

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of April 3, 2014

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room A
2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Attendance: Members: Richard Schreiner, Richard Sunderhauf, Russ. St. John, Robert Rodman, Yvonne Loteczka, Mort Katz, Bill Kelaher, Alan Sylvestre, Nicholas Lownes, Ed McAnaney, Chris Adams.. **Ex-officio members:** Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Kay Carson, Russell McDermott, Danielle Herbert.

Vice chairman Rick Schreiner opened the meeting at 1:34 pm. The minutes of the meeting of March 6 were accepted as written.

Rick then welcomed Dr. Nicholas Lownes to the Commission. Dr. Lownes was appointed by Senate Pro Tempore Don Williams on March 26th. Rick asked Dr. Lownes to say a few words about his background and his work. Lownes has been an Associate Professor at UConn for seven years, working in the School of Engineering. He is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and did his graduate work at Iowa State University. Transportation, particularly transit, has driven his research since he was a student and continues to be his focus now at UConn

Featured Speaker

Kay Carson, Project Manager for CT Rides, and Russell McDermott, Outreach Coordinator at that organization, explained that CT Rides is a travel options program designed to help reduce roadway congestion by advising commuters and other travelers of travel options other than single occupant vehicles. Carson said there are approximately 1.7 million workers in Connecticut and 79% of them, or 1.34 million, drive alone to work. This is slightly above the national average of 76% of workers commuting to jobs in single occupant vehicles. The average work commute in Connecticut is 24.8 miles, compared to 25.4 miles nationally. Ninety-four percent of Connecticut workers work in-state.

CT Rides Week is coming up next month. This provides not only an opportunity to promote ridesharing and transit to additional commuters but also a time to acknowledge those who are currently using transit, vanpooling, carpooling bicycling or walking to work.

Carson notes that CT Rides provides information on carpools and vanpools, buses and trains, as well as walking and biking. Work is on-going to make the CT Rides website more friendly for mobile devices.

Most outreach is done through the workplace. Since October 2011, over 2,600 meetings have been conducted at worksites. CT Rides distinguishes between various levels of transit and ridesharing support offered by individual employers with Gold level, Silver level and Bronze level designations based on the range of services available at different worksites.

Carson said CT Rides has a staff of six outreach coordinators through whom it offers its services, be it at employment sites, commuter events, or one-on-one interactions by phone, e-mail or texting.

“Sitting in traffic is so 2013” is a slogan that CT Rides is currently using to promote telecommuting options. Every telecommuting employee represents a trip not made. Technology has made it much easier now for companies to implement telecommuting programs. Many companies set a target of 20% of their employees telecommuting. These workers can continue to work even during storm events or power outages.

CT Rides responds to over 1,100 inquiries per month via e-mail, phone or on-line chats. Many of these inquiries result in devising a personal commuting plan for the caller.

CT Rides works with the NuRide rewards program. NuRide began operations in Connecticut in 2005. This program sets up rewards for shared rides and telecommuting. Points toward prizes are earned for each transit or telecommute trip taken. Over 21,000 people are registered with NuRide in Connecticut.

Another promotional program overseen by CT Rides offers 10-ride free trips for bus and vanpool trips for new riders. About ten people per month take advantage of this program, with most of these continuing transit use or ridesharing after the 10 free trips are taken.

CT Rides also oversees the Guaranteed Ride Home program which allows transit users, vanpoolers and carpoolers up to four free taxi trips per year when personal or family emergencies necessitate that a commuter cannot wait for his or her normal ride home. Experience has shown that about 45 people per month use the Guaranteed Ride Home provision.

A final service that Carson mentioned as provided by CT Rides is to assist in marketing for Shore Line East. CT Rides provides Shore Line East service alerts through Facebook, Twitter and text messages to riders, as well as advising riders with announcements about service improvements to Shore Line East. Shore Line East provides 55,000 rides per month. CT Rides has helped promote the expanded service to New London and the Shore Line East weekend service.

CT Rides can be reached by phone at 1-877-CT Rides or by e-mail at info@ctrides.com

In response to a question as to whether CT Rides only assists with work trip planning or if it also coordinates transportation for non-employment trips, Carson said that the latter is the case. Though certainly the bulk of the outreach and inquiries concern work trips, assistance is provided to make other kinds of trips also.

Comments from the Public

None.

Comments from Operating Entities

Rick Schreiner noted that a proposed cut of approximately \$1,000,000 in TEIP funds from DSS was not restored by the General Assembly's Appropriations Committee. A cut of this magnitude is going to have significant ramifications to the Job Access and Reverse Commute program with service cuts likely going into effect on July 1st.

Rich Sunderhauf mentioned that CT Transit's new computerized inventory system AssetWorks is getting great reviews.

Fred Riese attended a Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) meeting March 24 at the Lyceum in Hartford. The meeting provided an update on FRA's NEC Future study to identify priority investment needs and a vision for Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. The study will result in a Tier I environmental impact statement (EIS) covering the entire corridor. The current 15 preliminary alternatives will be narrowed to 3-5 alternatives for detailed evaluation in the EIS. The selection of the final alternatives will be announced this fall.

Fred also mentioned that scoping comments for a potential EIS on the new Waterbury area bus storage and maintenance facility for North East Transportation are due April 18. This project, proposed for the site of the former Watertown Drive-in Theatre between Route 8 and the Naugatuck River in Watertown, would meet a need long identified by the Commission.

Bill Kelaher said there has been no real progress concerning a new labor contract for workers on the Long Island Railroad and there is a potential strike looming when the current contract expires in July. Last month, the company requested a second Emergency Board to facilitate a solution. July 19 is the contract expiration date. A strike on the LIRR could impact Amtrak service in New York City as well.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney offered his apologies for again not being able to chair today's meeting. He is attending the Air and Expedited Motor Carrier annual conference in Orlando, Florida.

Chairman Maloney recalled that an individual who was denied access to the DOT building in August of last year because he refused to provide identification filed a complaint with the Freedom of Information Commission, and a hearing on the matter was scheduled in Hartford on the exact date and time of our March meeting. As Kevin was named in the complaint as Chairman, he was obligated to attend; however, the complainant failed to show up for the hearing and, to the best of Kevin's knowledge, the matter was dismissed.

ConnDOT announced that, while it does not yet possess the funds for construction, it does have the funds in place for the design of and the environmental study for the relocation of the Windsor Locks train station back to its original downtown location. The project is expected to include the restoration of the old train station, two five hundred foot platforms joined by a pedestrian overpass and numerous traffic control and parking improvements.

ConnDOT also announced that, while the New Haven and Springfield commuter line is still on track (this sounds like a Tom Cheeseman line) to be completed in 2016, no operator has been selected as of yet.

Lastly, Kevin welcomed Doctor Nicholas Lownes to the Commission. Doctor Lownes was appointed by Senator Williams and Kevin hoped his welcoming letter reached Doctor Lownes in time to make him aware of today's meeting. If you're in the room Doctor, it's good to have you aboard and I look forward to meeting you in May.

Old Business

Fred Riese mentioned that the derelict SNET Building which sat in the parking lot of the Waterbury train station has been demolished. Beside taking up valuable space, this structure blocked the main station parking area from view from Meadow Street, compromising safety and security for travelers at the station. Ultimately, additional parking will be added along with other improvements such as a bus pull-off lane, an indoor waiting area and rest rooms.

Fred also mentioned that work is progressing on the new bus storage and maintenance facility for the Windham Region Transit District, which is another project long advocated by the Commission. This new facility will replace the outdoor vehicle storage lot currently used by the District.

Spring Public Hearings

Rick Schreiner announced the Commission's spring public hearing schedule, which is:

- May 6, Tuesday: New Haven at the Hall of Records, 200 Orange Street
- May 13, Tuesday: Stamford at Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard
- June 2, Monday: Danbury, Danbury City Hall, 155 Deer Hill Avenue.

All hearings begin at 7:30 pm.

New Business

Fred reported that Colin Pease of the Housatonic Railroad will be the featured speaker at the Commission's May 1 meeting at Union Station in New Haven.

Vice chairman Schreiner adjourned the meeting at 2:40 pm.