

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of June 2, 2016

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room B
2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Mort Katz, Richard Sunderhauf, Nick Lownes, Russ St. John, Robert Rodman, Yvonne Loteczka, Alan Sylvestre, Bob Hammersley, Ed McAnaney. **Ex-officio members:** Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Lisa Rivers, Jim Stutz, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Stephen Troster, Brenda Sunderhauf.

Chairman Maloney opened the meeting at 1:38 p.m. The minutes of the meeting of May 5 were accepted as written subject to a correction that the 2005 Federal Surface Transportation Act acronym should be SAFTEA-LU, not SAFETY-LU.

Featured Speaker

Lisa Rivers, ConnDOT Transit Manager, began her career with the Department in 1992 and first began working on the New Britain busway/ *CTfastrak* in 2004. Rivers said her remarks today would provide a *CTfastrak* overview, review the first year of operations, discuss expansion of *CTfastrak* east of the Connecticut River, and give an overview of the Statewide Bus Study.

Seven features which characterize *CTfastrak* as a bus rapid transit (BRT) system are its dedicated bus-only roadway, its distinctive and standardized stations and platforms, the aesthetics of its vehicles, its off-vehicle fare collection system, its intelligent transportation system (ITS) elements such as automatic vehicle locator (AVL) technology and real time info on bus arrivals, its service plan, and the distinctive branding for *CTfastrak*. Transit App and Google Transit pick up and display the information from the AVL and this info is also displayed at the stations on variable message signs which announce the next several arriving buses and their arrival times.

The *CTfastrak* service plan is simply to provide frequent and reliable service so that riders don't even need to rely on having a schedule. There are three types of service within the *CTfastrak* system. The basic service (Route 101) uses the busway exclusively. Other *CTfastrak* routes use the busway for part of their journey. This group includes the commuter bus runs to Waterbury, Cheshire, Southington and Bristol as well as some local routes. The last group of *CTfastrak* routes are those which directly serve a *fastrak* station as one terminus. Most service on the busway exits at Sigourney Street onto local roads as its eastern exit point. Only Routes 101 and 128 go all the way to Asylum Avenue on the busway.

Rivers mentioned that the relocation of Gold Street in Hartford led to the relocation of the Gold Street bus stop to Jewell Street due to the construction activity. Originally proposed as a temporary relocation, the Jewell Street site will now become the permanent stop and is, in fact, a location that was originally preferred by ConnDOT.

Ridership on the *CTfastrak* system shows the typical seasonal variations, with a September through November peak ridership and lowest ridership in the winter.

Recognizing that some of the bus routes that now run under the *CTfastrak* banner were pre-existing Hartford Division routes, ConnDOT looks at ridership numbers for the overall corridor, whether on the green *CTfastrak* or blue regular buses, when comparing ridership. The pre-*fastrak* level of 8,000 – 9,000 riders in the corridor has nearly doubled to 16,000 daily riders now. This is well in excess of the Year 1 ridership goal of 11,180 riders per day in the corridor.

Average fare per local rider is \$.94, a figure derived by dividing the total fare revenue by the total corridor ridership. The average *CTfastrak* express service fare is \$3.24. Based on fare enforcement inspections, fare payment compliance is 99%. When fare inspections are done, all doors of the bus are covered to make sure that non-ticket-holding riders do not leave via the backdoor of the bus. Revenue for the second half of 2015 (July-December) was \$297,743 ahead of the projected level. *CTfastrak* is running slightly favorable on costs, i.e., slightly below projected costs, such as fuel and other operating costs, snow removal and maintenance.

Headways on the 161 bus, which is the local circulator, have been moved from 15 minutes to 20 minutes, which is more realistic and allows for a higher rate of schedule compliance. Similarly, a layover was added into the Route 140 service to improve schedule compliance. Several express bus schedules have also been tweaked.

The demand for parking at *CTfastrak* stations is high, in many cases exceeding supply. Several measures are being taken to address this. Twenty-four spaces were added to the Elmwood Station parking lot last December by removing an island from the lot. Eleven spaces will be added at Newington Junction this year. Ninety additional spaces are planned for the Cedar Street lot in 2017. Additional capacity via leased parking spaces is being pursued, but so far it has not been easy to procure spots through leasing. Enforcement of a *CTfastrak* riders only parking policy is being stepped up at station parking lots.

ConnDOT is working with a consultant to look at options to extend *CTfastrak* east of the Connecticut River. The budget does not allow for service to UConn in the immediate future. As a Phase 1 of expanded service east of the river, five routes have been selected for extended evening hours of service to 10:45 pm, and for a better alignment of schedules to improve connections to *CTfastrak* service. The five routes to get enhanced service are Tolland Street (Route 82/84), Silver Lane (Route 83), Burnside Avenue (Route 88), Forbes Street Crosstown (Route 91) and Glastonbury (Route 95). Further enhancements in Phase 2 will involve focus areas at Buckland Hills, Silver Lane and Burnside Avenue to provide BRT features at the bus stops/stations there including distinctive pavement treatments, benches, information kiosks, and landscaping, along with service features like wi-fi, fewer stops to speed travel, and perhaps signal pre-emption. Service to Rentschler Field for UConn football games, as well as to New Britain Stadium for New Britain Bees games, will be provided and will use separate access routes to bypass traffic into and out of those facilities.

Rivers then moved on to provide a brief overview of the Statewide Bus Study. VHB has been hired to do this study, the first statewide bus study in 15 years. Among other things, the

study will recommend a consistent format and schedule for data collection from the state's transit operators. Other elements of the study will include connectivity between systems, amenities, and fare structures. Some specific route recommendations will be developed. Based on experience with public input in the development of *CTfastrak*, ConnDOT has found that open houses are not very productive for soliciting public input, so a greater focus on internet outreach is planned. A website has been set up at www.ctbusstudy.com.

Rivers mentioned that 60 new buses have just been ordered for the Hartford Division of CT Transit.

With regard to capital costs for the busway, Rivers noted that some bits and pieces of construction are still going on. Some kiosks are still going in and a wetland creation project in Newington that was a requirement of the Inland Wetlands Permit is still underway. But almost all the work is done and it appears the overall project will come in just under its projected capital cost. The operating cost has increased significantly compared to the original \$10,000,000 annual subsidy estimate. This is mostly due to a significantly expanded service plan, especially the running of more evening and night service, and some maintenance costs which proved to be higher than estimated. The current *CTfastrak* operating subsidy is \$17,000,000 annually.

In response to a question on the level of wheelchair-dependent or other disabled riders using *CTfastrak*, Rivers said this data has not to date been tracked.

Reports from Operating Entities

Rich Sunderhauf mentioned that the Transportation Supervisors at CT Transit have organized to become members of the Teamsters. Because of supervisor/staff reporting relationships, the supervisors could not organize with the Amalgamated Transit Union which represents other CT Transit employees.

Old Business

Fred Riese reported that the contract to provide a bus link between the Waterbury and Danbury campuses of Naugatuck Valley Community College is advancing. Jim Troup, Dean of Administration at Naugatuck Valley Community College, reported that a final contract with Peter Pan has been drawn up and is under review at the bus company. Under the arrangement, which arose out of a 2014 Annual Report recommendation of the Commission and was brokered with guidance from the Commission, Peter Pan will offer the college discounted commuter fare tickets for sale to students. The NVCC Student Government Association also provided \$25,000 in funding to underwrite the tickets and the college identified additional funds to further lower the out-of-pocket fares the students will contribute. It is hoped to have the arrangement in place by the fall for the new academic year. Relatedly, through the Commission's involvement, a UPass system was also set up in Danbury between NVCC and HARTransit to provide prepaid transportation to NVCC's Danbury students on HART buses.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney said he would hold his remarks until the end of the meeting.

Spring Public Hearings

Fred Riese distributed copies of the hearing summaries for the May 10 Bristol public hearing and the May 23 Willimantic public hearing. Testimony in Bristol included updates from the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments and the Capitol Region Council of Governments on several planning studies underway, as well as bus rider testimony including a desire for more *CTfastrak* stops in the area of Bristol Hospital and an observation that the *CTfastrak* bus that leaves Bristol City Hall often departs as the Tunxis Community College shuttle is discharging passengers at that same location, with the shuttle riders thus unable to access the *CTfastrak* bus.

At the Willimantic hearing, which produced much excellent testimony, interregional bus connections were again the top priority. Willimantic was described as the city where the workers live but not where the jobs are. So transit connections to Manchester, Norwich, the casinos, New London and even Westerly were mentioned as being very important. Capacity issues on Windham Region Transit District (WRTD) buses and the need for more evening service, especially from Storrs to Willimantic, were highlighted. The move of some Peter Pan bus service from Willimantic to Storrs was cited as a major loss for the area.

The Commission's final spring public hearing will be June 7 in West Haven.

New Business

In view of the Commission's interest in preparing an Interim Annual Report, and with no further meetings of the Commission planned before its July 1 expiration date, Bob Hammersley proposed a motion to authorize Chairman Maloney and Fred Riese to draft the Interim Annual Report and cover letter. This motion passed by a 10-0 vote.

Closing Thoughts and Memories Concerning the Commission

Fred Riese gave a brief summary of the Commission's history, noting that it was created in 1975 as the Connecticut Public Transportation Authority. In 1983, as a result of a Sunset Law review, the Connecticut Public Transportation Authority and the Governor's Railroad Advisory Task Force were merged to create the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission.

When Fred joined the CPTA in 1979, Stewart Low was the Chairman. (Note: Bob Cairns and George Cahill had served as previous chairmen.) Stewart Low served as Chairman from 1979 through 1986. Ken Bondurant served as Chairman from 1987-1991, followed by Ken Slapin (1991), Paul Ehrhardt (1992-1997), Fred Riese (1998-2001), Tom Cheeseman (2002-2009) and Kevin Maloney (2010-present). ConnDOT's liaisons to the Commission over that time were Ed Ryan, Ray Dzialo, Rick Gray, Karen Yeske, Kevin Jones, Abby Rivera, Laila Mandour, Dennis King and Sherry Osterling. The first work sessions Fred remembers were in the early 1980s in the Capitol cafeteria. For a number of years thereafter, the November work session was held at the New Haven Holiday Inn. In particular, Fred recalled one of those meetings which took place during an ice storm. Commission member Dick Carpenter arrived late and having walked some distance in the ice storm, he looked like the abominable snowman when he walked in. For the last couple of decades, the annual work session has been held at Union Station in New Haven. Fred expressed his gratitude at working with all the dedicated members of the Commission over the years.

Chairman Maloney closed the meeting with his remarks, first thanking all the members for their contributions to the Commission during his tenure. He thanked in particular Vice Chairman Rick Schreiner and Fred Riese. Kevin said that as he looks around the room, he sees not only fellow Commissioners but individuals with whom he has become friends over the years. He expressed his hope that those friendships would remain long after this meeting is adjourned.

Concerning the work of the Commission, Kevin said “History will reflect that we have done some good work. One needs only to peruse our annual reports to get a sense of all we’ve accomplished. I am particularly proud of the work we did in the Waterbury area, the attention we drew to the problems surrounding the change of the bus system pulse point and especially our role in re-establishing evening bus service and the difference that service has made to the students at Naugatuck Valley Community College.” Kevin also took satisfaction in the extension of bus service to that college’s Danbury campus, which is well on its way even as we speak.

Kevin closed by saying “Democracy is by necessity a messy business. The civil discourse of ideas, especially when those ideas conflict with one another, often places people outside their comfort zone and forces them to consider positions that challenge their own. But that civil discourse and that sharing of ideas are the hallmarks of a democracy. However, efforts to suppress conflicting ideas and eliminate any semblance of oversight, thus minimizing among other things, the public’s right to knowledge and comment are not the hallmarks of a democracy; they are the hallmarks of something else.”

“We have honored our mission. We have provided for public comment without any filters.”

Mort Katz mentioned that the he has served on the Commission since 1984 and enjoyed the privilege of serving over these years.

Chairman Maloney closed the Commission’s final meeting at 3:05 p.m.

Note: Sadly, the passing of former CPTC member Dorothy Adamson on May 28, 2016 is noted. Dorothy served on the Commission from 2004 to 2008 as the Senior Citizen representative.