Harry Strate, Vice President at Wilbur Smith Associates, detailing the proposed busway between Hartford and New Britain. In August, Brian McGrath, Director of Traffic and Parking for the City of New Haven, recounted the development of the very controversial changes to the Connecticut Transit bus stops and transfer points on the New Haven Green. Department of Social Services Commissioner Patricia Wilson-Coker spoke in September about the Access to Jobs transportation program and the cooperative roles of various agencies to improve the delivery of transportation to employment sites.

The Commission was brought up-to-date on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor electrification program and other Amtrak initiatives by David Carol, Vice President for High Speed Rail, at

the October meeting. The following month, Capitol Region Council of Governments' Director of Transportation Tom Maziarz described specific Hartford area welfare-to-work transportation enhancements and results to date, while CROG's Sandra Fry outlined the ongoing Regional Transit Strategy study for the Greater Hartford region. Rounding out the year, Robert Stanley of Cambridge Systematics told the Commission about the study underway to assess alternate governance structures for the management and delivery of bus transit services in Connecticut. The Commission was fortunate to have such knowledgeable and significant speakers during the year and greatly appreciates their presentations and their patience in answering the extensive questions of Commission members following their talks.

### ADA Task Force

The Commission's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Task Force was involved with several issues this year and took part in an accessibility trial of new bus equipment. Foremost for the ADA Task Force was the issue on what constitutes valid identification for qualification for reduced fares for handicapped bus users on State supported systems (see Recommendation No. 11 on page 28 of this report.) Current practice for Connecticut Transit and other State supported systems calls for handicapped riders to obtain a separate Connecticut Transit-issued photo ID card which requires a medical certification of the users handicap from a doctor. The Task Force and the Commission believe that an ADA eligibility card, which has its own medical certification requirement, when used in combination with any other valid form of picture identification to prove the identity of the ADA card bearer, should be accepted as sufficient credentials for qualification for the reduced fare. ConnDOT is currently reviewing this proposal but has not yet acted upon it.

Also still in process is the development of a State wheelchair policy for use on Connecticut Transit and other State supported systems. This policy will set forth acceptable mobility equipment and procedures to prevent damage to equipment or injury to the handicapped riders or other patrons.

The Task Force also took part in an evaluation of the utility of the new El Dorado low floor, ramp-equipped buses to assess their ease of use for those in wheelchairs. This inspection revealed several problems. Although the use of a ramp rather than a lift will protect wheelchairs from the damage lifts have been known to cause, the ramps may present too steep a grade to be navigated by the chairs when the former are deployed in locations where they cannot reach the curb with their outboard end. This can happen if the bus stop is blocked or encroached upon. If the ramp is deployed onto the street surface, the ensuing grade from street level to bus floor is very difficult to overcome. Once on the bus, the initial right angle turn to access the bus aisle is too tight to be made without several repositionings of the wheelchair. More space needs to be available to accomplish this turn on a single attempt. Lastly, the tie down position for wheelchairs is midway back on the bus, necessitating all intervening passengers in the front half of the bus to be clear of the aisle. This is very inconvenient for all

parties involved. The tiedown locations should have been located at the front of the bus to avoid this problem. The Commission will be involved in discussions to see if some of these deficiencies can be corrected. In the meantime, it is recommended that the new, low floor buses not be used in high volume situations, such as on Hartford's Farmington Avenue route, where large numbers of wheelchair riders would need to board these buses.

The Task Force was asked for its concurrence on a ConnDOT request to the Federal Transit Administration to reprogram ADA compliance funds designated for the downtown Fairfield railroad station to be used instead at a new railroad station proposed to be built in Fairfield and which would then become Fairfield's 'key station' for ADA purposes. The Task Force believes this is a beneficial switch in that these funds will allow for a new station to be build which can be designed and constructed to be ADA compliant from Day One rather than retrofitted. Our concurrence was expressed in a letter to ConnDOT.

During 1999, the Commission initiated a program whereby meeting notices, public hearing notices, minutes and other pertinent documents and information are made readily available to the blind and visually impaired. We extend our appreciation to the Connecticut Board of Education Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (BESB) and to the Connecticut Radio Information Service (CRIS) for their assistance in making this program a reality.

#### New Haven Curb Cut at Church and Crown Streets

When the City of New Haven moved certain downtown bus stops on June 28, 1998, the New Haven/ Hartford commuter bus stop was also moved. Its new location on Church Street near George Street created a situation that caused the Department of Transportation, who funds the service, and the City of New Haven, to be out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). This noncompliance situation arose because one of the street access points used to reach the new stop location, namely the southeast corner of Church Street at Crown Street, did not contain a curb cut and was, therefore, not accessible to wheelchair users.

Although this condition existed for many years, it did not significantly impact public transportation and remained a local matter. However, after the bus stop was relocated to its new position, the lack of a curb cut at Church and Crown affected the usability of a state operated program and it thus became necessary to try to resolve the issue, particularly after the Commission received several complaints about the problem.

Brian McGrath, the Director of Traffic and Parking for the City of New Haven, spoke at the Commission's August meeting on bus issues in downtown New Haven. The curb cut issue was brought up and discussed. Mr. McGrath agreed on the need for this curb cut but mentioned some architectural considerations which complicated its installation. He cited this location as on the City's list of sites to be addressed but with no assurance of any specific date for its

installation.

With the assistance of Mr. McGrath, the installation of the curb cut at Church and Crown was completed about five weeks after the Commission's August meeting, thereby ending the ADA noncompliance status. While the Commission was instrumental in bringing this issue to the forefront, we would like to extend our appreciation to Mr. McGrath for his superb cooperation and assistance in achieving a successful conclusion to this matter.

### Vehicle Occupancy Ratio Report

The Connecticut Public Transportation Commission is required by Section 13b-11b of the Connecticut General Statutes to monitor progress toward achieving a vehicle occupancy ratio of one and two-tenths persons per car by the year 2000. Beginning with the 1989 traffic year, the Commission has included this analysis in each year's Annual Report, using the ConnDOT-compiled Traffic Accident Database as the data source for the analysis. Due to delays in compilation, the 1997 Traffic Accident Database has the most recent statistics available.

1997 was the seventh consecutive year for which the vehicle occupancy ratio (VOR) for the morning peak commuter hours exceeded the statutorily-set goal of 1.20 persons per vehicle. The Commission uses the morning peak (6-9 AM) figures as a measurement of employment-related commuter habits since work trips are the dominant trip purpose during these hours. For 1997, the average VOR on Connecticut's roads during the 6-9 AM time frame was 1.212. This ended a stretch of six consecutive years when the morning peak vehicle occupancy rates had either increased or remained the same. The drop of over one percentage point from the 1996 VOR of 1.224 and 1995's similar rate of 1.223 is a significant decrease. Geographically, 10 of the state's 15 planning regions reported decreases in average vehicle occupancy during the morning peak for 1997.

The afternoon peak hours (3-6 PM) also showed a decline from 1.423 in 1996 to 1.420 in 1997. This is a less significant drop but continues a trend of gradual declines in afternoon ridesharing since a peak VOR of 1.437 in 1992. Overall, the vehicles in Connecticut on a 24-hour basis averaged 1.411 occupants in 1997, virtually unchanged from 1.410 in 1996. For a more detailed analysis and breakdown of ridesharing statistics, see pages 34-37 of this report.

### Rail Issues

One of the foremost issues the Commission has tackled over the last couple of years has been that of the high trackage fees charged by Amtrak for freight use of its Springfield Line, which is the dominant gateway for freight into central and southern Connecticut. Amtrak has assessed trackage fees exceeding \$.90 per car-mile, a rate far exceeding industry averages and believed to be the highest trackage fee in the nation, for all shipments moved by the Connecticut Southern Railroad and the Guilford Rail System from Springfield south to the

Hartford and New Haven areas. Freight bound for New Britain, Bristol, Waterbury and the Naugatuck Valley is also affected by the fee as it travels on the Springfield Line as far south as Berlin. These car-mile fees, which are assessed on both the inbound and outbound movements, can amount to \$50 to \$100 per carload, an incremental cost which can easily make or break a deal to ship by rail.

The Commission has been involved in this issue by writing to the members of the Connecticut Congressional delegation, soliciting the involvement of ConnDOT and most specifically of Bureau Chief Harry Harris of the Bureau of Public Transportation, and by having the affected railroads appear at our meetings to describe the effects of these trackage fees on their operations. The Commission has sought a general reduction in these per car-mile fees or to have the existing level of Amtrak revenues preserved but then foregoing or greatly reducing fees on new traffic generated above existing levels.

This long-standing issue may have been resolved by a draft agreement between Amtrak and the Connecticut Southern Railroad in August of this year to reduce the assessed fees dramatically for all traffic above a baseline level of 16,400 cars annually. For traffic above this level, the car-mile fee will drop from \$.92 to \$.44, a reduction which could save \$50 per carload. Connecticut Southern anticipates that the extra volume of business this lower rate will generate could actually result in an additional \$1,000,000 of fee revenue to Amtrak, producing a benefit for both the railroads involved. While the Guilford Rail System has not yet negotiated a similar agreement with Amtrak, the same financial motivation exists for that carrier as well as the same benefit to Amtrak of additional trackage revenue. Therefore, we expect the Amtrak-Connecticut Southern agreement will serve as a pattern for a second agreement with Guilford.

The Commission believes that the Amtrak-Connecticut Southern agreement is a major accomplishment in encouraging the shift of significant volumes of freight movements from the highways to the rails. This will benefit the financial health of the rail carriers, lessen congestion on the highways, and reduce the amount of 'wear and tear' on our roads, which produces an attendant savings in State and local maintenance costs. Connecticut Southern alone currently handles about 16,400 carloads per year in Connecticut. Conservatively, this would equate to 50,000 truckloads if delivered over the highway. The Commission is proud to have had a role in setting the stage for significant growth in this number.

The other major rail issue in Connecticut, and indeed the dominant rail issue in the Northeast and Midwest during 1999, was the acquisition of Conrail by the Norfolk Southern and CSX rail systems in a joint purchase. The Conrail system was then divided between these two railroads with CSX getting approximately 58% of the route miles of the Conrail system, including all Conrail properties east of the Hudson River, while Norfolk Southern got the remaining 42% of Conrail. This acquisition became effective on June 1, 1999. As has been well noted in the press, this acquisition and the transition in operation has been accompanied by many growing pains for both railroads, and many shipments are experiencing substantial

delays, commonly as much as two weeks. The situation is slowly improving and, once the Conrail operations are effectively integrated into the systems of the two new operators, long-term benefits to shippers in the Northeast and Midwest should accrue.

Both CSX and Norfolk Southern have intermodal terminals in northern New Jersey where containers and trailers are transferred from the railroads to trucks for the completion of their journeys. To lessen the number of New England-bound trucks from these facilities, the Commission, in its 1997 and 1998 Annual Reports, called for the creation of a 'shared assets area' from New York City to New Haven over which both Norfolk Southern and CSX would be allowed to operate. Such 'shared assets areas' had been established by the Surface Transportation Board in other areas of the Conrail system. The creation of such an area from New York City to New Haven would have accomplished two purposes. It would have promoted competition for freight business in southwestern Connecticut and it would have provided direct access into Connecticut for Norfolk Southern, which is the more proficient railroad at operating Roadrailer service which can move truck trailers directly through the Hudson River tunnels and New York City at the reduced clearances available there. The Surface Transportation Board ultimately did not see fit to create a shared assets area through and east of New York City, as called for by the Commission and by a Congressional Intervention Petition filed with the Board by 24 members of the U. S. House of Representatives from New York and Connecticut.

However, largely as a result of the Congressional Intervention Petition, several other initiatives to effect improved rail access east of the Hudson River are underway. First, the Surface Transportation Board directed that the Canadian Pacific Railroad be allowed access to New York City via the Hudson River Line which runs north-south on the east side of the river. Also, an East of the Hudson Rail Freight Operations Committee under the chairmanship of New York Congressman Jerrold Nadler has been established to find ways to improve rail freight connections between New Jersey and New York and New England, rather than having to employ the current circuitous routing via Albany. Commission member Richard Carpenter is a member of the East of the Hudson Committee.

Two options exist for rail access across the Hudson River. These are a car float connection (i.e., a ferry) and tunnels. Concerning the car float option, a recent cooperative agreement among CSX, Norfolk Southern, the Cross Harbor Ferry Company, the New York and Atlantic, Metro-North and the Providence and Worcester has just produced the first through rail freight shipment from west of the Hudson (New Jersey) through New York City to a location on the Providence and Worcester system. The Commission applauds all the railroads involved in reaching this agreement and encourages them to work to expand such freight service in the interest of reducing truck traffic on Interstate 95.

New York City Rail Freight Tunnel Study - Early Results

As mentioned above, Commission member Richard Carpenter sits on the East of the Hudson Freight Operations Committee. Closely related to this group's efforts is a study being undertaken by the New York City Economic Development Commission on the possible construction of additional rail freight capacity under the Hudson River. As this topic bears on the long-standing Commission interest in diverting more freight movements from Interstate 95 to the rails, a brief discussion of the early findings of this study and its effects on Connecticut is included here.

The City of New York is currently engaged in a study of a possible rail freight tunnel under New York Harbor. If constructed, this tunnel would provide a long-needed, full clearance rail freight connection across the Hudson providing a north-south link for New York City and New England directly along the Northeast Corridor, rather than along the current circuitous rail route via Albany. Based on the analysis of freight shipments conducted to date for movements into and out of a 30 county study area, including Fairfield County, the following preliminary conclusion has been reached. Were a rail freight tunnel to be constructed between New Jersey and New York, over 800,000 tractor trailer trips per year would be diverted from highway crossings of the Hudson River and New York Harbor to the new rail tunnel. Further analysis, now underway, may cause an increase in this 800,000 truckload figure as the following categories of movements are added to the analysis:

- (1) Trips to and from seagoing container ships and other warehouse cargo,
- (2) Trips now moving through the 30 county New York study area,
- (3) Trips diverted from present rail/ highway intermodal terminals in New Jersey to new proposed intermodal terminals in New York City and Long Island,
- (4) Trips involving waste shipments, due to increase because of landfill closure mandates, and
- (5) New induced trips created because a new rail tunnel has been added to the rail system.

Incidentally, the figure of 800,000 truck trips per year translates into an average of 2,192 trucks per day.

The tunnel study in New York is also examining possible intermodal terminal sites in the Borough of Queens and in western Suffolk County. Currently, and also historically, such facilities are located in New Jersey. However, officials from both CSX and Norfolk Southern railroads are now warning that these New Jersey terminal sites are operating at capacity and have limited room to expand. The Harlem River Yard in The Bronx also has limited capacity and will be fully used by CSX and Canadian Pacific for rail shipments to and from the western US and Canada. The current overcrowded conditions at the New Jersey intermodal terminals and the limited options for terminal sites in New York increases the importance of protecting possible terminal sites in Connecticut, such as Cedar Hill Yard and the Hartford Classification Yard. This issue is taken up in Recommendation # 12 on page 29 of this report.



## Jobs Access (Welfare-to-Work) Transportation

For the third year, the Commission has been closely involved in the jobs access transportation component of Connecticut's welfare-to-work initiative. Speakers at four of the Commission's 1999 monthly meetings dealt with this topic. Jobs access transportation was also a frequently discussed subject at the Commission's public hearings.

Jobs access transportation is an absolutely critical need in the securing of employment for transit-dependent residents, including those attempting to move from State assistance to the work force. The Commission continues to appreciate the great degree of cooperation that is occurring among the key players in each region to plan for and to provide these transportation services. The Jobs Access Task Force in the Hartford Region, the Regional Growth Connection in Greater New Haven and the People to Jobs Regional Transportation Task Force in southwestern Connecticut have done an outstanding job of integrating the services and capabilities of transit and paratransit providers, job development agencies, the Department of Social Services, ConnDOT, other State agencies, employers, regional planning agencies, ridesharing brokerages and municipalities, among others. This collaborative approach has yielded a very efficient utilization of the available funding to provide as much jobs access transportation as possible. Identification of worker and employer needs are matched up with service providers and delivery options. In the Greater Hartford area, where Connecticut Transit, Greater Hartford Ridesharing and the Greater Hartford Transit District together coordinate the delivery of jobs access services, this process is done in a rapid response environment which is flexible enough to cater to a wide variety of situations. The government responsiveness and creative thinking in all the regions have truly been a credit to all parties involved.

Some of the accomplishments which have resulted from these efforts are discussed in Recommendation #3 of the report.

## Other Activities and Events

During the year, Commission members took part in various transportation related events or served in various capacities related to the Commission's goals. Many members attended one or both of the Transit Summits held on April 23 and September 30 at Northeast Utilities. These events were held by Cambridge Systematics to present their Management, Governance and Finance Study to bus transit stakeholders and to get their input. The Commission was also well represented at Operation Lifesaver Awareness Day held at New Haven's Union Station on May 14 to publicize efforts to improve public awareness of safety issues at railroad crossings. Several members also attended the public roll-out of the new El Dorado National low floor 30' buses on September 13 at Connecticut Transit's Hartford Division bus facility. ADA Task Force members also participated in an accessibility evaluation of these buses at that time.

Among the transportation roles served by Commission members are the afore-mentioned

East of the Hudson Freight Operations Committee of which Richard Carpenter is a member. Fred Riese attends the monthly meetings of the Capitol Region Council of Governments Transportation Committee, and also sits on ConnDOT-sponsored advisory committees for three highway projects, namely Route 11 in southeastern Connecticut and two Interstate 84 projects in the Waterbury to Southington and Danbury to Newtown corridors. Russ St. John serves as Connecticut's freight railroad representative on the State Operation Lifesaver Committee and attended a 3-day regional operation Lifesaver Seminar in New Hampshire.

The Commission wishes to acknowledge the valuable assistance of Kevin Jones, who served as liaison between the Commission and ConnDOT during 1999 and whose assistance is much appreciated.