

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of January 6, 2011

Fourth Floor Conference Room
Union Station, New Haven

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Alan Sylvestre, Yvonne Loteczka, Richard Carpenter, Ed McAnaney, Richard Sunderhauf, Gail Lavielle, Robert Rodman. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Jennifer Carrier, Lia Huang, Terry Hall, Jan Lindberg.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:43 pm. The minutes of the meeting of December 2 were approved as written.

Gail Lavielle informed the Commission that she has been sworn in as a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives representing the 143rd House district covering Wilton and part of Norwalk. Her committee assignments are the Transportation, Appropriations and Education Committees. She mentioned her intention to submit a bill to amend the Commission's statute to restore the requirement that ConnDOT prepare official responses to the recommendations of the Commission's Annual Report. Language for this bill has already been drafted with the assistance of Chris Adams. She plans to meet with ConnDOT Commissioner Jeff Parker to discuss the bill with him before she submits it.

Gail also mentioned that she had originally intended to submit her resignation from the Commission at today's meeting but she wants to look into that matter further to see if that is actually required.

Featured Speaker

Jennifer Carrier, Director of Transportation Planning at the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), assisted by Transportation Planner Lia Huang, gave a presentation on the Hartford I-84 Viaduct Study undertaken by CRCOG last year. Lia Huang informed the Commission that the viaduct structure was built in 1965. In 2006, ConnDOT did a study that recommended an in-kind replacement of the ¾ mile long structure. Following that recommendation, the City of Hartford and local neighborhood advocates asked ConnDOT to look at other alternatives for replacing the viaduct. ConnDOT agreed to do this analysis and implemented a short-term repair process for the viaduct structure. The local advocates formed into the HUB of Hartford steering committee, a group which also included business owners, employees, community organizations, City staff, ConnDOT and DEP.

A three-phase study was undertaken, first doing a technical review of the existing viaduct, then a screening assessment of alternatives to the viaduct, and lastly an in-depth look at the alternatives.

Of trips over the viaduct section of Interstate 84, 40-50% have either an origin or a destination in Hartford, 5-10% of trips both originate and terminate in Hartford, and 40-50% are

through trips. However, many of the through trips are short in nature, such as between West Hartford and East Hartford. Only about 15% of the total trips over the viaduct are through trips of the Capitol Region.

Carrier noted that the Hartford Viaduct supports 175,000 trips per day. This is only slightly fewer than the 190,000 trips on Interstate 93 at the Big Dig tunnel in Boston.

The goals of the viaduct study were to identify alternatives which could:

- Maintain or enhance transportation function
- Reduce the visual and environmental impacts of the highway
- Promote a walkable, bike able environment that supports transit use and enhances transit access
- Reconnect the city across the highway
- Strengthen the downtown core, and
- Foster transit-oriented development around Union Station.

The selection of alternatives for the study was constrained by the assumptions that that highway would remain essentially within its existing corridor and that the rail line could not be lowered to a below-grade alignment.

The CRCOG study looked at a baseline alternative called an enhanced viaduct concept, which incorporated a more compact Sisson Avenue interchange design. It also looked at three new concepts. Concept 1 incorporates an enhanced viaduct structure and improved connections across the highway. Concept 2 replaces the viaduct with a surface roadway, relocates the rail line to the north side of the highway, and improves connections across the highway. Concept 3 replaces the viaduct with a tunnel, relocates the rail line to the north side of the highway, and improves connections across the highway.

No detailed cost analyses were done for these options. However, for evaluation purposes, the baseline option was assigned a cost factor of 1.0 to which other options could be compared. The baseline option was rated as poor for urban design, good for transportation function, and fair for economic development considerations.

Under Concept 1, the eastbound barrel of Interstate 84 would be dropped below Asylum Avenue. Eight acres of new useable land would be created for development or open space where the highway now passes over Asylum Avenue. Concept 1 has a cost factor of 1.2 and is rated as fair/poor for urban design, good for transportation and good for economic development.

Concept 2, replacing the viaduct with a surface roadway, would also drop the eastbound lanes of Interstate 84 below Asylum Avenue. It would free up 15-20 acres of new land for development or open space. The rail line would be relocated to run north of Interstate 84 at all points. A new Union Station Annex would serve the relocated Amtrak Line while the existing Union Station would serve intercity buses. This concept has a cost factor of 1.0, equivalent to the baseline option, and is rated as good/ very good for urban design, good for transportation, and very good for economic development.

Concept 3 replaces the I-84 viaduct with a tunnel. It would create 15-20 acres of new land for development or open space but, at a cost factor of 3.0, it is very expensive. Concept 3 is rated as very good for urban design, good for transportation, and very good for economic development. It would also lessen highway noise through the affected neighborhoods.

Carrier mentioned that pieces of the alternatives can be mixed and matched to meet local needs and desires. A community summit on the study was held on October 27, 2010 and was very well attended. CRCOG and the City of Hartford have endorsed the findings of the study. The next phase of development of a viaduct replacement plan would be a detailed feasibility study. Currently, there is no funding in place to do this. Carrier says ConnDOT feels the viaduct structure replacement needs to be addressed within the next 15-20 years. Replacement of the viaduct is recognized as an important need but is probably behind the reconstruction of the Route 8/ Interstate 84 interchange in priority.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Richard Schreiner said HART has just completed its 5-year fixed route services analysis. He offered to send copies of the report to any interested members.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney reported that he received a call from the Wilton Press and that the reporter said Wilton was all abuzz because Wilton Station was featured on the cover of the Annual Report.

Kevin also said that Bradley Airport is likely to be run by an independent operating authority outside of ConnDOT. He feels that the State has always looked at the airport as a cash cow but has ignored its potential as an engine for economic development.

Old Business

Fred Riese mentioned, on behalf of Sherry Osterling, the need to keep track of members' appointment letters in a more organized fashion. This prompted a related discussion concerning filling the vacancies on the Commission. Kevin and Dennis discussed how to best go about this. Members were encouraged to offer the names of any potential future members who they feel would be assets to the Commission.

New Business

Dick Carpenter requested that ConnDOT provide an update on the status of the Springfield Line project at a future meeting. He also asked if Mike Riley of the Connecticut Motor Transport Association could speak at a future meeting.

Jan Lindberg reported that he took the 4:00 pm Metro-North train on December 28 during a snowstorm. His observations indicated that almost all the riders rode for free as no fares were collected, other than those riding on monthly passes.

Dennis King asked the Commission to suggest hearing locations for the spring public hearings by the February meeting.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:15 PM.

NOTE: The February 3 meeting will be at Bozzuto's Grocery Wholesalers at 155 Schoolhouse Road in Cheshire.