

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

AGENDA

Thursday, September 1, 2005 - 1:30 PM

Legislative Office Building, Hearing Room 1B  
Hartford

1. Approval of the August 4, 2005 meeting minutes
2. Featured speaker: Jim Cameron, Vice Chairman, CT Rail Commuter Council
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, August 4, 2005

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room B  
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

VOTING MEMBERS

Linda Blair  
Tom Cheeseman  
Terry Hall  
Yvonne Loteczka  
Richard Sunderhauf  
Russ St. John  
William Kelaher  
Morton Katz

GUESTS

Mario Marrero  
Stephen Troster  
Mike Cross  
Leo Petri  
Ann Katis

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese  
Phil Smith

ConnDOT STAFF

H. James Boice  
Michael Sanders  
Cindy Gollareny  
Peter Richther  
Charles Barone  
Mark Foran  
Len Lapsis

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
Minutes of August 4, 2005

ConnDOT Building, Conference Room B  
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Chairman Cheeseman called the meeting to order at 1:32 pm. The minutes of the meeting of July 7, 2005 were approved with one abstention. Tom announced that Jim Cameron of the Metro-North Rail Commuter Council, who was originally scheduled to be the speaker for today's meeting, would speak at the September meeting.

**FEATURED SPEAKER**

Mario Marrero, Senior Transportation Planner with the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), provided an update on the Job Access transportation program in the North Central Region. Ridership on Job Access services is averaging 2,800 to 3,000 clients per day. At the insistence of the Department of Social Services (DSS), who is one of the principal funding sources for these services, CRCOG had to survey the ridership on the Job Access routes to see if the riders the services were carrying were TANF recipients or TANF eligible. (TANF is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.) This survey was performed in April. Preliminary results of the survey show that 58% of the riders carried are TANF eligible, while 80% meet FTA eligibility guidelines for Job Access services. Since Connecticut Transit routes are open to the public, it is not possible to control who uses these services. However, the survey indicates that 77% of the riders on the Job Access-funded Connecticut Transit routes are TANF or FTA eligible, 90% of the riders on the Rideshare Company Job Access services are program eligible, and 100% of the Greater Hartford Transit District Job Access riders meet program eligibility guidelines, as do 88% of the riders on the Arrow Bus services Job Access routes.

Marrero announced that ConnDOT has approved funding for a 2-month trial of the Downtown Circulator services. The route will include service to Adriaen's Landing and the convention center. The buses for the service will come from the Stamford Division of Connecticut Transit. Rich Sunderhauf mentioned that El Dorado buses will be used for this service. These buses will be wrapped with distinctive markings and logos.

Marrero also reported that six new bus shelters are being installed in Windsor. Other recent bus shelter installations have been in East Hartford (7 shelters), West Hartford (8), and Farmington (4). Also, long term funding has been secured to operate the Job Access buses serving the casinos. This will put these services on a secure footing for at least the next couple of years.

Lastly, Marrero noted that Job Access ridership for the North Central Region has reached a plateau and been stable the last couple of years, after previous steady increases. Funding for these services has been stable or slightly declining, which limits the amount of service that can be offered, and thus constrains further ridership gains.

Mike Cross, Director of Job Access Transportation for the Regional Growth Connection, which operates in the South Central Region, noted that the DSS funding restrictions constrain the services that can be operated. Cross mentioned Connecticut Transit route enhancements and the Shoreline Shuttle from New Haven to Old Saybrook as the Job Access services operated in his region. Individual transit districts also receive funding for Job Access services. He mentioned that the services run by the Meriden Transit District were recently terminated after ridership dropped to very low levels.

In response to a couple of follow-up questions about the fares and marketing for the Downtown Circulator, Mike Sanders mentioned that the service will be free during the demonstration period. If the service is extended beyond that, the fare issue will be revisited. Publicity and marketing will include the bus wraps to make the service very visible in the public eye, marked bus stops, publicity to hotels and tourist destinations, and some degree of public outreach effort.

### **COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

### **REPORTS FROM OPERATING ENTITIES**

Mike Sanders said the final state budget contained no surprises for transit. Rail and bus services received what they expected, which will put them in good shape to continue existing services. Fuel costs are the big wild card in the budget. Amtrak's new trackage fee rates will also have an impact on Shore Line East.

Charles Barone of ConnDOT said the new federal transportation bill was signed into law on July 29. The bill provides \$286 billion in transportation funds over the next five years, including \$52.6 billion for transit, which represents a 46% increase over TEA-21 levels. Connecticut made out better than expected in the new bill, with \$676 million in funding over the five years, which is a 33% increase.

The new federal bill is called the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act- A Legacy for Users, or SAFETEA-LU. It contains several new programs including a Growing States Program, a High Density States Program which distributes funds to urban areas of states with population densities of 370 persons per square mile or greater (including Connecticut), a Small Starts Program which is a version of the New Starts Program for transit projects under \$75 million, a New Freedom Program to fund disabled transit services which go beyond the requirements of ADA, and a program for public transportation within the National Parks. Barone said Connecticut is slated to receive a 19% increase in funding on the highway side.

Mike Sanders updated the Commission on the New Britain Busway. For design contract purposes, the busway has been broken up into five separate projects. Design contracts are expected to be awarded in September or October. The tentative opening date for the busway is

July 2011. Sanders also mentioned that the purchase order has been written for new coaches for the Hartford Division of Connecticut Transit, and the buses are currently waiting in a parking lot, so we should see them soon.

Peter Richter detailed the status of the rail car purchase and maintenance facility timetable. Gov. Rell has signed the funding authorization for these projects, which totals \$967,000,000. The target date for the delivery of the first of the 342 new M-8 railcars, as well as for the opening of the new maintenance facility, is 2008. The first \$26,000,000 of this funding was made available last week. The Request for Qualifications for the M-8 procurement went out last week, with September 6 as the response date. The Request for Proposals for the maintenance facility will go out August 12. The campus of maintenance facilities will include separate shops for periodic inspections, wheel truing, painting, and heavy repairs, as well as the track layout.

In other rolling stock news, the rehabilitated M-2 cars are operating at higher than expected levels of reliability. The worst of the M-2s were scheduled for rehab work first to get the biggest improvements in reliability. Richter also reported that two of the eight P-40 locomotives purchased from Amtrak are now in operation. Also, Phase 1 of the running repair facility in New Haven was awarded on July 13. This facility is expected to be up and running this December.

Lastly, Richter mentioned that Amtrak's contract to operate Shore Line East has been extended to December 31, 2005, and Amtrak's ACELA Express service resumed on July 11.

Bill Kelaher reported there has been very little change in the contract negotiations between the coalition of unions and Metro-North. The previous contract expired almost three years ago. The unions are waiting for the Mediation Board to get the talks up and running. Kelaher said there has been increased security on the trains since the London subway bombings. He believes the closing of two New York ticket stations and the blanking of other ticket windows in New York and Connecticut when personnel are out compromises security as it removes another set of human eyes and ears to observe boarding customers.

Russ St. John said things are going well at the Providence and Worcester. The entire railroad industry is booming right now causing choke points, equipment shortages and crew shortages, as detailed by Frank Rogers last meeting.

Fred Riese read from an e-mail from Dick Carpenter regarding the July 26 Northeast Rail Operations Study meeting at ConnDOT. Dick mentioned that P&W was the only freight railroad present at the meeting. There was very little discussion of the truck problem on Interstate 95 or of cross-Hudson issues. Most of the emphasis was on north-south traffic between Canada and New England. Dick felt that the existing constraints to rail operations in New England, particularly in southern New England, are being too readily accepted by the study. Bureau Chief James Boice of Policy and Planning counseled against getting discouraged at this point as the study is still in its infancy. He mentioned a creative measure being explored in Delaware to provide 'tolled' use of a Norfolk Southern line by other railroads.

Fred also reported on the initial meeting of the Rest Area and Service Plaza Study at ConnDOT on July 25. This 18-month study will develop a master plan for the rest areas and service plazas along Connecticut's limited access highways, including possible expansions at some facilities, closure of others, consideration of up to seven additional sites, amenities to be offered at these areas, and opportunities to address the shortfall in overnight capacity for trucks.

Fred further mentioned that he had just returned from New Mexico and he was impressed by the volume of rail traffic on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line running through Grants, New Mexico. Every 15-20 minutes a freight train of 110-130 cars, mostly double stack containers, would pass. Each of these trains represented over 200 trucks worth of cargo.

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Sen. Joe Lieberman was in Middletown yesterday to announce a SAFETY-LU project there, a new \$18.5 million parking garage, half of the cost of which goes to a new intermodal center, Tom Cheeseman reported.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Fred Riese said longtime Commission meeting attendee Dick Whittier passed away last month. He was a dedicated advocate for passenger rail service between Waterbury and Hartford. Fred also announced the fall public hearing sites would be New Haven, New Britain, Norwich, Winsted and Fairfield.

Mort Katz reported that he has switched from Amtrak to Southwest Airlines for his frequent trips to Philadelphia, citing savings in both cost and time.

Yvonne Loteczka had seen a article about paying parking meters remotely by cell phone and credit card. Denver and Seattle are testing these systems which can be handy if you are tied up longer than expected at a meeting, to use one example.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 2:36 p.m.