

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
MEETING

Thursday, June 2, 2005 - 1:30 PM

Union Station, Conference Room A  
New Haven, Connecticut

1. Approval of the May 5, 2005 meeting minutes
2. Featured speaker: TBD
3. Comments from the public
4. Report from operating entities
5. Chairman's report
6. Old business
7. New business

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

MEETING ATTENDANCE

THURSDAY, May 5, 2005

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room B  
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

VOTING MEMBERS

Linda Blair  
Tom Cheeseman  
Richard Carpenter  
Yvonne Loteczka  
Richard Schreiner  
Richard Sunderhauf  
Russ St. John

GUESTS

Tom Moritz, Amtrak  
Bradshaw Smith  
Carl Stephani  
Stephen Troster  
T. G. Dyar  
Randy James, Waterbury Repub.-Am.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese

ConnDOT STAFF

Michael Sanders  
Carmine Trotta  
Cindy Gollareny

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
Minutes of May 5, 2005

ConnDOT Building, Conference Room B  
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

The meeting was convened at 1:34 pm. The minutes of the meeting of April 7, 2005 were approved.

**Featured Speaker**

Chairman Cheeseman introduced the featured speaker, Tom Moritz, Senior Director for Commuter Operations at Amtrak. Mr. Moritz mentioned that Amtrak's contract with ConnDOT for the operation of Shore Line East is currently being updated. The existing contract dates from 1997. Amtrak is currently repricing access to its Northeast Corridor and renegotiating its contracts with states along the East Coast to reflect the new pricing policy. Costs in shared use areas are being pro-rated among Amtrak, commuter agencies and freight operators. These repricing efforts will represent significant increases in costs to state agencies such as ConnDOT, as Amtrak is now looking for states to make capital contributions to the Northeast Corridor.

Moritz noted that the current collection of state agreements for Northeast Corridor operations are a hodge-podge of politically negotiated agreements with no standardization to them. He also mentioned that the current contract for Shore Line East will be extended for another six months to December 31, 2005 while negotiations continue. He also informed the Commission that Amtrak will be spending \$450 million on the Connecticut segments of the Northeast Corridor and the Springfield Line in the next five years.

Other Northeast Corridor states are already making payments to Amtrak for capital maintenance and improvements. New Jersey contributes \$35-45 million per year, Delaware pays \$850,000, and Virginia Rail Express pays \$1.5 million in operating costs and a \$1 million capital contribution.

Dick Carpenter asked if Amtrak's payments to Connecticut for use of the New Haven Line match what it pays freight railroads for use of their lines. Moritz did not know the terms of the agreement for the New Haven Line. Rates paid to the freight railroads by Amtrak are set by Congress and are based on the incremental cost of Amtrak's usage. Amtrak's formula for state contributions for use of its lines is based on fully allocated costs, not incremental costs. This means that all of the costs of maintaining the line are apportioned among the users based on traffic volumes. Moritz pointed out that New Jersey and some other states have used Federal Transit Administration funding for part of their capital contributions to Amtrak.

In response to a question about whether Amtrak would consider selling the Springfield Line to Connecticut, Moritz said that Amtrak has never received an expression of interest from the State of Connecticut but would discuss such a possibility if approached.

Dick Carpenter asked Moritz if any elements of the Mid-Atlantic Rail Operations Study are underway to eliminate choke points along the Northeast Corridor. Moritz was not completely familiar with the study but said Amtrak had no extra funds available for this purpose. He noted the Shell Interlocking and Hell Gate Bridge projects, which are currently underway, will add rail capacity to the Corridor.

Moritz then gave a quick briefing on the status of Amtrak's FY '06 funding. The administration proposed \$0 for Amtrak for FY '06 but said it would agree to more funding if Amtrak agreed to make necessary reforms. The USDOT Inspector General found Amtrak would need \$1.4 – 1.5 billion to continue operations at existing levels. Amtrak wants \$1.8 billion to continue operations, but could get by on \$1.5 billion if its debt was restructured to allow Amtrak to borrow funds based on the Federal government's credit rating rather than its own. That change would allow Amtrak to borrow money at lower interest rates.

As to reforms that might be implemented at Amtrak, a *Strategic Reforms Initiatives* report has been prepared by Amtrak to accompany its funding request. Currently, no entity other than Amtrak has the guaranteed right to run over freight railroads. In the interest of creating an environment for competition, Amtrak supports legislation to remove its exclusive right to access the freight railroad lines. The *Initiatives* also call for the creation of a capital support program to the states for rail capital projects, set up along the lines of the highway and airport cost-sharing programs. Amtrak also supports the development of targets by which the quality of intercity train service would be measured. These targets could be based on ridership levels, on-time performance, financial performance or any other metrics thought to be appropriate. Congress could then set timetables for Amtrak to achieve these targets and could base future funding on Amtrak's success in achieving these targets.

Moritz responded in the affirmative to Dick Carpenter's question as to whether Amtrak feels it is important to maintain a national rail passenger network, but he acknowledged that intercity routes were major money losers. He pointed out that there has been interest on the part of states and regions in developing new passenger corridors. Amtrak would like to see further development of state-funded corridor services, with Amtrak as one bidder in a competition to operate such services.

Amtrak wants to see the Northeast Corridor return to a 'state of good repair'. Multi-party coordination will be needed to prioritize the actions necessary to do this and to allocate the costs of achieving this.

Chairman Cheeseman inquired with Moritz as to the impact of the loss of ACELA Express service due to brake problems last month, and if the June date for a return of this equipment was realistic. Moritz answered that ridership has fallen, but not dramatically. Since Metroliner equipment is being used in place of the ACELA Express trains, Amtrak is running about the same level of service but running times are longer, especially north of NYC, where 30 minutes are added to the travel time to Boston. Only 10 minutes are added on the NYC-DC runs. Moritz is still looking for an early summer date for a return to service of the ACELA Express equipment. This problem arose because there has been a greater level of wear and tear on the

brakes than originally expected. It has not yet been determined whether this is due to a design flaw or a manufacturing defect.

Moritz concluded by noting that Amtrak owns relatively little of the tracks it operates over. It owns the Northeast Corridor from Washington, DC. to New Rochelle and from New Haven to the Rhode Island-Massachusetts state line. It also owns the Springfield Line, the corridor from Philadelphia to Harrisburg, 29 miles of the Empire Corridor and 96 miles in Michigan.

#### **Reports from Operating Entities**

Mike Sanders had no news on the State budget. The budget version passed by the Appropriations Committee is \$400 million over the Governor's budget. State grants for municipal Dial-a-Ride services are still an open question. The rail side of ConnDOT is faring OK in the Governor's proposed budget but the bus side is not doing well.

Carmine Trotta of ConnDOT's Bureau of Policy and Planning noted that the Springfield Line Rail Commuter Implementation Plan is still under review and, in response to an earlier question, he noted that it is way too early to speculate who might operate such a service.

Fred Riese mentioned that the Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Agency in Massachusetts is already beginning a study into the feasibility of extending Springfield Line rail service northward through western Massachusetts and up to White River Junction, Vermont. He also mentioned that ConnDOT has begun environmental scoping for an impact study of the expansion of Interstate 84 from Waterbury to the New York state line and for new parking structures at the Stratford and Wilton rail stations.

Rich Schriener reported that funding had been found to continue the Jobs Access services of Job Links through mid-December. Job Links provides Jobs Access transportation in the Danbury, Waterbury and Torrington areas.

#### **Chairman's Report**

Tom Cheeseman reported that he had sent a letter to the Appropriations Committee expressing the Commission's support for funding to continue the Section 16 TSB projects. Sen. Toni Harp had responded saying she would try to find such funds, but making no commitments. He also had good news that ridership has been up substantially on the Middletown Transit route serving Aetna. He speculated that these increases could be due to the high cost of gas recently. Ridership is also up 40% on the Night Owl Jobs Access service since extra hours of service have been restored.

#### **New Business**

Fred Riese reminded members of the two upcoming public hearings this month: May 9 in Willimantic and May 16 in Wethersfield.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:47 p.m.