

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
June 3, 2010

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room B
2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Morton Katz, Richard Sunderhauf, Alan Sylvestre, Russ St. John, Edward McAnaney, Chris Adams, Richard Carpenter. **Ex-officio members:** Frederick Riese (DEP). **DOT Staff:** Commissioner Joseph Marie, James Redeker, Dennis King, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Terry Hall, Brooke Hoberman, Jan Lindberg, Stephen Troster.

Chairman Maloney opened the meeting at 1:36 pm. The minutes of the meeting of May 6 were accepted as written.

Featured Speaker

Chairman Maloney noted that he and Commissioner Marie were both a few minutes late as they had just had a short meeting in Commissioner Marie's office. He then introduced Commissioner Marie and thanked him for attending today's meeting.

Commissioner Marie related that he was born and raised in Boston and began his 25 year career in public transportation by working at the MBTA. Nine of his 25 years were spent on the private side but involved designing and building train systems, so he has never left the public transportation field. He has been Commissioner at ConnDOT for two years now.

Marie noted that a couple hundred ConnDOT employees took the retirement incentive package last year which cost the department in terms of resources but also provided some opportunities to place new people in some key positions. He also observed that ConnDOT today is placing more emphasis on performance and on mode neutrality. The department is more balanced today between highways and public transportation, and that balance is reflected in ConnDOT's capital plans.

Though the concept of multi-modal departments of transportation is gaining momentum, currently ConnDOT is one of only three state departments of transportation, along with Maryland and Hawaii, which have responsibility for all modes. It wasn't so long ago that the idea of splitting off the public transportation functions of ConnDOT into a separate department was seriously discussed. Today the value of a comprehensive, multimodal approach to transportation is more apparent and accepted.

Marie next focused on the current state of affairs relating to the lack of a federal surface transportation act. SAFETY-LU expired on Sept. 30, 2009. Federal transportation spending has been operating under a continuing resolution since that time. Marie sees the continuing resolution as likely to be extended again by 6-9 months until at

least after the mid-term elections. More likely it will be the spring of 2011 before there is serious movement on the next federal surface transportation act. Federal transportation support is likely to be in the \$550-600 billion range in the next bill, or roughly double the levels under SAFETY-LU, though the discussion of how to pay for this level of spending has not really begun yet.

The specifics of the next surface transportation act are especially important to Connecticut and the rest of New England because these states have the oldest transportation infrastructure. Using Connecticut as an example, Marie cited the average age of the state's bus fleet at 8 ½ years. As buses have an average useful life of 12 years, proper planning would be to maintain a fleet average of about six years. Fortunately, we do have new buses on order. The first of the new buses will go to the New Britain-Bristol service, which has the oldest bus fleet. On the rail side, Connecticut is tied with Chicago for the oldest rail car fleet, though this will change with the arrival of the new M-8 rail cars.

Over the next five years, Connecticut will spend \$1.25 billion to maintain our rail assets in a state of good repair including projects such as catenary replacement, tie and track replacement, and signal upgrades including positive train control. In historic terms, Connecticut has been a recipient state rather than a donor state when it comes to federal transportation support. Under the formulas of the most recent surface transportation act, Connecticut received \$1.31 for every \$1.00 it contributed in fuel taxes.

Opportunities for major roadway expansion are negligible. We don't have the resources it would take to accomplish any significant upgrades in capacity. Our major investments for the foreseeable future will be in public transportation. Marie then discussed a number of the major public transportation projects the department either currently has underway or is pursuing.

Seven hundred million dollars worth of facility improvements are underway at New Haven Yard. This project was at one point estimated to cost \$1.2 billion. The project has benefitted from the favorable climate for bidding in this economy, which has created a buyer's market. Bids have come in much lower than expected. Refinements to the sequencing of the component projects have also reduced the cost.

Testing on the first M-8 rail cars on the New Haven Line is underway. Thus far, the cars have been tested at speeds up to 90 mph. By the first quarter of 2011, 16-20 cars per month should be accepted into the fleet. Connecticut is having on-going dialogues about exercising its option for an additional eighty M-8s. Once all the new cars have been accepted, M-8's will constitute 65-70% of our rail fleet and the average age of our cars will have decreased from 31 ½ years to 9 ½ years.

The Springfield Line rail project is moving forward. We are in active discussions with our partner Amtrak as we prepare funding applications. The Springfield Line project has seen a major change in direction, moving from a commuter rail project

to meet local needs to being part of a regional high speed rail system serving both intercity and commuter needs.

Other projects mentioned by Marie included the New Britain Busway, for which \$275 million in federal funding will be applied for this year, and the recently expanded Shore Line East service which added trains to New London. Three more fuel cell buses are also coming to Hartford.

In response to a question about getting rail freight here from northern New Jersey, Commissioner Marie said that the six New England commissioners of transportation are now meeting quarterly to discuss New England transportation issues including the development of a New England regional rail plan. We can no longer do our transportation planning in a vacuum. Further, Marie noted that the planning for the Springfield Line improvements will allow for a freight capacity at a level above what any current forecasts envision. This will provide for substantial operating flexibility on the line.

Jim Redeker further noted that much of the rail infrastructure in Connecticut is in state ownership and most of this is very old infrastructure. We need a plan for investment in state-owned rail infrastructure and some pot of money to fix our own rail lines. One bright note is the authorization for \$2.5 million in bonding in this last budget to improve rail crossings.

In response to a question regarding railroad clearances, Commissioner Marie noted that 20-30 bridges between New Haven and Hartford have clearances between 18' and 19'. The Aetna Viaduct has a clearance of 18' 6".

Another question concerned the department's thinking on the possibility of restoring the Armory Branch as the final link in a non-Amtrak north-south route which would also be much easier to operate as a high and wide clearance route than would be the Springfield Line. Jim Redeker agreed that this is an opportunity and would be a less costly route to provide high and wide clearances.

Commissioner Marie also noted that the NYS DOT commissioner frequently attends the meetings of the New England commissioners so that an integration of New York and New England issues does occur at these planning sessions.

Chairman Maloney expressed concern that if no capacity improvements are made on Interstate 95 during the next decade, we will see access not only to Connecticut but to all of New England get choked off. Commissioner Marie said that we can make improvements at the margins and cited several examples such as the operational lanes added to I-95 in Darien, the new Q Bridge, the new 34/91/95 interchange in New Haven, the new M-8 rail cars, and port and airport improvements, the latter three of these which will entice more people and freight off that highway.

Marie next highlighted that, not only is Connecticut involved in regional rail transportation planning but, Connecticut led the 11 Northeast Corridor states in teaming up for a common application for federal funds for capacity upgrades to Northeast Corridor infrastructure. Connecticut has gone from being viewed as a passive participant to being a leader.

Lastly, the Commissioner mentioned that, while ConnDOT did not receive any TIGER rail grants, it did receive one of the largest of the FAA grants under TIGER. There will be another round of grant applications and awards under TIGER but it will be extremely oversubscribed so competition for the grants will be intense.

In response to a final question concerning bar cars, Marie noted that there are no café cars in the original order of 300 M-8s but there may be some café cars in the option order.

Comments from the Public

Terry Hall reported that bridge construction work is continuing around the clock in eastern Connecticut including on two bridges in Stonington and at the Niantic River Bridge. Also, Amtrak's Northeast Corridor Master Plan provides lots of information regarding capital plans in Connecticut, including on the Springfield Line, but very little information on any planned work between New Haven and New Rochelle. Jim Redeker said that the multi-state planning effort will address this latter segment. Redeker also made passing mention of a new Regional Plan Association report proposing a totally new high speed rail corridor as a long term planning goal.

Reports from Operating Entities

Following up on the driver training topic addressed by David Lee at the May meeting, Richard Sunderhauf passed around a copy of the very extensive Connecticut Transit bus driver's handbook to show members the range of information and training with which drivers need to be familiar.

Brooke Hoberman of Rideworks mentioned that the Shore Line East schedule will be tweaked a bit starting June 14 but Rideworks has not yet received the new schedule from ConnDOT.

The bus ROADEO will be held on June 13 at the Manchester park and ride lot, Rick Schreiner reported.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney related that he had met with Commissioner Marie before today's meeting and had a very good discussion with him. The Commissioner was sorry that this is the first time he had met with the Commission during his two years in his position. Kevin and the Commissioner discussed the role that the Commission can serve as a conduit between the public and the department.

Discussion of the Commission's Legislative Briefing

Chairman Maloney next discussed the planning for the Commission's legislative briefing and noted that a meeting of several Commission members took place on May 25 to work on the plan. Though Gail could not be at today's meeting due to her conflict with the Danbury Branch Advisory Committee meeting in Ridgefield, Kevin noted the elements of the planning that he could address. The sites for the Commission's fall public hearings have been selected and will be announced at the briefing, along with the dates for those hearings to the extent that they are available. The hearing sites will be Stamford, Waterbury, Newington and New London. The target date for the briefing had been June 15 but will need to be pushed back a week or two. Fred Riese distributed an outline of the briefing topics and Kevin asked for membership participation on the various pieces of the outline. The scheduling for the briefing may be dependent on the date of the Legislature's special session, which is not yet set but may be June 21 or 22. Rich Schreiner suggested adding the New Britain Busway to the list of issues in the briefing outline to reflect that the Commission wrote to Commissioner Marie on this topic.

Old Business

Russ St. John asked about the status of the State Rail Plan development. Fred Riese promised to look into this.

New Business

Fred Riese mentioned that the meeting of the Danbury Branch Advisory Committee on the Danbury Branch Electrification Study was occurring simultaneously with today's Commission meeting. Therefore, Stephen Gazillo of the study team has agreed to make a presentation on that study at the Commission's meeting of July 8.

Chairman Maloney reported that Fred Riese has been selected to receive the Connecticut Association for Community Transportation's Friend of Public Transportation Award and will be one of four recipients so honored at CACT's award luncheon June 23 at the Indian Hills Country Club in Newington.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:12 pm.