

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

AGENDA

Thursday, July 7, 2005 - 1:30 PM

Legislative Office Building, Hearing Room 1B  
Hartford, Connecticut

1. Approval of the June 2, 2005 meeting minutes
2. Featured speaker: Frank Rogers, Director of Marketing and Sales, Providence and Worcester Railroad Company
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, June 2, 2005

Union Station, Fourth Floor Conference Room  
New Haven, Connecticut

VOTING MEMBERS

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

GUESTS

Louis Mangini  
Brooke Hoberman

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese

ConnDOT STAFF

Michael Sanders  
J. Mark Foran  
Al Song  
Cindy Gollareny

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
Minutes of June 2, 2005

Union Station, Fourth Floor Conference Room  
New Haven

Chairman Cheeseman called the meeting to order at 1:30 PM. The minutes of the meeting of May 5, 2005 were approved.

**FEATURED SPEAKER**

Louis Mangini, Staff Assistant to Rep. Rosa DeLauro, briefed the Commission on the progress of efforts toward passing a new federal surface transportation act. The current House version would provide \$284 billion in funding over six years. The Senate bill would provide \$295 billion over the same timeframe. The House version would increase funding to Connecticut by 10% over current levels; the Senate bill would increase Connecticut's transportation funding by 15%. These increases are raw numbers not factoring inflation in. Therefore, over the six year timeframe of either bill, Connecticut's level of funding in real buying power could actually decrease in the out-years. Mangini pointed out that Senator Joseph Lieberman is on the conference committee that will reconcile the two bills. There is no timetable yet for this conference committee, but another extension of TEA-21 was passed recently for only one additional month, to the end of June, indicating the committee will be acting soon.

Mangini had not heard much lately on the topic of minimum guarantees for each state. That was a feature of previous bills and it could pop up again, to the detriment of states like Connecticut that receive more money from the Transportation Fund than they contribute. Mangini mentioned that the Administration had originally proposed a \$256 billion, 6-year spending plan but has now signaled that it can live with the House bill figure of \$284 billion. The best route for input from Connecticut into the transportation bill at this point is through Sen. Lieberman.

**COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Brooke Hoberman of Rideworks handed out a brochure on the NuRide program which is sponsored in Connecticut by ConnDOT and marketed in southern Connecticut by Rideworks. NuRide is a computerized ride matching system which awards points for participants based on the amount of miles rideshared. A Virginia company has developed the program. Work, medical, shopping or other trips are eligible to be matched. The points earned can be redeemed for gift certificates.

**REPORTS FROM OPERATING ENTITIES**

ConnDOT's Mike Sanders confessed to being 'fuzzy' on the details of the recent budget agreement between the Governor and legislative leadership. Based on information to date, the rail appropriation is in good shape but the bus side of the transit budget is \$2.0-2.5 million short.

The \$5,000,000 municipal grant program for Dial-a-Ride is still in the budget. This program was strongly backed by CACT and AARP. The budget will be adopted next week. A gross receipts tax on all petroleum products has replaced the Governor's proposed gas tax. In response to a question on the availability of residual funds from the snow removal budget, Mike said snow removal costs were \$6,000,000 over budget last winter. For planning purposes, the snow removal budget is based on the average of the last ten years snow removal expenditures.

Sanders also mentioned that the \$2.5 million hole in ConnDOT's bus operating budget is equivalent to the amount needed to continue the Transportation Strategy Board's Section 16 transit demonstration projects. Without extra funding, ConnDOT will have \$90,000,000 worth of services to fund on an \$87.5 million appropriation. The Section 16 projects will be thrown into the same pot as all other transit services and ranked by various productivity measures. Insurance costs are running a little bit below projections, which may produce a \$100,000 savings, but the rest of the costs to fund the Section 16 projects must be found elsewhere.

Bill Kelaher stated that there has been no progress in talks for a new contract for the Rail Labor Coalition, which includes unions representing 70% of the Metro-North employees. This has been the case for almost two years now. The Coalition asked the Federal Mediation Board to release it from mediation, in view of this lack of progress, so that it could pursue other options such as arbitration or a strike.

Kelaher also mentioned that some Metro-North ticket windows were being "blanked" or closed when there is no one to cover the absence of the scheduled ticket agent at that site. Darien's ticket window is now closed, despite this being the prime period for commuters to buy monthly passes. The ticket windows at the Tuckahoe and Pelham stations were closed down as of last month. The goal is to direct commuters to use the ticket vending machines, though Kelaher noted that group tickets cannot be purchased from the machines. This is a problem at this time of year with class trips and other group events into New York City. He also mentioned that, as of July 1, Amtrak will not offer food service on the Empire Corridor in New York. The food service will be replaced by vending machines. He cautioned that this could eventually happen in Connecticut too on the Northeast Corridor.

Asked about the return of the ACELA Express high speed trainsets, Kelaher said there was no clear date yet for their return. There has been a clear drop in ridership and revenue since the loss of these trainsets due to excessive brake wear. ACELA Express accounted for 40% of the service out of Stamford.

Regarding the labor contract negotiations, Kelaher said medical coverage plans are a big issue, as is the pension plan and the condition of the pension fund. Amtrak has also petitioned to be exempted from the Railway Labor Act and to be removed from the Railroad Retirement System. Kelaher believes that if Amtrak were to leave the Railroad Retirement System, the system would become insolvent.

ConnDOT's Mark Foran noted that the percentage of New Haven Line cars in the shop has fallen to 15% as of last week. This is good news and it shows that the M-2 rehab program and good weather are improving car availability. The cars in the worst condition were

rehabilitated first. Historically, 30% or more of the New Haven Line fleet has been out of service at any one time.

Russ St. John reported that relative quiet prevails at the Providence and Worcester. Selkirk, NY has become a significant choke point for traffic into and out of New England. This has made service delivery times unreliable. Russ hoped that CSX would get the Selkirk problems under control soon.

Rick Schreiner mentioned that HART was finishing up an operational analysis of its system and also practicing for the upcoming ROADEO and a potential HART sweep at that event.

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Tom Cheeseman just returned from the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) convention in St. Louis. USDOT Secretary Norman Mineta was the featured speaker. Mineta reaffirmed his agency's commitment to the United We Ride initiative to consolidate the 68 separate federal transportation programs. A full court press is now on to bring this goal to fruition.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Fred Riese gave a brief report on the Willimantic and Wethersfield public hearings and encouraged members to attend the upcoming Greenwich hearing on June 13.

Mort Katz mentioned that former commissioner Dudley Birmingham had passed away. Mr. Birmingham served on the Commission from 1988 to 1999.

Mort also had just returned from Europe and commented that the articulated trolleys he saw in Belgium worked very well. He also mentioned that the proposed Blueback Square development in West Hartford is not designed to accommodate transit vehicles. Mike Sanders replied that the Blueback Square situation is not that bleak for transit. Connecticut Transit will have access to all main roads used for their service and will have adequate areas to turn around. Connecticut Transit was not looking for a major bus terminal at Blueback Square. If the development does not see a need for transit to allow its shoppers to access the area, he is sure many employees at the development will arrive by bus. He said it was not appropriate to compare this situation to the Omni Hotel in New Haven.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:37 P.M.