

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION MEETING

June 1, 2006 - 1:30 PM

Union Station, Fourth Floor Conference Room
New Haven

1. Approval of the May 4, 2006 meeting minutes
2. Speaker: Robert Santy, President, Regional Growth Connection
3. Comments from the public
4. Comments from operating entities
5. Chairman's report
6. Old business
7. New business

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Minutes of May 4, 2006

ConnDOT Building, Conference Room B
2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Chairman Tom Cheeseman called the meeting to order at 1:32 pm. After some discussion about difficulties members were having in accessing the Commission's minutes through the ConnDOT website, the minutes of the meeting of April 6 were approved.

Featured Speaker

Douglas Holcomb, Director of Planning and Service Development for the Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority, briefly described his organization, then outlined several major new initiatives GBTA has undertaken recently. GBTA operates 17 fixed routes in four towns (Bridgeport, Fairfield, Trumbull and Stratford) as well as paratransit services. With its fleet of 56 buses, 24 vans and one trolley, it handles 4,600,000 boardings annually.

GBTA instituted a new *ziptrip* bus pass this past March. For the basic fare of \$1.50, a *ziptrip* pass provides unlimited rides for the next 90 minutes. An all-day version of the *ziptrip* pass is available for \$3.00. Similarly, 7-day and 31-day unlimited service *ziptrip* passes are available for \$15.00 and \$60.00, respectively. Seniors and disabled riders may purchase any of these *ziptrip* passes for half price. Lastly, a 31-day youth fare *ziptrip* is available for \$40.00 but is only valid on weekdays. Though the recent introduction of this new fare option allows only limited data so far, the April 2006 over April 2005 system ridership was up 11.5%, with revenue also increasing. MetroPool has done marketing to promote the *ziptrip* pass.

GBTA completed a study of its route system in 2004. A new route system design provides for a pulse system radiating from the new bus terminal. The route study also determined that the Stratford runs were under-utilized. Therefore, a flexible community route service has been initiated in Stratford. Under this system, buses can deviate in their routes to reach riders as long as several fixed points are served in each cycle of the route.

Ground has been broken for a new 10,000 square foot bus terminal for GBTA. The terminal will have 17 bays for GBTA and will also serve intercity carriers Peter Pan and Greyhound. The terminal will be finished in early 2007, with occupancy scheduled for April 2007. An adjacent parking garage, which is another element of the Bridgeport Intermodal Center, has already been completed.

Holcomb also related that GBTA will be installing a GPS-based advanced communications system for its fleet. Currently, proposals from three vendors are being evaluated. The system will provide real time information on the location of each vehicle in the fleet, updated every two minutes. Other initiatives underway include a new shelter

program, currently in the planning phase, and the standardization and marking of all 1,450 bus stops in the route system.

Holcomb concluded by noting that GBTA lacks a coordinated marketing program, but it is undertaking several new outreach initiatives. Its website has just been updated, it will be publishing electronic newsletters, and it is working with MetroPool to enhance publicity. It has also established a relationship with local radio station WICC to do publicity and 60-second interviews.

In response to a question from Yvonne concerning how useful the 90 minute *ziptrip* pass really is in terms of utility for multiple trips, Holcomb noted that data to date show 1.7 trips are being made per 90 minute *ziptrip* pass.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Michael Sanders, ConnDOT Administrator for Transit and Ridesharing, noted that the legislative session ended last night and the dust is still settling as to the specifics of what they did. Bus appropriations were increased by 17% in the new budget but this figure includes the \$3,500,000 of State funds for Jobs Access which replaces lost federal funding. Another \$3,500,000 in fuel cost adjustments was also added for transit. These funds will be available for other transit expenses should fuel costs decline. Sanders felt that the budget put both rail and bus operations in good shape for next year.

He noted that the \$2.3 billion transportation package favored transit improvements over highways. However, since the General Assembly adjourned before approving a State bonding package, the status of these new funds is unclear at the moment. The \$2.3 billion figure includes \$1.3 billion of federal funds now being committed to specific projects and \$1.0 billion of new State funds.

Sanders related that the SAFETY-LU transportation act incorporated the 'United We Ride' initiative to coordinate and consolidate the separate transportation programs within the federal government. All states will now be required to develop coordinated human services transportation plans in order to receive Jobs Access, New Freedoms, and Section 5310 elderly and handicapped transportation funds. Both statewide plans and individual plans for metropolitan areas must be developed. The list of eligible designated funding recipients has also been expanded in SAFETY-LU. The increased planning burden contrasts with a reduced amount of federal funding to be received, now \$1.1 million in the case of Connecticut for Jobs Access. In fact, in Connecticut, Jobs Access transportation will now be 87% State funded and only 13% federally funded. There will be less federal funding in all three programs together than was formerly received for Section 5310 and Jobs Access alone. Fortunately, the requirement for individual metropolitan area plans has been waived for 2006.

The new funding process is much more administratively burdensome. Metropolitan areas of over 200,000 population, which in Connecticut are Bridgeport/Stamford, Hartford and New Haven, receive their Jobs Access and New Freedom funds directly and are responsible for the development of their own coordinated plans. Meanwhile, the State is the designated planner for the small urban and rural areas. ConnDOT will propose to FTA that it (i.e. ConnDOT) develop the statewide plan including the three large urban plans. ConnDOT will be looking for a consensus among the planning agencies that this is how our process should occur. At this point, only three of the 62 federal transportation programs, namely Jobs Access, New Freedoms and Section 5310, are mandated for inclusion in the planning program. The New Freedoms program is designed to serve the needs of handicapped individuals which go beyond ADA services.

ConnDOT's Lisa Rivers mentioned that the department has received 133 applications from municipalities for State matching assistance for Dial-a-Ride services. The department has issued 132 preliminary approval letters, with Bridgeport being the one exception. Getting the agreements set by July 1 will be very tight, Rivers said.

Peter Richter informed the Commission that Amtrak's management agreement to run Shore Line East has been extended to run through June 2007. Shore Line East's access fees to use the Northeast Corridor will go up to \$30,000 per month. Richter also mentioned that the Virginia Rail Express cars have gone to Kawasaki's facility in Yonkers for reconditioning. In New Haven Line news, the New Haven Yard Phase I shop is now roofed and framed and on schedule for its opening this fall. The shop will contain two tracks and have capacity for six cars. The M-2 critical systems replacement program will reach 100 cars this week, approximately the halfway point. M-2 reliability has improved dramatically. The proposals for the new M-8 cars were received last Friday and are currently being reviewed by the department and Metro-North. Two proposals were received.

Richter noted that the Roadmap for Connecticut's Economic Future bond package contained a number of rail initiatives including the Springfield Line commuter rail service, the extension of Danbury Branch service to New Milford, the rehabilitation of passenger coaches for use on both Shore Line East and the Springfield Line, parking improvements on the New Haven Line and Shore Line East, a new New Haven Line station between New Haven and Milford, and an assessment of passenger rail service between Norwich and Worcester.

Carmine Trotta mentioned that the scopes of service for both Phase 2 of the Danbury Branch study and Phase 1 of the Waterbury and New Canaan Branches study will be finalized in the next two weeks. His office will be responsible for any studies of the Worcester rail service or for another initiative in the bond package, an assessment of Old Saybrook to Hartford commuter rail service. A scope of services is also being finalized for a Buckland area transportation study.

Russ St. John informed the Commission that progress is continuing on the reopening of the Providence and Worcester's Willimantic Branch.

Fred Riese, who represents the Department of Environmental Protection on the Waterbury and New Canaan Branches Study Advisory Committee, noted that the options being considered for the Waterbury Branch in that study include double tracking the line, installing passing sidings, new stations, track geometry improvements, partial electrification, a busway alongside the railroad, and express bus service on Route 8.

Rick Schriener of HART said his agency is working on an agreement with a church in Katonah for additional parking for the Ridgefield-Katonah shuttle, and is also beginning a study on Danbury-to-Bridgeport bus service.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Cheeseman introduced Robert Zarnetski who has just been appointed as a member of the Commission. He also expressed his opinion that transit made out very well in this legislative session.

Old Business

Linda Blair feels ConnDOT's response to recommendation #4 of the 2005 Annual Report missed that point of the recommendation. The layover of buses and vans at sidewalk curb cuts is not as much of a problem as the vehicles (mostly paratransit vehicles) parking at curb cuts to deploy lifts rather than stopping and deploying their lifts at other locations. Deploying at the curb cuts is not only unnecessary and blocks access to the curb cuts and often to corresponding crosswalks, but it is also counterproductive as the ramps are then deployed at steeper angles than if they were deployed onto a full curb as they are intended to be. Yvonne Loteczka confirmed that she has encountered the same situation.

New Business

Fred Riese reminded members of the two upcoming public hearings this month: Tuesday, May 9 at the West Haven Town Hall Senior Center and Tuesday, May 23 at the Senior and Disabled Center in Newington at 131 Cedar Street. Both hearings will start at 7:30 pm.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 2:53 p.m.

Note: To access the Commission's webpage, either go to www.google.com and type in Connecticut Public Transportation Commission, or go to www.ct.gov/dot, click on General Information, find the listing for Commissions and click on Public Transportation Commission.

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Thursday, May 4, 2006

Connecticut Department of Transportation
Newington, Connecticut

VOTING MEMBERS

Linda Blair
Tom Cheeseman
Robert Zarnetski
Yvonne Loteczka
Terry Hall
Richard Sunderhauf
Richard Schreiner
Dorothy Adamson
Russ St. John
Kevin Maloney

GUESTS

Stephen Troster
Alvin Douglas

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese

ConnDOT STAFF

Michael Sanders
Peter Richter
Carmine Trotta
Lisa Rivers
Dennis King
Sherry Osterlund