

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

THURSDAY, May 4, 2006 – 1:30 P.M.

CONNDOT HEADQUARTERS
BERLIN TURNPIKE, NEWINGTON

1. Approval of minutes of April 6, 2006
2. Featured Speaker: Douglas Holcomb, Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority
3. Comments from the public
4. Comments from operating entities
5. Chairman's report
6. Old Business
7. New business

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Thursday, April 6, 2006

Union Station, Fourth Floor Conference Room
New Haven, Connecticut

VOTING MEMBERS

Linda Blair
Tom Cheeseman
Morton Katz
William Kelaher
Yvonne Loteczka
Terry Hall
Richard Sunderhauf
Richard Schreiner
Dorothy Adamson
Russ St. John
Richard Carpenter
Kevin Maloney
Ralph Capenera

GUESTS

Heidi Green
David Bauer

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese

ConnDOT STAFF

Eugene Colonese
Peter Richter
Carmine Trotta
Dennis King

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Minutes of April 6, 2006

Union Station, New Haven
Fourth Floor Conference Room

Chairman Tom Cheeseman called the meeting to order at 1:33 pm. The minutes of the meeting of February 2, 2006 were approved as written. Due to the snowstorm of March 2, there was not a Commission meeting or minutes for March.

Featured Speaker

Heidi Green, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Connecticut, introduced the Commission to her organization, which was formed in early 2004 to promote smart growth principles through advocacy, education and litigation. 1000 Friends of Connecticut had its genesis in a number of factors including the Gallis Report, the work of the Regional Institute for the 21st Century, Connecticut's overdependence on automobiles, and the rapid rate at which the state is losing farmland. There are a number of 1000 Friends organizations promoting similar goals in other states.

The goal of 1000 Friends of Connecticut is to change "business as usual" at the state and local government levels. Since our tax structure drives development and land use policy, it needs to be reevaluated. 1000 Friends has organized a task force which includes the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, the business community, religious leaders, academia, and others to look for a new model for the state/local revenue structure. The task force hopes to have its report done in time for the new gubernatorial term. Three factors that need to be addressed are economic development, affordable housing and jobs. Green says her organization wants to see an increased focus on transit over highway development. 1000 Friends also supports context sensitive design, the Main Street USA concept, and more livable, walkable communities.

1000 Friends will meet with Governor Rell and her two challengers in the coming weeks to present its proposals. One of those challengers, New Haven Mayor John DeStefano, was formerly on the board of 1000 Friends but has left since declaring his candidacy for governor. Despite his past connections to it, 1000 Friends is not formally endorsing him or any of the gubernatorial candidates.

Green noted one proposal contained in Speaker Jim Amann's transportation package would create a Coordinator of Transportation and Growth to act as a bridge between ConnDOT, the Department Economic and Community Development, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Office of Policy and Management. The coordinator would be housed within OPM.

Green closed by noting that the board of directors of 1000 Friends is very broadly based, both politically and geographically. Commission member Ralph Capenera recommended to her that the task force report be released as soon as possible to make the document look less political in light of the upcoming election.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

ConnDOT's Peter Richter related that Shore Line East ridership is up 6% and New Haven Line ridership is up 2% on a year to date basis for the first two months of 2006. Car availability continues to improve on the New Haven Line. The 50th pair of M-2s is now undergoing rehab. The running repair shop, which will improve future car maintenance and availability, is progressing rapidly, with steel up, the foundation poured, and the roof on. It will open this fall. Looking further out, the request for proposals for the 342 new M-8 cars was released on January 19, with responses due back at the end of April. The first cars are scheduled to be delivered in 2008.

Richter also noted that the contract for the reconditioning of the Virginia Rail Express (VRE) cars has been awarded to Kawasaki. The first batch of 6 cars will be sent to the Kawasaki shop in Yonkers soon.

Lastly, Richter mentioned that Amtrak's contract to manage Shore Line East has been extended to June 2007.

Carmine Trotta of the Bureau of Policy and Planning related that the scope of services for the study of the Waterbury and New Canaan Branches of the New Haven Line was currently in development and near finalization. For the Danbury Branch, the scope for phase 2 of that study is currently under development. ConnDOT and DECD are coordinating on development of the Waterbury Intermodal Facility Study. Lastly, funding has been approved for the New Haven-Springfield rail service environmental study.

Bill Kelaher reported that Amtrak has released its list of 40 stations nationwide at which manned ticket offices will be closed. Regionally, Meriden and Worcester are on this list. Separately, Bill noted that the coalition representing 70% of Metro-North employees is still waiting to hear from the Federal Mediation Board on its request to be released from mediation. The mediation process has not gone anywhere. If released from mediation, the coalition can petition the Bush administration to go to arbitration.

Rich Sunderhauf report that the Star Shuttle in downtown Hartford carried 1,169 riders, 1,727 riders and 1,547 riders respectively on the weekend of February 17-19 when a fencing convention was held at the new convention center. Normally, the Star Shuttle does not run on Sundays, but an exception was made on this weekend. Unfortunately for these convention attendees, only 7% of downtown Hartford restaurants were open on that Sunday.

A sixty-foot articulated hybrid demonstrator bus was on the grounds of the Connecticut Transit Hartford Division that weekend. Sunderhauf mentioned it could see possible use on the New Britain Busway.

The Providence and Worcester's coal trains from Providence to Binghamton, NY are working well, according to Russ St. John of the P&W.

Rich Schreiner reported a busy spring at HART. Its section 13(b) application for service in seven towns was recently completed. HART also plans to begin service in two new towns. Half of HART's fixed route fleet and all of its paratransit fleet will be replaced by next year, with replacement of some of its paratransit vehicles occurring this year. Ridership on HART's Harlem Line shuttles continues to grow, with March 2006 over March 2005 increases of 32% on the Ridgefield-Katonah shuttle to over 3,000 rides, and 26% on the Danbury-Brewster shuttle to over 5,700 rides. One third of the Ridgefield-Katonah shuttle ridership is from New York residents, predominantly from Lewisboro, who drive to Ridgefield due to the availability of parking there.

In response to a question from Dick Carpenter concerning the Northeast Rail Operations Study (NEROPs), Carmine Trotta reported that there is a draft report but it is being rewritten completely after the last meeting in Worcester. There is no schedule for the release of the new version of the report. Answering other questions from Carpenter, Eugene Colonese, Director of the Office of Rail, affirmed that the New Haven Line electrical system has sufficient power available to operate the new M-8s, which will actually be 20% more efficient than the M-2s, and Peter Richter clarified that there is capacity on the Danbury Branch to run more trains in the peak direction but that centralized train control (CTC) is needed to add reverse direction trains.

Richter took this opportunity to formally introduce Eugene Colonese to the Commission. Colonese assumed the position of Director of the Office of Rails in January. Colonese then outlined that work on the New Haven Line's Norwalk and Saugatuck bridges will start next decade in coordination with the catenaries replacement on their segments of the line. These bridges may be rehabilitated or they may need to be rebuilt. Segment A of the catenaries replacement effort from the New York state line to Stamford has been completed. Segment D from Devon to New Haven is scheduled next, to be followed by the Stamford to Norwalk segment (B). Norwalk to Devon (Segment C) will occur last and be done in two separate projects.

Fred Riese expressed some concern about the statement made at the April 3 rest area and service plaza advisory committee meeting that the problem of insufficient truck parking capacity is "too big of a problem for this study". He felt that statement left the impression that the study will deal only with determining what

amenities should be offered at service plazas and rest areas, even though the truck parking deficiency was the major reason the study was undertaken. He also related that the inland barge service between New York City and Albany terminated in February when a subsidizing grant expired. The service was carrying 400 containers weekly when it ceased, but apparently was not economic at that level.

Chairman's Report

Tom Cheesemen happily noted that it looks as if ADA services will be funded at the 100% level in the next State budget. Previously, only the ADA services of the State-run systems were supported at that level, while the transit districts had to divide the remaining funding to cover their ADA systems. Also, by January 1, 2007, all transit districts must operate on ultra-low sulfur fuel. Connecticut Transit will administer the bids for the transit district consortium, but currently there is only one Connecticut distributor for this fuel.

Chairman Cheeseman then solicited volunteers to moderate the four spring public hearings. Linda Blair volunteered for the May 9 hearing in West Haven, Mort Katz will moderate May 23 in Newington, and Fred Riese will do so June 6 in Niantic and Rich Schreiner will be the emcee in Derby on June 20.

Old Business

Linda Blair attended a February 3 focus group meeting in New York City to evaluate accessibility features for the new M-8 commuter rail cars. Gene Colonese informed the Commission that there will be eight or nine focus groups to evaluate various aspects of the design on the new cars.

Fred Riese discussed the ConnDOT responses to three of the recommendations in the Commission's Annual Report. He was pleased to see a commitment and a definite schedule for the installation of CTC on the Danbury Branch (Rec. #12). ConnDOT set out a time line to advertise this project this summer and complete it by October 2008. Concerning recommendation #9 on rail station amenities and particularly on benches at rail stations, he noted that ConnDOT is currently developing a station standards manual which will address this issue. Regarding Connecticut's input into the deliberations over the structure of Amtrak (Rec. #2), he noted ConnDOT's response that they are engaged in the process, and asked if Peter Richter or Gene Colonese could elaborate on that point. Colonese mentioned that ConnDOT has on-going discussions with other Northeast Corridor states as to how to address the possible implications of Amtrak restructuring on the states.

New Business

Two new Commission members were recently appointed and began their service at this meeting. Ralph Capenera and Kevin Maloney introduced themselves and gave quick summaries of their interest and involvement in transportation.

Tom Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.

The next Commission meeting will be May 4, 2006 at ConnDOT headquarters in Newington at 1:30 pm.