

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of January 7, 2010

Fourth Floor Conference Room
Union Station, New Haven

Attendance: Members: Richard Schreiner, Alan Sylvestre, Yvonne Loteczka, Richard Carpenter, Ed McAnaney, Kevin Maloney, Richard Sunderhauf, Mort Katz, Russ St. John, Gail Lavielle, Chris Adams. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Jim Peay, Dennis King. **Guests:** Terry Hall, Mark Mirko.

The meeting was called to order by vice chairman Morton Katz at 1:32 pm. The minutes of the meeting of December 3 were approved as written.

Featured Speaker

Vice chairman Katz introduced James Peay of ConnDOT who serves as the Operation Lifesaver Coordinator for Connecticut, and turned the floor over to him. Peay said that the Operation Lifesaver program began in 1972 and is now active in every state. With the slogan "Train time is any time", Operation Lifesaver works to educate the public on the dangers of railroad grade crossings and trespass on railroad rights-of-way.

A three-pronged approach of education, engineering and enforcement is employed. With the education component in mind, Operation Lifesaver coordinators and certified presenters speak to school students, civic organizations, new drivers, Scout groups and others. The engineering component of Operation Lifesaver addresses passive and active crossing devices and signage to promote safe passage by the trains as well as by the automobiles. Enforcement involves training local police as well as ensuring that pavement markings are in place and caution lights and warning bells are functioning properly. In regard to enforcement issues, Peay noted that the public often believes that railroad property is public property when in fact it is private property, and its unauthorized use by the public constitutes trespass. In addition to simple pedestrian activities on the right-of-way, the use of quads and motorcycles, as well as acts of outright vandalism can cause track undermining and lead to train derailments and even the loss of life.

Peay related that buses, tractor-trailer trucks and hazmat trucks of any size must stop at all grade crossings, even those marked as 'exempt'. Crossing gates, he noted, are really just warning signs as they will not stop an approaching vehicle. Peay also discussed the relative stopping distances from 60 mph for various vehicles. While an automobile can stop from this speed in 200 feet and a bus in 230 feet, a tractor-trailer truck may take 300 feet. A passenger train will require double that, or 600 feet, to stop. In contrast, a freight train traveling at 60 mph may require a full mile to stop. Therefore, a driver should never cross a rail line if an approaching train is in sight.

Peay has been on trains and seen school buses cross the tracks in front of the trains, a sight which very much unsettled him. He also mentioned the danger of grade crossings where

multiple tracks are involved. Sometimes drivers may not see or wait for a second train blocked from view when a train on a closer track passes.

In his experience with training police officers about the dangers of grade crossings and of trespass on railroads, Peay has found that once police officers are aware of the consequences of train accidents, they are much more vigilant in enforcing trespassing and grade crossing violations.

Peay also spoke of other rail-related dangers. People often place objects on the tracks to see what happens when the train wheels go over them. Peay has seen the results of a coin placed on the tracks which was subsequently run over by the train and shot out from under the wheel at high speed and imbedded into a tree with such force that it could not be removed from the tree by hand. If that coin had hit someone, it would have gone through him or her. He has also seen objects suspended off bridges, left for the train to hit. Such pranks can easily injure a locomotive operator. Lastly he mentioned that railroad tunnels, which are frequently used by pedestrians, are typically only wide enough to accommodate the train. Anyone in a railroad tunnel during the passage of a train would likely be killed.

Currently, Operation Lifesaver has 23 certified presenters in Connecticut.

In response to a question as to who owns the property where the public road right-of-way crosses the rail right-of-way, Peay cited C.G.S. section 13b-200 as the statute covering right-of-way ownership, but did not know the answer offhand. Chris Adams said the rail right-of-way is owned continuously by the railroad, with the public road having an easement across it. This was consistent with Dick Carpenter's experience with railroad val (valuation) maps which depict the rail right-of-way as a continuous ownership.

Yvonne Loteczka noted that paratransit vehicles she rides in will always stop at rail crossings, open their doors, then proceed. Other vehicles at the crossing do not stop. Peay said paratransit vans, like buses, are required by statute to stop at all crossings.

Comments from the Public

Terry Hall mentioned that the Bond Commission will be voting tomorrow on funding for the next step on the Springfield Line commuter rail project to provide funds for the State share of engineering and design work on the line. Terry also said that construction of the new moveable bridge to replace Amtrak's current Niantic River bridge would begin in the next couple of weeks, possibly as soon as Monday. The new bridge will provide a wider channel and more vertical clearance under the bridge than the current 1907 vintage structure.

Reports from Operating Entities

Richard Sunderhauf distributed a recent notice from James Bradford to all Connecticut Transit bus drivers concerning the procedure for asking customers to relocate from priority seating, i.e. those seats reserved for elderly or disabled riders. This notice stemmed from an incident aboard Rich's bus on the 42 line from Windsor and Wilson. He had one wheelchair using rider on board the bus, then a sight-impaired rider took the seat at the second wheelchair tie-down location. When a second wheelchair-using rider wanted to board the bus, Rich asked

the sight-impaired rider if he would take another seat so the second wheelchair could board. Initially the rider balked at this request but he later agreed to relocate after Rich pointed out that it was raining and it would not be good to leave the new rider out in the rain. However, the sight-impaired rider subsequently filed a complaint with Connecticut Transit, which was the genesis for the issuance of the new policy.

Richard Schreiner distributed copies of HART's new trolley schedule for downtown Danbury. He also mentioned that he will be attending the second meeting of the Route 7 Corridor technical advisory committee next week.

Fred Riese will be attending the second meeting of the advisory committee for the environmental impact statement being prepared for the Interstate 84 expansion project from the west end of Waterbury to Danbury. That meeting will be January 13 in Middlebury.

Election of Commission Officers

Vice chairman Mort Katz turned the floor over to Fred Riese to conduct elections for the officers of the Commission. Fred explained that the timing of the Commission's elections is not spelled out in statute and that elections have historically taken place only when a need arose to name a new chairman. He mentioned that he, Sue Simmat and Connie Mendola, as ex-officio members, could neither put forward nominations or vote for the election of the Commission's three offices of chairman, vice chairman and administrative vice chairman. He then outlined the procedures by which the elections would be conducted.

Fred then read a motion from current chairman Tom Cheeseman nominating Kevin Maloney for that office. Rich Sunderhauf seconded the motion to nominate Kevin. No further names were placed into nomination and Kevin was elected unanimously.

Yvonne Loteczka responded to the call for nominations for vice chairman by placing Mort Katz's name in nomination. This motion was seconded by Alan Sylvestre. Kevin Maloney placed Rich Schreiner's name in nomination for vice chairman, a motion seconded by Russ St. John. No further names were offered. Rick was elected by a vote of 8-2. Fred then asked if anyone else was interested in the position of administrative vice chairman, in which case he would turn the proceedings back to Mort to conduct the election. There being no interest expressed, Kevin nominated Fred to be administrative vice chairman, with Gail Lavielle seconding the motion. Fred was elected unanimously.

Discussion of the Mission of the Commission

Mort turned the floor over to Kevin Maloney for this discussion. Kevin noted that serving on the Commission represents a significant commitment on the part of the members, with 12 monthly meetings and eight or nine evenings per year for the hearings and work session. He then read C.G.S. section 13b-11a(b) which outlines the Commission's role to advise and assist the Commissioner of Transportation, the Governor and the Transportation Committee. Kevin sees the Commission as needing more interaction with all three of these entities and with the media and the public. Kevin also sees a need for a more focused agenda as to the issues in which the Commission wishes to be involved.

Gail Lavielle suggested that the members look into what other state boards and commissions do as far as sitting down with the authorities to whom they report.

Kevin asked members to come to the February meeting with their thoughts on what issues the Commission should focus on, how it can become more credible and more visible, and how it can add value for the department.

Discussion on Legislative Briefing on the Annual Report

Gail distributed an outline for the legislative briefing. Preferable dates would be a Monday morning, a Monday afternoon, or a Wednesday afternoon in February, earlier in the month if possible. February 8, 10, 22 and 24 were discussed as possible dates. The venue would be the Legislative Office Building. In addition to the recommendations of the Annual Report, the agenda for the briefing would include a discussion of the role and function of the Commission, plans for the upcoming year, and the announcement of the spring public hearing schedule.

New Business

Fred Riese reported that former Commission member Alice Pinsince, now 86 and living in Florida, extended her Christmas greetings to the members, and that Commission member Kathleen Anderson had broken her foot playing in a charity volleyball game.

Fred also directed members to submit their reimbursement request forms for the second half of 2009 to him as soon as members had completed them.

Lastly, a brief discussion of the spring public hearings occurred. Fred promised to get a list of hearing locations to Dennis King in the next week.

Vice Chairman Mort Katz adjourned the meeting at 3:48 PM.