

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of August 4, 2011

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room B
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Mort Katz, Ed McAnaney, Chris Adams, Yvonne Loteczka, Paul Chenard (for Rick Schreiner), Dick Carpenter, Russ St. John, Robert Rodman, Alan Sylvestre, John Zelinsky. **Ex-officio members:** David LeVasseur (OPM) Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** James Peay, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Charles Hunter, Jan Lindberg, Stephen Troster.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:40 pm. The minutes of the meeting of July 14 were approved as written.

Featured Speaker

Charles Hunter, Assistant Vice President for Governmental Relations at RailAmerica, discussed the structure of RailAmerica and the current business and future outlook of its Connecticut operations, the Connecticut Southern Railroad (CSO) and the New England Central Railroad (NECR).

RailAmerica operates 43 short line and regional railroads across the US and Canada totaling about 7,000 miles of track. Taken together, these 43 railroads would constitute a Class I railroad. RailAmerica is headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. Mr. Hunter works out of the St. Albans, VT office which is responsible for 10 railroads in the US and Canada.

Connecticut Southern Railroad operates 78 miles of track in Connecticut. Most of the traffic it carries is subject to a \$1.00 per car-mile trackage fee by Amtrak for use of the latter's Springfield Line. CSO has 55 freight customers with levels of rail usage from 10 cars per year to thousands of cars per year. CSO had a better year in 2010 than in 2009 but traffic is still down from 2008 levels. CSO began operations in Connecticut in 1998.

One significant issue facing the CSO is that it cannot receive and handle 286,000 # cars, which is the new standard for the rail industry. Access to CSO lines is limited to 263,000# cars. Most lines in Massachusetts and New York can handle 286,000# cars so Connecticut is at a disadvantage which has cost the railroad some customers and the state some businesses. Hunter equated a 286,000 # car to 4 tractor trailer truckloads while a 263,000 # car equates to roughly 3 ½ truckloads.

Hunter related that CSO owns and operates over the Connecticut River bridge which needs a lot of structural repairs. A Bond Commission approval last Friday will provide \$3,000,000 to fund repairs and upgrades to the bridge, but those repairs will not get the bridge up to the 286,000 # standard. Major customers for the CSO include Murphy Road Recycling, Cytex Industries, Hudson-Baylor Recycling and the Central Connecticut Cooperative. Hunter

mentioned two new customers expected to be served later this year are CWPM in Berlin, a construction waste firm, and Nicoloc Pavers in North Haven.

The NECR operates 320 miles from the Canada to New London. The NECR was formerly the Central Vermont Railroad and constitutes a north-south spine through New England that provides connections to several Class I carriers and short lines. The NECR has interchanges with the Canadian National, the Canadian Pacific, CSXT and Norfolk Southern. In Connecticut, NECR serves 12 rail customers and carried 9,758 carloads in 2010. Moving cars for the Providence and Worcester (P&W) through its Willimantic connection constitutes one of NECR's biggest markets. Over 7,000 cars will go through the Willimantic interchange this year. Autoracks, road salt and ethanol are the largest volume cargoes on the NECR. NECR lost the Cargill feed facility in Yantic, an important customer, in 2009.

Hunter said the NECR constitutes a high clearance route into Connecticut. The railroad has worked with the states of Vermont and Rhode Island and with the P&W to get higher clearance routes. The Bellows Falls rail tunnel in Vermont was improved as part of this effort by lowering the floor of the tunnel. Hunter noted that the NECR got \$55,000,000 in high speed rail grants under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act which, along with \$19,000,000 in matching funds, will be used to improve the line. This work will begin in October 2011 and should be finished in September of 2012 and will include the installation of 140,000 ties and 140 miles of 115# continuously-welded rail which will bring the line up to 286,000# capacity.

The NECR does much business with the P&W including moving ethanol cars headed to Providence. Other significant customers include Freeport McMoran, Koffkoff Egg Farms, Headwater Resources, Logistic at the Port of New London, and C. C. Lounsbury of South Windsor which handles lumber and utility poles.

Hunter noted the declining role of trailer-on-flatcar (TOFC) service. More freight is going to container-on-flatcar service (COFC) due to its greater flexibility as the containers can move by train, truck, or ship and can be double stacked.

New projects being pursued by the NECR include a new siding to an aggregate customer in Bozrah, possible passenger service to the Mohegan Sun casino and better port/ rail connections at New London.

Hunter said there are no intermodal ramps in Connecticut, partly because there are intermodal ramps in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey. NECR is working with P&W to improve COFC service. NECR, through P&W, uses an intermodal facility in Worcester. CSX has its own intermodal yard in Worcester, which is a competing facility to P&W's, to it is difficult for NECR to work with CSX on intermodal moves.

Hunter also noted that other East Coast ports, specifically in Virginia and North Carolina, are gearing up for more shipping from the Pacific due to the capacity improvements at the Panama Canal.

Switching gears to passenger service, Hunter discussed the Central Corridor Project, a passenger rail initiative that would use the NECR's track. Several universities, including UConn, UMass, the Coast Guard Academy, Eastern Connecticut State University and Amherst College, are located on or near the NECR line so this project has a potential market in college students as well as other passengers. The Mohegan Sun casino has also expressed an interest in this service. The route would connect to Amtrak at Palmer, Massachusetts and at New London. NECR would be interested in operating the passenger service and has identified self-propelled diesel passenger cars it would use on the line.

Hunter said the NECR has no paper barriers preventing interchanges with other carriers so it can make full use of all its connections. NECR interchanges with Pan Am Southern at Millers Falls, Mass. which gives it access to the Norfolk Southern. It also possesses the only double stack clearance route into Connecticut, down the NECR to Willimantic. Double stack clearance is then available over the Versailles Line and then as far north as Putnam. Unlike the NECR, the CSO can only interchange freight with the CSX, except for occasional waivers for specific shipments.

In response to a question on the impact of high speed rail service upon freight movements, Hunter said by law such new services are not allowed to disrupt existing freight service. NECR, and more importantly CSO, have legal rights to use their lines and move their freight.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Russ St. John expressed his appreciation of Mr. Hunter's presentation and noted that the P&W and NECR work very closely.

Richard Sunderhauf reported on the results of the ROADEO competition held on June 12th. A CT Transit Hartford Division driver took first place in the 40-foot bus competition, while a HART driver took 1st in the 35-foot bus division. The body-on-chassis division was won by a Greater Hartford Transit District driver.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney delivered the news that CPTC liaison Dennis King has received a layoff notice and he asked for the Commission's approval to write a letter on behalf of Dennis asking for reconsideration of this decision. This approval was granted. Kevin expressed that if Dennis is laid off that would be a huge loss to the Commission.

Old Business

Dick Carpenter brought up the July 22 incident on a Metro-North New Haven Line train which was disabled in Westport by catenary problems. Passengers were subject to long delays on the train with no air conditioning and no ability for passengers to leave the cars. In addition, windows on the train did not open, resulting in hot temperatures and no ventilation. John Zelinsky mentioned that there will be an investigation into this issue.

Chairman Maloney also mentioned that he would look into the possibility of arranging for an inspection of the new M-8 cars when the Commission next meets in New Haven for its October meeting.

Assignment of Moderators for Fall Public Hearings

Moderators were assigned for the four fall public hearings as follows. Mort Katz will moderate the September 27 hearing in Torrington. Fred Riese will preside in Westport on October 12. The Wilton hearing on October 18 will be chaired by Rich Schreiner. Lastly, Chairman Maloney will moderate the Plainville hearing on October 24. As has been recent practice, each moderator will be responsible for press releases and other publicity for his hearing.

New Business

Russ St. John mentioned that Mega Bus is expanding its service from Hartford to New York City and Boston with hourly departures for much of the day. Fares to New York are \$28.00 one way and \$52 round trip. Kevin noted that intercity bus service is experiencing a big resurgence nationally.

A short discussion concerning moving the starting time for the Commission's November 17 annual work session in New Haven from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm was the final item of business. It was ultimately decided that such a change would result in an unacceptably late termination of the session, which typically ends around 9:00 under current conditions. Therefore, the starting time for the work session will remain at 5:00 pm.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:06 pm.