

1. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT THE FINAL SELECTION OF THE LOCATION FOR A NEW TRAIN STATION IN EITHER WEST HAVEN OR ORANGE BE BASED ON A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF ALL PERTINENT CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDING PROJECTED RIDERSHIP, STATION COST, LAND USE ISSUES, ECONOMIC IMPACTS AND BENEFITS, ACCESSIBILITY, LINKAGES TO OTHER PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICES, ALTERNATIVE FINANCING OPTIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT ISSUES.

Two sites, one each in West Haven and Orange, are being considered for the construction of a New Haven Line railroad station within the existing nine mile gap between the Milford station and New Haven's Union Station. Such a new station would improve access to the Metro-North New Haven Line service and would add valuable parking capacity for at least 1,000 cars. While no specific timeframe has been established for the construction of this new station, we commend the Department for its consideration of this new facility, and we commend the Transportation Strategy Board for approving \$2,000,000 for the environmental and design work necessary to develop such a station.

The Commission does not purport to be in a position to endorse either Orange or West Haven as the best location for the new station. We recognize that there are many considerations that should be factored into the siting selection. The Frederic R. Harris site study (September 2001) focused heavily on construction cost and construction timeframe as the major factors differentiating the two sites in its recommendation favoring the site in Orange. While these are certainly important factors, the Commission urges decision makers, including ConnDOT and the South Central Council of Governments, to include a broader range of factors in this long-term siting decision. These should include accessibility of the sites by public transit (existing routes or future services), compatibility with regional land use plans, potential for economic development including transit oriented development, and the viability of the alternative private financing mechanisms that have been made for the two sites.

We commend ConnDOT also for soliciting the preference of the Council of Governments, which will vote on this matter as this report goes to press. The COG is in an excellent position to weigh the above-listed factors in its decision. If the Orange site is ultimately selected, the Commission believes it is extremely important to the success of the new station that Connecticut Transit, and possibly Milford Transit, bus routes be extended to serve that location to provide a public transit access option at that site.

[Note: The Chief Elected Officials of the South Central Council of Governments, by a 12-3 vote taken on December 19, favored the West Haven site for the new railroad station.]

2. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION (FRA) CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NORTHEAST CORRIDOR SIDINGS AT GUILFORD AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. THESE SIDINGS WERE MANDATED BY FRA'S RECORD OF DECISION ON THE NORTHEAST CORRIDOR ELECTRIFICATION PROJECT. WITH AMTRAK'S INCREASED FREQUENCY OF SERVICE AND SPEED OF TRAINS ON THE CORRIDOR, THE CONSTRUCTION OF THESE SIDINGS HAS BECOME ESSENTIAL TO UNIMPEDED COMMUTER SERVICE BY CONNECTICUT'S SHORE LINE EAST AND SAFE FREIGHT OPERATIONS BY PROVIDENCE & WORCESTER RAILROAD.

The Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Record of Decision on the Northeast Corridor Electrification project mandated the construction of sidings at various locations along the Corridor to mitigate impact to other Corridor users. Most of the sidings, including Guilford, were stipulated for construction A prior to the initiation of Amtrak service at speeds greater than those presently operated. At the time of the Record of Decision (ROD), this was projected to be October 1999.

Subsequently, and in view of the slippage of the initiation date for Amtrak high speed service, Amtrak requested a delay for the construction of the Guilford siding to June 20, 2001. After consulting with the Providence and Worcester Railroad (P&W) and ConnDOT, FRA did not object to this request.

Amtrak's financial difficulties have led to continued delays in the construction of these Guilford sidings. FRA has been fully aware of the hardships caused to the Providence and Worcester Railroad and to Shore Line East commuter service by the lack of these sidings, but is also fully cognizant of Amtrak's budgetary situation and has taken a pragmatic approach to the enforcement of the ROD requirement for the sidings. FRA has taken the position that as soon as a new authorization of funds for Amtrak materializes, it would press the issue of the construction of the sidings.

It is now our understanding that Amtrak has identified additional money in its capital budget arising from unexpended funds committed to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Amtrak, Metro-North and ConnDOT for New Haven Line improvements benefiting both passenger services. These unexpended first year MOU funds can be reprogrammed to build the Guilford sidings. To date, there appears to be a willingness among all three parties to do this. We urge FRA to continue to encourage and foster this recommitment of funds to the Guilford sidings. The amount of unexpended MOU first year funds may be approximately \$5,000,000, which should allow for at least the south siding to be built.

Further delays in the installation of the Guilford sidings are of more than theoretical or policy concern. Stringline diagrams submitted to date by Amtrak are not sufficiently detailed to demonstrate that adequate operating windows will be available for operation of all Shore Line East commuter and Providence & Worcester freight service once

Amtrak's expanded service is fully in place. Recently implemented Shore Line East expansion in fall of 2001 has added one new train in each direction, adding to the schedule tightness and conflicts. The same is true as P&W freight volumes continue to grow.

More specific problems will occur if the Guilford sidings are not in place by 2002 when a new Guilford Shore Line East station is slated for construction (currently expected to begin in September 2002). It is proposed to be located to serve the south siding rather than the main line track. Failure to have the siding in place will result in a "stranded" station, with the need for a temporary platform to reach the trains. If the new station and platform were located to serve the main line track directly, it would need to be relocated when the siding is installed, obviously a situation to be avoided.

For freight service, availability of the Guilford siding allows P&W the flexibility to use smaller windows in the Amtrak schedule to deadhead trains from New Haven to Old Saybrook. Guilford can be reached in 25 minutes from New Haven. Freight trains could then wait at Guilford for Amtrak trains to clear, then proceed to Old Saybrook. In the absence of the siding, a full 40 minute window is necessary to safely transit to Old Saybrook. If this window is missed due to any deliveries taking longer than anticipated, then P&W must wait a full hour for another window. This could put them in violation of the FRA's 12-hour crew limit, making them unable to complete the run in one shift and necessitating a new crew being sent to complete the run. This is very expensive and inefficient.

To date, Amtrak has been very cooperative in setting their schedules to provide sufficient operating windows for Shore Line East and P&W operations. However, with increasing service by all three corridor users, this will become progressively more difficult. With Amtrak having scheduling priority on the Corridor, at some point other users will be forced to make compromises in their service and will lose customers or riders. The Guilford siding will provide all users with the operating flexibility to avoid these conflicts.

If Amtrak is not required to construct these sidings without further delay, there is also a fear among other Corridor users that they may never get constructed. Once all high speed Acela service is underway, Amtrak's needs are met, and it becomes increasingly difficult to secure completion of mitigation measures such as the Guilford sidings. With Providence and Worcester's freight volumes growing and with Shore Line East looking at possible increases in commuter service, the operating flexibility provided by the Guilford sidings becomes increasingly essential. Without it, only Amtrak's needs among Corridor users are met, while other commuter and freight needs are constrained, inevitably resulting in these unmet travel demands moving from the rail line to Interstate 95, US-1 and other roads in the region.

3. THE COMMISSION REAFFIRMS ITS PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION THAT CONNDOT PURSUE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE BETWEEN NEW HAVEN, HARTFORD AND SPRINGFIELD TO MEET THE NEEDS OF COMMUTERS AND OTHER TRAVELERS IN CONNECTICUT'S CENTRAL CORRIDOR, WHICH ARE NOT BEING MET BY THE CURRENT AMTRAK SERVICE. TO THIS END, THE COMMISSION STRONGLY COMMENDS THE TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY BOARD FOR ITS SELECTION OF A STUDY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPRINGFIELD LINE COMMUTER SERVICE AS ONE OF THE SECTION 16 PROJECTS DESIGNATED FOR FUNDING. CONNDOT'S EXPEDITIOUS PROGRESS TOWARD UNDERTAKING SUCH A STUDY IS ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED.

The Transportation Strategy Board has authorized \$2,000,000 to undertake a study of all aspects of the implementation of commuter rail service between New Haven, Hartford, and Springfield on Amtrak's Springfield Line. Study elements include analysis of the right-of-way, passing sidings, equipment options, service schedules, parking, platforms, stations, signal work and a schedule for possible implementation. A 12 to 18 month study schedule is anticipated, with the study commencing in early 2002 and study results to be finalized in early to mid-2003.

Amtrak reduced service during 2001 from seven to six passenger trains in each direction between New Haven, Hartford and Springfield. Presently serving this route are: (A) One daily unreserved through train connecting Boston and Washington via the Inland Route; (B) One unreserved train operating daily, with a modified weekend schedule, between Washington and Springfield; (C) One daily reserved seat train, serving only the New Haven, Hartford and Springfield stops on its way to Vermont; and (D) Three shuttle trains operating in each direction on weekdays and two on weekends between New Haven and Springfield. These train connect with Acela Regional service trains on the Northeast Corridor. They are not specifically scheduled to connect with either Metro-North trains or Acela Express services.

Currently this route provides limited options during commuter hours, resulting in poor commuter service. Southbound in the morning to New Haven, there is one train arriving at 7:28 AM and another at 10:20 AM, neither encouraging use by commuters. These same trains also serve Hartford at 6:38 AM and 9:34 AM, though the fare structure does not encourage commuter use. Southbound afternoon trains are a 4:49 PM from Hartford with arrival in New Haven at 5:35 PM and a second at 7:14 PM. Northbound from New Haven, there is only a 9:05 AM morning train and a 5:20 PM evening train. Other trains do operate, though they do not provide convenient times for commuters or a fare structure to encourage local usage. All fares are structured to encourage use of the services through to Northeast Corridor points between New York and Washington.

The fact that a new rail service in this corridor would be costly to implement in terms of initial capital expenses, and operating resources, is not lost on this commission.

However, the service would serve multiple needs and does complement other pieces of the state's transportation system. The proposed Springfield Line service would tie in to Amtrak's new high speed Acela Northeast Corridor service at New Haven, providing more frequent connections with upstate areas than Amtrak's present service. Additionally, the service would connect to Metro-North New Haven Line and to Shore Line East services, expanding the range of destinations that could be reached by rail from these lines. This in turn would result in increased ridership as people along the route of the existing Metro-North and Shore Line East services make connections to reach points north of New Haven, and vice versa from points along the Springfield Line to shore locations. The service would also connect to the proposed New Britain Busway and other potential transit corridors currently being studied to Manchester, Bloomfield and Rocky Hill.

The construction of the new State Street Station in New Haven will increase access from that city to points north by providing a convenient downtown access point. Improved access to Bradley Field from the Springfield Line at Windsor Locks is becoming more desirable and necessary. Access could be by shuttle van or bus, or in the future perhaps via a rail connection. Also, with welfare-to-work initiatives leading to employment opportunities for many residents who do not own cars, Springfield Line commuter service which would serve intermediate cities such as Meriden, Wallingford, North Haven, Windsor Locks and Enfield in addition to Hartford, New Haven and Springfield, would open up a wealth of employment opportunities for the transit dependent residents of these cities. The development of the proposed Adriaen's Landing project in downtown Hartford will further increase demand for convenient rail access into the Capital City.

The 1991 Statewide Transit System Plan performed for ConnDOT estimated a year 2010 daily ridership of 4,300 between Hartford and New Haven, without commuter service to Springfield. The 1994 ConnDOT study "Feasibility Evaluation of Commuter Rail Service Along the New Haven-Hartford Corridor" projected ridership of 2000 trips daily, again with the service not extending past Hartford. The efficiency of serving these trips is increased by the fact that the trip demand in this corridor is bi-directional, i.e., not predominantly just northbound or southbound. Therefore, unlike Shore Line East for example, there is no "deadhead" direction. Each movement will be a revenue trip.

It is also very possible that Springfield Line commuter service could be provided through a joint Amtrak/ConnDOT venture. With a joint service, passengers utilizing the line for commutation to work could simply use multiple ride tickets, either weekly or monthly. The single fare ticket would continue to be used by single trip passengers. If a jointly operated service were established, increased frequency, primarily during the commuting hours, would need to be added. These added trains would not only serve commuters but would also be an advantage to Amtrak since they would provide additional connections to Amtrak trains on the Northeast Corridor.

4. THE COMMISSION COMMENDS THE DEPARTMENT ON ITS INITIATION OF THE DANBURY BRANCH ELECTRIFICATION FEASIBILITY STUDY. THIS COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS WILL LOOK AT ALL ASPECTS OF POSSIBLE UPGRADING OF THE DANBURY BRANCH METRO-NORTH SERVICE INCLUDING ELECTRIFICATION, VARIOUS EQUIPMENT TYPES AND TECHNOLOGIES, DOUBLE TRACKING, TRACK GEOMETRY IMPROVEMENTS, STATION LOCATIONS AND FACILITIES, AND, IMPORTANTLY, EXTENSION OF DANBURY BRANCH SERVICE NORTHWARD TO NEW MILFORD.

During the last 10 years, efforts to extend Metro-North Danbury Branch rail service north to New Milford and Brookfield have been advocated, first by the locally-based Rail Service Restoration Society, and by the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials. This Commission first addressed this proposal in its 1992 Annual Report. Several studies to look at feasibility and potential ridership were undertaken. The Route 7 Corridor Travel Options Implementation Plan, undertaken jointly by the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials and the South Western Regional Planning Agency and released in September 2000, was the latest in the series of studies to recommend this service extension as a strategy to provide more attractive commuting options from New Milford, Brookfield and surrounding towns to points in southern Fairfield County and New York, and thus lure motorists out of their cars and, specifically, off Route 7.

This proposal benefits from the fact that the 14.2 miles of track and the New Milford railroad station are already in place, along with ample parking at the latter. Some of the track will require upgrading to meet passenger service standards. The Route 7 Corridor Study and previous studies also found that initial service could be established using existing equipment with no new purchase of rolling stock required.

Unlike the recently instituted extension of Metro-North Harlem Line service from Dover Plains to Wassaic, NY, which covers an area of more sparsely developed and mostly residential land use, the New Milford extension would also serve significant commercial and office users.

Though the New Milford extension is a proposal the Commission has long advocated, the entire Danbury Branch Electrification Feasibility Study will provide a solid planning foundation for a program of phased improvements to the service, which will operate to achieve many of the same public benefits of the New Milford service extension. The Commission also commends the extensive public outreach component of the feasibility study.

5. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT CONNECTICUT PARTICIPATE IN THE MID-ATLANTIC RAIL OPERATIONS STUDY WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY, AS PART OF A STRATEGIC, COMPREHENSIVE CORRIDOR APPROACH TO HIGHWAY TRAFFIC CONGESTION. THIS STUDY IS BEING UNDERTAKEN BY VIRGINIA, DELAWARE, MARYLAND, PENNSYLVANIA, NEW JERSEY, NORFOLK SOUTHERN, CSX, AMTRAK AND THE 1-95 CORRIDOR COALITION.

The Commission, through the participation of one of its members in the work of the East of Hudson Rail Operations Task Force, has become aware of this study. New York and Connecticut are not currently included in the study, a fact which, in light of the long history of Commission recommendations concerning the need to make the fullest possible use of Connecticut's rail system to reduce highway traffic congestion, is of great concern to the Commission.

Quoting from "Briefing Paper v2.2", which is attached on pages 31-31 of this report following recommendation #12, the conclusion reads, "If we do nothing to improve the Mid-Atlantic rail network, the rail system will not be able to keep pace with growing demand, which means that more freight and passenger auto traffic will be forced onto the region's already-overburdened highways and airports. On the other hand, if we make meaningful improvements to the Mid-Atlantic rail network, we can help offset present and future impacts on these overburdened highways and airports, and make a positive contribution to the capacity, efficiency and safety of the region's intermodal transportation network as a whole."

To date, this study has defined the problem, identified "choke points" in the rail system, and has proposed specific projects to add track capacity, increase rail clearances and provide critical connections between major north-south lines.

It is our understanding that one of the results of the Mid-Atlantic Rail Operations Study will be to earmark Federal funds for these projects under the so-called AT-3" Federal transportation funding bill, which will be funded in the next session of Congress, replacing the current TEA-21 funding programs. This funding timeline makes the participation of New York and Connecticut have more importance and weight.

The Commission believes that just such an approach is needed in the northern portion of the Northeast Corridor, i.e., north of New Jersey, where there are even more severe examples of lack of connectivity, lack of redundancy and more severe clearance restrictions than presently exist south of New Jersey. .

The continued absence of Connecticut, New York and other New England states from participation in the Mid-Atlantic Rail Operations Study leaves the impression that it is the policy of those states to do nothing about the growing problem of truck freight congestion on Interstate 95. Such a public policy is unacceptable.

If all of the states along the Interstate 95 corridor participate, the focus of the study would then be changed to the an I-95 Corridor Rail Operations Study. In fact, one of the recommendations of the Mid-Atlantic report quoted above is “Expand the study area to include New York and New England.”

6. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT CLEANING PROGRAMS FOR CONNDOT-OWNED METRO-NORTH AND SHORE LINE EAST RAIL CARS BE IMPROVED, BOTH FOR THE EXTERIORS AND INTERIORS OF THE CARS.

The external siding and the interiors, including the toilet facilities, of many ConnDOT-owned cars show signs of an ineffective cleaning policy. This includes cars in both Metro-North and Shore Line East services. The current cleaning policy needs to be re-evaluated. The Commission believes that steps must be taken to address this situation, including a consistent rotation plan for all equipment through the car wash in Stamford or other appropriate locations. Regular inspection and cleaning of all interiors and toilets must be made at the end of each run.

The current state of cleanliness, or lack thereof, has been a frequently heard complaint at Commission meetings. Not only does this discourage transit use, but it presents a bad impression of Connecticut to riders, potential riders, potential residents and even potential business interests who see these cars in Connecticut or New York. The term we have heard used is that these cars are Connecticut's "calling cards" to those forming a first impression of the state. And the first impression they are getting is very often not a positive one.

Furthermore, if the outside appearance of the cars is improved, train riders will treat the interiors with more respect and do their part to keep the cars clean. Currently, riders can understandably get the impression that the operators just do not care about cleanliness, and they may adjust their behavior accordingly.

In spring of 2000, the Commission heard a presentation by Metro-North representatives about the new computerized car tracking system which would monitor the cleaning history of each car and assure that each car in the fleet received its various levels of cleaning on time, including its 90-day extraordinary or "E" cleaning, its heavy cleaning and its daily layover cleaning, in addition to the turnaround cleaning, essentially a trash pick up. That sounded like a major leap forward and a noticeable improvement in car cleanliness was anticipated by Metro-North. Twenty months later, it is apparent that has not materialized. All of the promotion and marketing effort going into enticing additional ridership is counteracted by the firsthand experience and then the simple word of mouth reputation the commuter services develop based on the unpleasant ridership experiences. Conversely, a pleasant commuting environment in clean equipment would generate abundant and effective unpaid advertising as satisfied train riders spread the word. This would be more effective than any marketing effort the department is currently developing.

7. THE COMMISSION REPEATS ITS 2000 RECOMMENDATION THAT THE DEPARTMENT ADOPT AN ADVANCE PAYMENT SYSTEM BASED ON ANTICIPATED MONTHLY EXPENSES TO REIMBURSE TRANSIT DISTRICTS, WITH SUBSEQUENT ADJUSTMENTS TO REFLECT VARIANCES FROM ACTUAL EXPENSES. THIS WOULD REPLACE THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF REIMBURSING ACTUAL INCURRED EXPENSES AND WOULD RESULT IN EXPEDITED PAYMENTS TO TRANSIT DISTRICTS AND CONTRACT OPERATORS. THE COMMISSION FURTHER RECOMMENDS THAT THE ANNUAL CONTRACTS AND ADDENDA BE FULLY EXECUTED PRIOR TO THE BEGINNING OF EACH FISCAL YEAR SO AS NOT TO IMPEDE THE PAYMENT PROCESS. IN FISCAL YEAR 2001, TWO TRANSIT DISTRICTS WERE FORCED TO BORROW MONEY AND A THIRD DISTRICT NEEDED TO, BUT WAS UNABLE TO DO SO BECAUSE IT WAS STILL PAYING OFF THE LOAN FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

Currently transit districts and contract operators submit monthly invoices to ConnDOT for the expenses incurred during their operations in the previous month. These invoices then undergo a rigorous six step review process before a reimbursement check is issued. In theory, payment should be received by the transit providers in approximately 5 to 6 weeks after the invoice and supporting documentation have been logged in at ConnDOT. In actual practice, these procedures typically result in much greater payment delays of as much as 5 to 6 months, frequently forcing some transit districts to engage in costly short-term borrowing to cover expenses until reimbursement payments arrives. As the interest on these short-term loans is not an allowable expense under current statute, tight transit district budgets cannot recover these costs and must make offsetting cuts elsewhere.

To remedy this situation, the Commission recommends that the current reimbursement system be replaced with a system of advance payments based on estimated monthly expenses, subject to adjustment in succeeding payments for any variances between estimated and actual costs. This system would result in expedited payments to operators and would avoid the need for operators to borrow money while waiting for reimbursement invoices to be processed. In order to implement this advance payment system, a one-time allocation of funds would be necessary to cover the timeframe of several months between the current after-the-fact payment schedule and the advance payment schedule. Once this adjustment was made, actual expenses to ConnDOT would remain the same except that the timing of the payments would be advanced. This advance payment system with subsequent adjustments is already employed for the last two months in each fiscal year.

If this change is implemented, and the need for transit districts to engage in short-term borrowing is eliminated, potentially several thousand dollars per year per district that currently is used to pay interest could be reallocated to the delivery of services.

8. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT FUNDS BE PROVIDED TO THE NORTHWESTERN CONNECTICUT TRANSIT DISTRICT TO UNDERTAKE A FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A NEW BUS MAINTENANCE AND STORAGE FACILITY.

Currently the Northwestern Connecticut Transit District lacks a single facility to park and maintain its fleet of 16 vehicles. This results in the use of 4 sites scattered across central Torrington in order to park its busses and vans. On some occasions, employees actually have to park the vehicles in their own driveways for lack of other space.

This situation creates numerous operational inefficiencies and unsafe conditions. Among these are the fact that it is not possible to secure the vehicles at these scattered sites and some of them have been vandalized. Four separate locations need to be plowed out in the event of snowstorms. Employees have no designated place to park and often must resort to using metered parking, which frequently expires during their work shifts, resulting in parking tickets.

In addition, the existing administrative office space used by the District in Torrington City Hall will soon be reassigned to another purpose by the City, with the result that the District will be evicted from City Hall during 2002 and must locate alternate office space. While such alternate space is undoubtedly available in Torrington, the new location will likely be farther removed and less convenient to the site hosting the largest number to NWTB vehicles. A new storage and maintenance facility would eliminate this additional inefficiency by incorporating necessary office space at the garage.

9. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT THE CURRENT \$3.00 PER MONTH BUS TRANSIT SUBSIDY FOR STATE OF CONNECTICUT EMPLOYEES BE INCREASED TO A LEVEL THAT PROVIDES A MORE MEANINGFUL INCENTIVE TO USE TRANSIT.

The current \$3.00 monthly subsidy was established during the Grasso era in the mid-1970s. At that time, \$3.00 represented a meaningful discount toward a \$25.00 monthly bus pass. That is no longer the case with Zone 2 bus passes currently costing \$65, Zone 3 passes at \$85 and Zone 4 passes at \$104. Private employers such as Aetna and Travelers currently offer their employees a \$21 discount on the monthly bus passes. A discount of this magnitude would be a meaningful enticement to encourage State employees to forego private commuting in favor of mass transit.

For comparison purposes, using figures supplied by Connecticut Transit, Travelers Insurance participation in the discount bus pass program currently is 1,417 passes sold, or \$70,000 worth of monthly passes. United Health Care employees purchase \$15,000 worth of passes per month, which translates to approximately 300 passes sold. State of Connecticut employee participation through Connecticut Transit is currently 15-20 local bus passes and 8 or 9 Zone 2 express passes monthly. Certainly there is much opportunity to improve transit usage among State of Connecticut employees by offering an improved discount bus pass option.

10. THE COMMISSION RECOGNIZES THE ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL ROLE OF TRANSPORTATION IN SECURING AND MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT, PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE ENTERING THE WORK FORCE FOR THE FIRST TIME. JOB ACCESS, OR WELFARE-TO-WORK, TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS HAVE NOT ONLY BEEN PIVOTAL BUT ALSO HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL IN FILLING THIS LINK TO JOB OPPORTUNITIES. THE COMMISSION NOTES WITH SATISFACTION THAT, FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER IN ITS ANNUAL REPORT, ADEQUATE FUNDING IS CURRENTLY IN PLACE, OR IN THE PIPELINE, TO CARRY EXISTING JOB ACCESS TRANSPORTATION SERVICES THROUGH THIS FISCAL YEAR AND INTO FY 2002. HOWEVER, THERE CONTINUES TO BE A NEED FOR A MORE PREDICTABLE, INSTITUTIONALIZED FUNDING STREAM TO SUPPORT THESE SERVICES SO THAT THEY CAN BE PLANNED AND DELIVERED IN A MORE EFFICIENT AND CONSISTENT MANNER AND SO THAT SERVICE USERS CAN MORE CONFIDENTLY MAKE LONG-TERM EMPLOYMENT AND LIFESTYLE DECISIONS.

In late 2001, just as impending shortages in operating funds were threatening to force curtailment of many Job Access transportation services, two sources of funding nearly simultaneously materialized, removing this threat. A \$3,500,000 earmark for Federal Transit Administration Job Access funding for Connecticut was included in the USDOT funding authorization by Congress and is expected to be available for transit services soon. Early November saw the Transportation Strategy Board approve \$1,200,000 for continued support of Job Access bus service enhancements. The Transportation Strategy Board funding has filled the financial breach arising from the delayed release of FY2001 funds from the Department of Social Services' (DSS) Transportation for Employment Independence Program (TEIP) and has allowed for payment to service providers, many of whom had accrued significant deficits while waiting for the release of the TEIP funds.

These developments will adequately provide for continuing existing services into FY 2002 (recognizing that, in many regions, "existing services" already reflects some cuts which had to be made in late 2001 to balance services and available funding). However, at the risk of looking a gift horse in the mouth, the timing of the arrival of these monies continued a trend of "just in the nick of time" rescues of welfare-to-work services, which were facing curtailment from cash-strapped operators. Specific routes had already been identified for cuts which would have gone into effect within a matter of weeks. This latest episode, and a historic record of standing at the financial brink, do not allow for efficient planning or operation of services, and do not allow riders to make employment, residential or lifestyle decisions with any degree of assurance. While the Commission cannot recommend a specific budgetary solution to provide greater consistency or predictability to the financial planning process, it is clear that the existing situation is far from optimal, even when it does ultimately result in adequate dollars at the end of the process.

The Commission has long been an enthusiastic advocate for Job Access transportation as a result of the input it has received from both users and providers across Connecticut. Jobs access transportation enhancements have been a shining success story in this state. This is in large part due to the collaboratives which have quarterbacked the delivery of these services by successfully bringing together all of the governmental, transportation, employer and social service interests, and have fashioned a well-managed and efficient network of job-focused transit enhancements and services. By concentrating on leveraging existing services and resources, and extending their geographic reach and hours of operation to provide better access to employment sites, the maximum level of services has been provided for the dollars available.

Any region of the state could be cited for impressive results of the Job Access Transportation program. The results have been encouraging throughout the state. Specifically, in the Capitol Region, as of August 2001, 3,386 riders per day were using Job Access services furnished through Connecticut Transit, New Britain Transportation, the Greater Hartford Transit District or the Rideshare Company. Perhaps the most noteworthy individual success in the region has been the L-Route bus from Bloomfield, through Hartford's North End, to Buckland Hills. Ridership on that route reached 10,349 trips in August. One year ago, we reported the ridership on this route was 7,000 rides per month, so by August ridership had increased fully 50% in the last year. L-Route ridership has since declined slightly to 9,600 riders per month as the service was cut from 40 minute headways to one hour headways in anticipation of funding shortages.

In southwestern Connecticut, Jobs Access transportation enhancements funded by FTA and DSS grants were providing 74,760 rides per month by May 2001, the most recent month for which complete statistics are available. This is up from 46,500 rides per month as of September 2000, the figure reported in last year's Annual Report. Among the success stories in this region is the Coastal Link, a seamless bus service between Milford and Norwalk along the Boston Post Road and run cooperatively by the Milford, Greater Bridgeport and Norwalk Transit Districts. Begun on October 31, 1999, this service is now providing 56,291 rides per month as of November 2001, with some of the buses so full that additional passengers cannot be accommodated. Approximately 36,000 of these trips, those provided by the Norwalk Transit District and Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority, are reflected in the 74,760 trip total given above for the People to Jobs program.

The Commission continues to highlight Job Access issues each year because these services are supporting a whole new way of life statewide for thousands of our residents and their families. Additionally, employers are obtaining the services of critically needed workers. Connecticut would suffer a great setback if these gains were lost for lack of the transportation services on which the workers depend. Further, we urge the General Assembly to take continued note of the direct linkage between Department of Social Services funding savings as people are able to transition to employment, and the adequate funding of the transportation services necessary to support the employment of low income and transit dependent workers.

11. THE COMMISSION URGES THE DEPARTMENT TO CONTINUE TO WORK TOWARD THE PROVISION OF MORE CAPACITY FOR TRUCKS AT REST AREAS ALONG CONNECTICUT'S INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS. THE COMMISSION COMMENDS THE DEPARTMENT FOR UNDERTAKING ITS APRIL 2001 TRUCK STOP AND REST AREA PARKING STUDY.

There is a shortage of parking places for truck drivers to pull off Interstate highways for needed rest or to wait for a scheduled delivery time. This situation can lead to several undesirable and unsafe consequences including having truck drivers continue to drive in a fatigued state, having trucks parking in undesignated or unsafe locations, or having existing rest areas and service plazas become overly congested to the point where emergency vehicles or other traffic cannot safely access those sites.

A 1996 Federal Highway Administration study found a shortage of 1,025 truck parking spaces in Connecticut, based on an estimated demand of 1,462 parking spaces and a supply of 437 at Connecticut's 13 public rest areas. The 2001 ConnDOT study estimated the shortfall at 1,200 spaces. This deficit is predicted to grow to 1,600 spaces by 2020.

Several measures can and should be taken to address this issue. First, capacity at existing rest areas should be expanded where feasible. Eighty additional spaces were created in 1999 when five parking areas along Interstate 95 were reconfigured. The 2001 ConnDOT Rest Area Study found a potential to create up to 638 additional parking spaces through expansions and reconfigurations at 15 locations at one or both sides of ten State rest areas along Interstates 84, 91, 95 and 395. These opportunities should be pursued. The study cites a window of opportunity when current leases at service plazas expire in 2003.

Although outside of the scope of ConnDOT's jurisdiction, another potential solution is the provision of additional capacity at private truck stops, either by expansion of existing facilities or the opening of new ones.

Construction of new public rest areas, though often politically difficult, would alleviate this problem, especially if done in the geographic areas of greatest need, mainly in western Connecticut.

As a result of the 2001 study effort, a working group, organized under the auspices of ConnDOT, is meeting quarterly to address these issues.

One additional strategy is the diversion of more freight volume from trucks to other modes. This would result in fewer trucks on the Interstates and therefore reduce, or at least slow the increase in, demand for rest areas. ConnDOT's Southwest Corridor Commodity Study (1999) showed "74 percent of the volume of commodities that travel into, out of or through Connecticut travel by truck, 19 percent by water, 6 percent by rail and 1 percent by air." Any measures that reduce this 74% freight dominance of truck transport would have the desirable byproduct, among others, of lessening the demand for truck rest area capacity.

12. THE COMMISSION COMMENDS THE TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY BOARD AND THE TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT AREA (TIA) CORRIDOR BOARDS ON THE EXCELLENT WORK THEY HAVE DONE TO DATE, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE VERY COMPRESSED TIMEFRAMES THAT HAVE BEEN AVAILABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR WORK.

Both the Transportation Investment Area Corridor Boards in developing their Interim Corridor Plans by November 15, 2001, and the Transportation Strategy Board in preparing its Interim Strategy Plan due January 15, 2002, have labored mightily to prepare their visions for future transportation planning and expenditures in Connecticut.

In particular, the Commission endorses the selections of the eleven 'Section 16' projects made by the Strategy Board at its November meeting. Many of the projects chosen by the Board operate to promote objectives this Commission has long endorsed, including three projects that are subjects of recommendations in this Annual Report, namely Job Access transportation, implementation of Springfield Line commuter rail service, and the development of a new Metro-North station at either West Haven or Orange. Most of the Board's remaining selected projects operate to improve the utility, attractiveness or connectivity of various transit services. Such strategies have long been advocated by this Commission. Increased Hartford area express bus service, greater connectivity of rail and bus modes by facilitating bus connections to Metro-North rail service on the New Haven and Harlem Lines, and enhancing the connectivity of bus systems in Fairfield County will all operate to make Connecticut's transit services more attractive and effectual for our commuters. We acknowledge the valuable role already being exercised by the Transportation Strategy Board and the TIA boards and we are confident that this important function in improving Connecticut's transit and transportation services is only beginning.

