

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of November 1, 2012

Legislative Office Building, Hearing Room 1-C
Hartford, Connecticut

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner. Russ St. John, Richard Sunderhauf, Robert Rodman, Mort Katz, Yvonne Loteczka, Alan Sylvestre. **Ex-officio members:** Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Cliff Gibson, Donald DeVivo, Kim Dunham(GHTD), and Brenda Sunderhauf, Chris Smith.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:33 pm. The minutes of the meeting of October 4 were accepted as written.

Featured Speaker

Cliff Gibson, Chief Operating Officer of DATTCO Bus Company, opened the presentation on the scope and status of his company's operations, with DATTCO President Donald DeVivo continuing the testimony and partnering in answering questions from Commission members.

DATTCO has 1,600 employees throughout Connecticut and New England. The company was founded in New Britain in 1924 as MASTCO, operating local transit buses and a few charter coaches. About the same time, the DeVivo family, who operated a dairy farm in Berlin, began operating a school bus for part of the day, an arrangement that was not uncommon at the time when farmers frequently also drove school buses to earn extra (and more stable) income. By the 1950s, the DeVivos and their partner Mr. Tollemeo had their D&T Bus Company operating routes in Berlin and Farmington, and beginning in 1959, in Plainville. In 1962, the New Britain transit operations of MASTCO were merged with D&T, and became DATTCO, the DeVivo and Tollemeo Transportation Company. Today, the school bus industry is dominated by a handful of large, national companies but DATTCO remains a local, family-owned business.

DATTCO is organized into three major divisions with several lines of business in each. The first division discussed by Gibson was the Motorcoach and Tour Division which includes not only DATTCO's 'big red buses' but also local paratransit services and limousine service. DATTCO has 65 motor coaches in service at present, including the standard 57-passenger buses and some 81-passenger double decker VanHool buses. Gibson mentioned that DATTCO has partnered with Megabus, initially to run the Megabus express service between Boston and New York for which it currently operates 11 trips per day, but later adding franchise routes from Providence to New York, from New Haven and

Hartford to Boston, from Hartford and New Haven to New York City, and routes from Hartford to Storrs, Amherst, Mass., and Burlington, VT, all as unsubsidized service. These buses, and similar services, offer much more modern transportation than the old Greyhound and Trailways buses, offering greater comfort, electrical outlets, wi-fi connections, on-line reservations, and roomy seating. Although the dominant demographic for this service is 18-30 year olds, the service has proven popular with business travelers as well.

As mentioned, the Motorcoach and Tour Division also provides local paratransit service, with 65 specialized vehicles for dial-a-ride, senior transportation, medical trips and other similar services in New Britain, Bristol, Hartford and surrounding communities. DATTCO operates a 24-hour/day reservation service for paratransit from its dispatch center in New Britain.

Finally, the Motorcoach and Tour Division operates coach and limousine service throughout New England and New York including daily trips to Mohegan Sun. It operates clean diesel technology coaches which allowed DATTCO to be certified as a Green Coach Company by the University of Vermont.

The largest division of DATTCO and the one that goes back to the company's roots is the School Bus Division. DATTCO presently provides school bus service to 19 towns in Connecticut and Rhode Island. In addition, through its affiliation with the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), DATTCO provides school bus transport in 43 towns around the Hartford Region. DATTCO operates 950 school buses and transports 85,000 students per day, including travel for evening activities. Today's school buses have high-back, padded seats, video cameras inside and out, GPS units, computerized routing systems, and accident event recorders which record the 10 seconds before and after any impact event. One facet of the computerized trip routing is that it allows the bus to avoid the address of any registered sexual predator on its route.

DATTCO's school bus drivers undergo background checks before hiring, and must possess CDLs to drive. They attend 10 in-service training classes per year as well as other periodic tests and training. The result of all this driver training and of rigorous bus maintenance is that 96% of DATTCO's school bus contracts are renewed each year.

DATTCO's third division is its Sales and Service Division. Beginning in 1992, DATTCO branched out into selling and servicing school buses and commercial buses, as well as fabricating wheelchair installations on buses. This DATTCO division has three service facilities in Connecticut (New Britain, Middletown and Bridgeport) and three in Massachusetts (Brockton, Fairhaven and Randolph) which perform repairs and body work on buses and trucks. An outgrowth of this line of DATTCO's business is the annual trade EXPO it hosts for customers and vendors.

The most recent EXPO, held at the Mohegan Sun, occupied the entire convention center and was attended by over 1,000 customers.

In the last 18 months, the Sales and Service Division has added the regional franchise for Thermo King truck refrigeration units to its business line and operates two Thermo King sales and service facilities in Brockton, Mass. and in Windsor Locks.

DATTCO president Don DeVivo then addressed DATTCO's affiliation with ConnDOT and the services it provides under contract to ConnDOT. Mr. DeVivo said his company has a long history with ConnDOT. Currently it operates three commuter express routes from Hartford: the Old Saybrook commuter express (51,000 passengers per year), the Bristol/Plainville commuter express (63,000 passengers per year) and the Cheshire/Southington commuter express (44,000 passengers per year). It also operates the East Street and South Street local transit routes in New Britain and the 41 Route from Bank Street in New Britain into Hartford. DATTCO operates 14 MCI coaches for these routes.

DeVivo mentioned that his company, along with New Britain Transportation, Post Road Stages and Kelley Transportation, has an active lawsuit against ConnDOT over the issue of rebidding franchised routes previously awarded to these companies but which are now put out to the low bidder. DeVivo said, in ConnDOT's defense, that the department was under strong pressure to initiate this change. DeVivo expressed his feeling that the new arrangement removes any incentive for service operators to improve service on commuter routes. The operators are paid a straight per hour rate, with all farebox revenues going to the State. DeVivo said that when the State initially began to subsidize public transportation, the idea was to keep fares low in order to increase transit usage. This has morphed into the current practice of the State paying operators an hourly rate but retaining all the farebox revenues. This removes any incentive for operators to build up ridership on the routes they operate.

DeVivo contrasted this practice with the Megabus model where the operators market the service and upgrade it to increase ridership. He also cited a service DATTCO runs in Massachusetts from Fairhaven to New Bedford to Taunton to Boston. When Massachusetts had to eliminate the subsidy for this service due to a tight budget, DATTCO decided to continue to run the service. They had to increase the fares but they now run 5-6 trips per day, all unsubsidized. Because DATTCO has an incentive to increase ridership, it has spent money on marketing, on social media, and on promoting this service through NU-Ride. DeVivo believes that this model, with an incentive to private operators to market and improve the service, is the way to go.

DeVivo mentioned that, in Connecticut, commuter buses cannot be used for other purposes during off-peak hours. In contrast, Massachusetts and New Jersey allow the use of commuter buses for other purposes during the day.

In response to a question on transporting children in wheelchairs, Gibson explained that the approach is to try to mainstream wheelchair-dependent children on school buses rather than separating these children onto separate vehicles. This may require extra training for the drivers but it is worth it. The standard seating configuration today incorporates two wheelchair positions per bus.

In response to another question about recent horrific accidents involving tour buses and whether the regulatory oversight of the industry is adequate, DeVivo stated that curbside bus operators don't always follow all of the rules. Bus riders should report any problems or complaints to the Department of Motor Vehicles. Gibson added that internal regulation and auditing by the bus companies themselves is very important since regulatory authorities can't do it all.

Concerning the range of bus services which might be compatible with the model of private, non-subsidized operation, DeVivo said DATTCO services currently operated under this model include casino runs for patrons and employees, Megabus routes, local commuter service and college transportation systems. It would be more difficult to put this model together for local fixed route transit service, not necessarily impossible but more difficult. Also, the short 1-year contract term for operating the commuter bus runs is also an impediment to operator incentives to invest in improvements. DeVivo would like to see the term of the contracts be three years.

Responding to a question as to whether DATTCO's workers are unionized, Gibson answered in the affirmative and said that its workers are represented by four different bargaining units who have different contract terms, but that DATTCO workers do receive full medical and dental coverage.

Regarding driver training, DATTCO does a whole range of training from helping employees receive their CDLs to advanced training done both in person and on-line. As the original question concerned a driver on another company's bus traveling at a high rate of speed, DeVivo noted that governors on the engines of all DATTCO buses limit the maximum speed the buses can attain to 68 mph.

The final question concerned what direction the speakers see bus technology taking. DeVivo said he personally believes compressed natural gas will be the way the industry goes but noted that various other technologies are currently being tested today including fuel cells and hybrid buses.

Comments from the public

None.

Comments from Operating Entities

Rich Sunderhauf mentioned that new operator run bids at Connecticut Transit go into effect on November 18. Minor tweaks of some routes will take place at the same time.

Fred Riese mentioned that he had attended the Federal Railroad Administration's North Region meeting for the NEC Future project on October 23 in Providence. The NEC Future project will evaluate capacity, service and infrastructure needs along the Northeast Corridor. It will develop a range of improvements to the Northeast Corridor to address these needs. These improvements will look first to enhance the existing NEC infrastructure, but will potentially look at a new and separate dedicated high speed corridor on new alignment, particularly between New York and Boston. The October 23 meeting focused on obtaining background resource data to be used in the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) and in the selection of a favored alternative.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney discussed the impacts of Hurricane Sandy on transit operations, particularly the outages of passenger rail service. He thought a briefing from the Department on the efforts necessary to restore service would be appropriate at a future meeting, perhaps in January.

On the subject of storm-caused interruptions of service, Rich Schreiner volunteered that HARTransit suspended service on Monday of the storm and resumed limited operations on Tuesday. At present, everything but the Harlem Line shuttles is operating. Since MTA has not yet resumed service north of Mount Kisco, there is no need to run the Harlem Line shuttles. HART was also asked to evacuate students from Western Connecticut State University and residents from an apartment building whose roof had blown off.

Summary of the Fall Public Hearings

Fred Riese summarized the testimony at the last two public hearings, held in Winsted and Windsor Locks. Major issues in Winsted were the proposed bus storage and maintenance facility for the Northwestern Connecticut Transit District, the high level of demand on the Jobs Access transportation services which are operating at capacity and have waiting lists, and an interest in formalizing and marking bus stops for the local Candystriper system.

Issues in Winsor included how to better serve the transit needs in the Day Hill Road industrial area, the need for and the coming institution of local bus service in Enfield, better suburb to suburb bus service for Windsor, better bus

service within Manchester, and the benefits of locating the new Springfield Line train station for Windsor Locks in the downtown area as opposed to at the current train station location in a remote area south of town.

Regarding the public hearings, Chairman Maloney reminded Commission members that we hold these hearings to gather testimony from others, and he asked that members refrain from expressing their opinions and experiences at the hearings. He also suggested that elected officials be given preference to speak first at the hearings. The first selectman of Windsor Locks had to wait an hour to present his testimony at the Windsor hearing.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Fred Riese reminded members that the annual work session will be Thursday, November 15 at the fourth floor conference room in New Haven. The summaries of the public hearings have been sent out already so members should have them shortly. Members are encouraged to prepare and present ideas for recommendations at the work session.

Chairman Maloney closed the meeting at 2:50 pm.