

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION MEETING

August 2, 2007 - 1:30 PM

Housatonic Area Regional Transit
62 Federal Road, Danbury
Second Floor Conference Room

1. Approval of the July 12, 2007 meeting minutes
2. Featured Speaker: Eric Bergstraesser, Executive Director, Housatonic Area Reg. Transit
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 July 12, 2007

Legislative Office Building, Conference Room 1B
Hartford, Connecticut

Attendance: Members: Tom Cheeseman, Kevin Maloney, Morton Katz, Russell St. John, Terry Hall, Linda Blair, Richard Schreiner, Richard Carpenter, Richard Sunderhauf, John Zelinsky. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat, Fred Riese. **ConnDOT staff:** Albert Martin, Carmine Trotta, Eugene Colonese, Riccardo Almeida, Dennis King. **Guests:** Brooke Hoberman, Stephen Troster.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:30 pm and welcomed Mort Katz who made his return from his surgery in April. The minutes of the meeting of June 7 were approved with Linda Blair's correction that the Amtrak website had shown the last returning train from Boston at 1:40 pm, not 1:45 pm. Dick Carpenter noted that he still had not received a reply from ConnDOT as to the clearance requirements necessary to run well cars on the New Haven Line.

Featured Speaker

Carmine Trotta, Assistant Director of Intermodal Planning at ConnDOT, provided a summary of the myriad of studies and planning activities currently underway in the Office of Intermodal Planning. His list of projects in outline form is as follows:

- Danbury Branch Electrification Study: Phase I study of a long list of alternatives has been completed. Waiting for contract approval for Phase II to do a detailed examination of a short list of alternatives and develop a recommendation and environmental document.
- Waterbury and New Canaan Branch studies: Consultant has been selected. Waiting for contract approval, hopefully in a couple of weeks.
- Northeast Rail Operations Study (NEROps): Phase II to start soon. Phase I identified choke points and constraints. Phase II is expected to identify possible ways to address them.
- Eastern Connecticut Mobility Needs Study: ConnDOT plans to combine an overall mobility needs study and the New London-Norwich-Worcester passenger rail study. ConnDOT is seeking funding, but has not yet received it.
- Springfield Line Commuter Rail Plan: \$300 million capital cost and \$10 million annual operating cost. ConnDOT is negotiating with consultant for environmental process, which might start in early 2008.
- West Haven/ Orange Rail Station Study: EIE done and submitted to OPM late June. West Haven is identified as the preferred site.
- Study for Rail Access to Deep Water Ports: Draft report due this summer. Will examine Bridgeport, New Haven and New London. Funds are being sought to construct rail spurs off the Waterfront Street track at New Haven Harbor into industrial properties.

- State Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan: ConnDOT is in the process of updating the last version of the plan produced in 1999. A consultant has been selected and a study scope has been developed. In addition, Trotta noted that the University of Connecticut will be preparing a training curriculum for evaluating and designing bicycle facilities.
- Oxford Airport Noise Study: Currently underway. Alternatives include possible operational modifications such as changing flight patterns for take-offs and landings up to the purchase of approximately 70 homes impacted by airport noise.
- Danielson Airport Master Plan: Being updated. Needs and preliminary alternatives are being evaluated.
- Groton-New London Airport Master Plan Study: Just beginning. Currently in negotiations with the selected consultant.
- Robertson Airport (Plainville) and Simsbury Airport may be sold by their owners. The affected towns are doing studies concerning their future use. ConnDOT is assisting on these studies. Trotta noted that the loss of private airports puts more pressure on State airports.
- The City of Stamford is doing a high speed ferry study for service to New York City.

Highway-relates studies:

- Interstate 84/ Route 8 Interchange Alternatives Study: ConnDOT is in the last stages of this study but has been asked by the City of Waterbury to do an economic impact analysis of the alternatives being considered. ConnDOT staff will meet with the Department of Economic and Community Development tomorrow to get ideas on the scope and cost of this study.
- Buckland Area Transportation Study: To investigate alternatives to manage traffic congestion in the Buckland Hills Mall area of Manchester and South Windsor. Preliminary alternatives are being evaluated.
- Route 8 Corridor Study: For the segment from Beacon Falls to Waterbury. Is in consultant selection now.
- Arrogoni Bridge Study: Study is just getting underway. Twelve preliminary alternatives have been identified to be evaluated. The bridge is carrying traffic far in excess of its original design capacity.
- Rest Area and Service Plaza Study: Four public meetings to be held in August and September 2007 to present preliminary options for individual facilities.
- Interstate 84 Widening, Danbury to Waterbury: Work on an EIS to begin this fall to analyze addition of one new lane in each direction and alterations to most interchanges.
- Interstate 95 Widening, Branford to Rhode Island: The corridor study has been completed for several years but a detailed study and environmental document of the segment between the Gold Star and Baldwin Bridges is set to begin in spring of 2008.
- Route 11 EIS/EIE: Completed and currently in Washington for final review.
- Route 2/ 2A EIS/EIE: Final Record of Decision issued but ConnDOT is being asked to look at another alternative.

Two other study efforts mentioned by Trotta were the draft EA/EIE for the Waterbury Transportation Center being undertaken by the Dept. of Economic and Community Development, and a study of value pricing on highways for which ConnDOT applied to USDOT for funding but was not approved.

Lastly, Trotta reported that the Bureau of Policy and Planning has added a new Division of Asset Management and Performance Measures. Although currently staffed only by its Assistant Director, the division will ultimately have 9-11 employees.

Dick Carpenter questioned Trotta about the Northeast Rail Operations Study. Carpenter noted that an earlier version of the report contained a condition that if any study member objected to a Phase I alternative, it would not be advanced to Phase II. Dick wondered if this condition still held because it could unnecessarily limit the scope of the study. In reply to Carpenter's follow-up question about the installation of centralized traffic control on the Danbury Branch, Eugene Colonese, ConnDOT's Director of Rail Operations, said that ConnDOT is in final design for the CTC system and that its installation would not await completion of Phase II of the study.

Carpenter asked Colonese if ConnDOT has a position on connecting Grand Central Terminal and Penn Station. Colonese said that this idea has been kicking around for a long time but lately seems to be losing some momentum. Dick then noted that Governor Rell has expressed a desire to see Connecticut commuters have access from the New Haven Line to Penn Station. Colonese mentioned that ConnDOT is doing a study on this issue and the study will be submitted by August 1.

Dick's final question concerned the limitations to well cars and other freight equipment being able to pass New Rochelle Station following the interlocking reconfiguration and the installation of high level platforms there. Colonese indicated his understanding is that most freight equipment can still get by this point.

Terry Hall observed that the parking constraints at New Haven Station really limit the availability to use the trains to early AM or late PM hours. Most parking spaces at the station are filled by 8:00-8:30 AM and begin to free up in the mid-afternoon, about 3:00 PM. So from 8:30 AM to 3:00 PM, it is almost impossible to find an open parking space at the station garage or parking lot. With the surface parking lot at the Coliseum becoming available soon, this is an optimal time to extend the parking garage at the station. He would also like to see more opportunities for Intermodal trips, specifically bus to rail. Should the Danbury Branch Metro-North service be extended to New Milford, a bus service from Torrington to New Milford would provide a valuable Intermodal traveling opportunity. Tom Cheeseman noted a story he had seen on WFSB last night that said the surface parking lot at the New Haven Coliseum would be ready for use in September.

Comments from the public

None.

Comments from Operating Entities

Gene Colonese, ConnDOT's Director of Rail Operations, reported that Shore Line East ridership in May 2007 was up 2.2% over May 2006, and up 4.4% year-to-date. On time performance in May was 92.9%. For the New Haven Line, May ridership was up 4.1%, putting

year-to-date ridership 3.4% ahead of 2006. New Haven Line on-time performance in May was 96.4%. Intrastate New Haven Line ridership is up 8% in May 2007 relative to May 2006.

Riccardo Almeida of the Bureau of Public Transportation reported that bus ridership is up 4.5% statewide. The new Sunday service in Waterbury had 1,000 riders on the first Sunday it was implemented, getting it off to a very good start. In response to a question, he noted that the new bus stop signs in Waterbury will be going up soon.

In response to a question from Dick Carpenter about delays installing the fourth track at South Norwalk and Darien, Gene Colonese reported that the cause of the delay was the steel fabricators being behind schedule, not a shortage of steel. This affects the fourth track, which is out of service. It will be 2 to 3 years before all four tracks are in service.

Almeida reported, in response to a question about a new Torrington bus facility for the Northwestern Connecticut Transit District, that some funding is programmed in FY '08 for this project.

Kevin Maloney noted that 3-8% growth in ridership in the various rail services should be a good financial shot in the arm but wondered when ridership would run up against capacity constraints. Colonese said that capacity is not an issue. With the critical systems replacement (CSR) program on the M-2s and M-4s, the addition of the Virginia Rail Express cars into service and the new M-8s to begin arriving in 2009, we are in good shape with capacity.

Rich Sunderhauf reported that new operator run bids go into effect July 29 on Connecticut Transit.

Russ St. John of Providence and Worcester noted this morning's Hartford Courant article about the potential restoration of freight service on the Valley Line between Old Saybrook and Middletown. This would provide a very useful link in the rail network but Russ is unaware of any active effort to restore this link.

Richard Schreiner informed the Commission that HART is working with MetroPool and ConnDOT producing a video to educate existing and potential elderly riders as to how to use the transit system. Also, HART and the Norwalk Transit District met with the developers of the Georgetown wire mill complex to make sure the new train station there will be bus compatible.

Fred Riese reported that he is working on DEP's comments on two Shore Line East rail station projects to increase parking at the Branford and Madison stations. The Madison proposal includes a 585-space parking structure.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Cheeseman announced the fall public hearing dates and locations: Putnam on September 11, Bristol on September 24, Bridgeport on October 10 and Torrington on October 23.

The Community Transportation Association of America newsletter noted that the US House and Senate have passed appropriations for \$400 million for homeland security on public transportation. There is now a House/Senate conference committee to determine how that money is to be allocated.

Old Business

Rick Schreiner asked where the dust settled for the matching grant program with the State transportation bill. Tom Cheeseman said \$3.9 million was added to the municipal grant program to bring the FY '09 funding to the full \$5,000,000.

John Zelinsky mentioned that he had left Stamford for today's meeting at 11:50. He got to the meeting late due to tree cutting work on the Merritt Parkway. He also noted that he was present at the June 7 meeting but was left off the attendance list.

Linda Blair said Terry Hall had given her a tutorial on navigating the Amtrak web site but she still recommended consulting the written schedule because the web site information is not always accurate.

New Business

On June 28, Linda Blair participated in a focus group on train travel at the UCONN Center for Disability Studies.

Tom Cheeseman recommends that all transit operators develop a procedure for situations involving stranded wheelchair operators. He got a call from the Middletown Police Department recently of such an incident. He had a bus there in 10 minutes and got the rider and wheelchair home with police assistance. He feels the bureaucratic maze can often get in the way of common sense.

Mort Katz thanked Commission members for remembering him during his recovery. He has obtained a handicapped parking sticker which he has found to be very useful. He noted the helpfulness of people including one incident where a Transportation Security Administration staff member in Pennsylvania even gave him assistance getting his sneaker on.

Fred Riese mentioned that Dennis King had forwarded him an article about Kennedy Airport in New York offering a cell phone parking lot for people picking up arriving passengers. This is another example of the type of facility the Commission recommended for Bradley Field in its 2006 Annual Report.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 2.59 p.m.