

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Thursday, December 7, 2006 – 1:30 P.M.

UNION STATION, NEW HAVEN
FOURTH FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM

1. Approval of minutes of November 2, 2006
2. Comments from the public
3. Comments from operating entities
4. Chairman's report
5. Old Business
6. New business
7. Discussion and voting on recommendations for 2006 Annual Report

NOTE: There will be no featured speaker for the December meeting in order to allow sufficient time to discuss the Annual Report recommendations.

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Minutes of November 2, 2006

ConnDOT Building, Conference Room B
2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Chairman Cheeseman called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm. The minutes of the meeting of October 5, 2006 were approved with two abstentions and subject to one correction offered by Mort Katz. His comments at the August 3 meeting concerned the safety problem at the Union Station (Hartford) platforms during the winter. The low level platforms there require steps to enter and exit the trains. The lack of adequate train crew personnel means the snow that gets packed onto the platform steps in winter is not properly cleaned off, creating a dangerous situation.

FEATURED SPEAKER

Tom Cheeseman introduced Mario Marrero, Transportation Planner with the Capitol Region Council of Governments. Marrero distributed copies of the September 2006 Jobs Access Program Annual Assessment for the Capitol Region and he noted that the program, begun in 1997 with 300 riders per day, is now in its 10th year and averaging 3,000-3,200 riders per day, well above the original program goal of 2,400 riders per day. The Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS), for whom the annual assessment was prepared, continues to be a major funding source for the services, providing \$859,288 in 2005 and \$871,731 in 2006.

Marrero mentioned a new Jobs Access initiative called the Jump Starts Program whereby 350 monthly bus passes have been purchased for TANF-eligible clients to assist new employees with a first month of free transportation. The passes are distributed through CT WORKS offices in north central Connecticut.

Among other specific Jobs Access services, Marrero noted the Connecticut Transit L Route, which connects Bloomfield, Hartford's North End, and the Buckland Hills area of Manchester, is now carrying 480 people per day (110,000 annually) while the Bradley Flyer route is averaging 380 daily riders.

Capitol Region Jobs Access services are still managed by the Jobs Access Task Force, which has met 10 times in the last year, roughly monthly. The Task Force reviews requests for new services, program costs and funding, and monthly ridership reports.

DSS requires that a majority of the riders on the services it funds must be TANF-eligible, with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requiring that most of the ridership be low income individuals, i.e., less than 75% of the median state income. A survey of 1,267 Jobs Access riders found 52% were TANF-eligible and 77% were TANF-eligible or low income.

Next year, Jobs Access funding from DSS will increase to \$932,000 and will include funding for new Vernon/Rockville area Sunday service. ConnDOT has also budgeted additional money to support the L Route, Bradley Flyer, and New Britain to Meriden services to compensate for reduced funding from FTA. Marrero feels that the Capitol Region Jobs Access services are in good shape financially at this point.

ConnDOT is also making \$600,000 available for expanded Jobs Access services and has solicited proposals for new services. Two million dollars worth of new projects were submitted in response to this solicitation. These included later evening service to East Hartford and Manchester, and an extension of service hours from New Britain to Farmington UConn and Tunxis Community College. Also, Stew Leonards will be opening a store on the Berlin Turnpike and there will be a need to run routes which meet their shift times. Scheduling services to meet shift needs is sometimes a problem as employers are often reluctant to alter their shift times even by one hour so that they will synchronize with other employers and be serviceable by one bus run. Marrero also mentioned that Walgreen's will be opening a huge distribution center in Windsor next year and that facility would likely be a promising Jobs Access market.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

REPORTS FROM OPERATING ENTITIES

Mike Sanders, ConnDOT's Administrator for Transit and Ridesharing, reported that bus ridership was holding its own despite the lower gas prices. Express bus routes in particular are still seeing gains. Also, he notes that ConnDOT has submitted its final tweaks to the Governor's budget, which will be a current services budget.

ConnDOT received FTA approval last week to proceed with final design on the New Britain Busway. Sanders said it has been challenging to meet FTA's ever-changing demands, but that the schedule for implementation is still looking for service to commence in early 2012. Most of the twelve separate design contracts are finalized and ready to go. There are individual contracts for station design, moving the Amtrak rails, the Amtrak access road, bridge work, and other specialties as well as for separate segments of the corridor. Amtrak has finally agreed to review the busway designs. It took two years to get them to do this due to their concerns about environmental liability. The design for the busway will leave room for two tracks and future electrification along the Springfield Line section of the busway. Sanders noted there have been 11 separate changes to the project since the EIE concept state, and each one of these has required approval by FTA. Some of these changes have been running Flatbush Avenue over the busway, dropping the stop at the Legislative Office Building, moving the location of one station in New Britain, and moving the alignment of the multi-use trail in New Britain.

Lastly Sanders mentioned that ConnDOT sought to use New Freedom Program funds to buy 25 accessible taxis for use at various systems around the state. This proposal did not get a warm reception at the regional level.

Peter Richter, Assistant Rail Administrator, said New Haven Line ridership is up 3% year-to-date through September, while Shore Line East ridership is up 10% year-to-date through September. For the month of September, the New Haven Line carried 3.6 million riders and achieved 97.0% on-time performance. Shore Line East carried 40,000 riders in September and had 95.7% on-time performance. A shortage of equipment for morning trains has led to some standees.

The first three of the Virginia Rail Express cars are now in service. A ribbon cutting ceremony October 16 marked this event. Also on the equipment front, the M-8 car program remains on track for the delivery of the first cars in 2009.

The running repair shop in New Haven Yard should receive its certificate of occupancy in the next 30 days and be fully operational by early 2007, providing 12 new service bays to double the repair capacity at New Haven. Initially, Metro-North will transfer existing employees to the new shop, but new hires for the shop will come on board in 2007.

A new 5-year operating agreement with Amtrak for Shore Line East has been reached, along with a long-term access agreement.

Dick Carpenter thanked the Department for the copy of the Northeast Rail Operations (NEROps) Study he received from Carmine Trotta.

Richard Sunderhauf mentioned that the next run bid is underway at Connecticut Transit. He wants to stay off Takott Mountain when the new routes are settled. Sunderhauf said a freak accident had killed a CT Transit bus driver on the I-Route in Stamford when a wheel came off a Toyota on I-95, hit the Jersey barrier, bounded over it and crashed through the bus window, striking the driver in the chest. Sunderhauf also related that buses were attacked in Hartford on Halloween, ranging from being pelted with eggs to having bus windows broken by rocks on Park Street.

Sunderhauf also reported that over-the-road bus services have been struggling with low ridership and substantial layoffs due to deregulation and lower air fares. One thousand Greyhound bus stops have been closed in the US in the last two years, with more in Canada. Another contributing factor has been the emergence of curbside bus operators such as Fung Wah and other Chinese carriers which provide no health insurance for drivers and sidestep many other laws and regulations. Tom Cheeseman commented that Middletown has lost most of its intercity bus service.

Rick Schreiner informed the Commission that HART would present its shuttle study in a couple of weeks, with one outcome of the study being a recommendation for a third Harlem Line shuttle from Southeast, NY to Danbury and New Fairfield.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Middletown Area Transit's new fareboxes were dedicated yesterday, which will allow seamless transfers with Connecticut Transit, DATTCO, and Northeast Transportation. However, two hours into the run, some problems were identified. Some information had not been programmed into the new fareboxes. The problem should be rectified in a few days with some software corrections.

OLD BUSINESS

Fred Riese reported on the two October public hearings in Litchfield and Danbury. The main item from the Litchfield hearing was the lack of progress with the new bus facility for the Northwest Connecticut Transit District. The well-attended Danbury hearing saw many calls for increased service on the Danbury Branch, with speakers asking for an extension of the service to New Milford and for more mid-day service during the current 4-hour service gap.

Mike Sanders gave an update on the NWCTD project. ConnDOT took over the bus facility project from the transit district after two feasibility studies for sites were not up to par. Money for the project is contained in the out-years of the Federal transportation bill. Realistically, it will be 4-5 years before the garage is a reality. ConnDOT doesn't have the matching funds available yet but will have them when the Federal money becomes available. Sanders foresees no problem with this project but cautioned that it just takes time.

NEW BUSINESS

Fred Riese reminded members of the annual work session in New Haven to discuss the recommendations for the Annual Report. The work session will be November 16 at 5 pm.

Mort Katz questioned Mike Sanders as to why the CPTC was not a member of the Transportation Strategy Board. Sanders explained that the TSB membership is defined by statute and is very specific.

Terry Hall said Amtrak is cutting two trains per day off the Springfield Line service in its latest time table due to the transfer of one trainset to be used on the Philadelphia-Harrisburg service. Southbound trains departing Springfield at 9:10 am and 12:40 pm will be cut, along with northbound departures from New Haven at 11:43 am and 2:50 pm. Amtrak revenues are running at 13.8% over budget projections. Ridership had dropped due to fare increases, but then rose again when gas prices went up.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:10 p.m.

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

MEETING ATTENDANCE

November 2, 2006

Department of Transportation Headquarters
2800 Berlin Turnpike, Conference Room B
Newington, Connecticut

VOTING MEMBERS

Linda Blair
Tom Cheeseman
Morton Katz
John Zelinsky
Yvonne Loteczka
Terry Hall
Richard Sunderhauf
Richard Schreiner
Richard Carpenter
Russ St. John
Kevin Maloney

GUESTS

Mario Marrero
Stephen Troster

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese

ConnDOT STAFF

Michael Sanders
Peter Richter
Dennis King