

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of December 4, 2008

Fourth Floor Conference Room
Union Station, New Haven

Attendance: Members: Tom Cheeseman, Mort Katz, Russ St. John, Terry Hall, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Chris Adams, Alan Sylvestre, Bill Kelaher, Richard Carpenter. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Leo Petry.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:32 PM. Tom announced that today's scheduled speaker, Michael Krauss, had phoned Tom earlier this afternoon to say that he would be unable to make today's meeting. Following this, the minutes of the meeting of November 6 were approved as written.

Tom mentioned that all Jobs Access and Reverse Commute transportation providers have been asked to submit 5% recession package cuts. For Tom's system, Middletown Area Transit, this may force him to cut the return trip on the Night Owl run, which will mean that he can get workers to their jobs but not home. The Night Owl service provides 31,000 – 33,000 trips per year. Tom's other Jobs Access service, the M Link, which connects Middletown and Meriden, provides 36,000 trips per year. His Jobs Access ridership has been growing at 3% per month. Also, the Department of Social Services may not have their Jobs Access contracts ready by December 31, which means providers will receive no money until after the new year begins. Some providers will need to borrow money to cover this interval.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Rick Schreiner said the impacts to Housatonic Area Regional Transit's Jobs Access program from the 5% recession are not clear yet. No decisions have been made.

Tom noted that these cuts impact people who have successfully transitioned from welfare to employment. If the transportation services they depend on are cut, they will not be able to continue in their jobs.

Alan Sylvestre mentioned that in the Hartford area, these cuts will affect two runs on the Hartford Cross-town route. The effect of this is that what has been a single seat trip requiring 30 minutes will now become a 2-seat trip requiring 60-90 minutes. Under these conditions, he doubted that many workers would continue to use the service and continue in their jobs.

Leo Petry of Rideworks informed the Commission of changes in the R Link operated by the Greater New Haven Transit District. This route has been extended to serve as a feeder route from North Branford to the Branford Shore Line East rail station. The route, which formerly terminated in downtown Branford, will meet almost all of the morning and evening Shore Line East trains. Riders may purchase a monthly pass for \$27 or pay for individual rides. The route will also intersect with DATTCO service at the Branford Green.

Richard Sunderhauf mentioned that there will be a public hearing on the New Britain Busway proposal tonight to get public input on how this service can best serve users. Alan Sylvestre indicated that he would be attending this forum.

Bill Kelaher reported that Amtrak ridership was down 6% in Connecticut vs last year. Also, an agreement has been signed allowing Metro-North to install more ticket issuing machines. Metro-North has announced that 75-100 positions will be cut after the first of the year. This will mean the closing of some ticket offices as well as reductions in train service, car cleaning and station cleaning. These cuts are part of a force reduction of 3-5%. The cycle for the e-cleaning or heavy duty car cleaning will be lengthened from 30 days to a 60-90 day cycle.

Russ St. John reported that the Providence and Worcester will move some components of the KLEEN Energy power plant to be built in Middletown. Some large plant components will be barged up the Connecticut River to Cromwell and shipped by rail to the plant site south of Middletown center. The rail line will be used because it provides better clearances than the highways. Five to six rail moves are anticipated to ship this equipment. Because of the weight of some of the components, upgrades to the track will be necessary including flooding the track with ballast, which means adding ballast right up to the tops of the rails. Some work to increase side clearances will also be necessary.

In response to a question about the possible use of tolls on Connecticut's highways and the Governor's statement of opposition to their use, Sue Simmat reported that the Transportation Strategy Board will be contracting with Cambridge Systematics to do a study of options for tolling. If tolls were to be reinstated, it would be done using 'open road tolling' rather than toll booths. This study is due in mid-February for potential legislative consideration. OPM and TSB will evaluate the report and make recommendations to the Governor.

Terry Hall reported that, while Amtrak ridership on the Northeast Corridor may be down, elsewhere in the country business is up. This applies to both the regional systems in the Midwest and around Los Angeles as well as to cross country service. Much of the Northeast Corridor decline can be traced to a steep fare increase. Reacting to this, Amtrak is trying an internet fare rate offering a 15% savings in ticket prices but with the tickets being non-refundable. The loss in NEC ridership on Amtrak has benefited MTA, SEPTA, and New Jersey Transit as some Amtrak riders are using the metro systems and attempting to make longer trips by connecting between these systems.

ACELA Express service is down 6% as businesses cut corporate travel. Tom Cheesemen added that Peter Pan/ Greyhound traffic is down substantially also.

Richard Schreiner attended a meeting yesterday on the Danbury Branch CTC signal system and how it might be funded. At present, there is insufficient funding even to start the project. ConnDOT is now looking into a phased approach for construction. The initial design concept of installing the CTC system using a catenary design is now up to a \$130 million cost. So the department is looking at an underground cable design. The issue has been further complicated by recent federal legislation requiring positive train control (PTC) capacity to be built into all systems where passenger and freight trains co-exist. This requirement, which goes into effect in 2025, is the result of a recent fatal train collision in southern California.

Rick also reported that a second parking lot with 25 additional spaces has been obtained for use for the Ridgefield-Katonah Shuttle patrons.

Terry Hall informed the Commission that the four major Class 1 railroads (Union Pacific, BNSF, Norfolk Southern and CSX) have agreed on one compatible platform for design of PTC systems. Other railroads have yet to formally sign on to this design. Commuter railroads will be required to be PTC-equipped. Some pieces of the systems will need to be in place by 2012. These requirements are applicable wherever passenger and freight railroads share use of a track or junction.

Chairman's Report

Tom reported that the 2009 national conference of the Community Transportation Association of America will be in Providence in May. Tom also reported that Senator Donald DeFronzo, a co-chair of the Transportation Committee, recently spoke at the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce and said that every effort will be made to keep projects which are already in the pipeline moving ahead. DeFronzo also promised that the \$5,000,000 of public transportation funds in the Governor's recession package will be put back into the budget for 2010. Tom wondered how this would be possible with the much larger projected budget deficit next year.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Fred Riese mentioned that ConnDOT will be holding four scoping meetings for the Springfield Line Commuter Rail Service NEPA/CEPA document. These meetings will occur in Springfield (Dec. 8), Hartford (Dec. 9), Windsor (Dec.11) and North Haven (Dec. 16). Fred planned to attend the Windsor meeting. Russ St. John also planned to make one of the meetings. Fred also noted that an agency scoping meeting on this project took place Dec. 2 at Union Station in New Haven.

Leo Petry of Rideworks mentioned that Shore Line East has started running extended Friday service for the holidays. This extra service began for Thanksgiving weekend and will run until Martin Luther King Day.

The Commission then took up the consideration of the draft recommendations which had been prepared for potential inclusion in the Annual Report. Ten of the fifteen draft recommendations offered were voted for inclusion, and one additional draft recommendation was withdrawn.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 4:08 PM.