

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of October 1, 2015

Union Station, Fourth Floor Conference Room
New Haven, Connecticut

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Rich Sunderhauf, Ed McAnaney, Robert Rodman, Chris Adams, Francis Pickering. **Ex-officio members:** Fred Riese (DEEP). **Guests:** Doug Hausladen, Kim Dunham, Lori Richards.

Chairman Maloney opened the meeting at 1:40 pm. The minutes of the meeting of September 3 were accepted as written.

Reports from Operating Entities

Fred Riese relayed a message from Garrett Eucolitto, OPM Undersecretary for Transportation, that a tour of the CTfastrak busway has been arranged for Commission members on Thursday, Nov. 12 at 10:30 am. The tour will leave from the Legislative Office Building and will last approximately two hours. As ConnDOT desires to have a count of members who are planning to participate, please contact Fred to let him know if you plan to be part of this tour.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney announced that UPass bus service for Danbury area students of Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) began today. Under the agreement between NVCC and HARTtransit, NVCC students can ride HART buses free of charge. NVCC's Student Government Association funds the UPass program out of a transportation fee of \$10/semester paid by all NVCC students. An existing UPass program in Waterbury allows NVCC students there to ride buses of the Waterbury Division of CT Transit free of charge. This now has been extended to Danbury NVCC students riding HART buses.

Chairman Maloney also reported that the Commission's September 9 public hearing in Derby received good coverage in the New Haven Register.

Next he noted upcoming improvements and increasing ridership on the Waterbury Branch of Metro-North. Ridership on the line jumped from 178,000 trips in 2004 to nearly 400,000 trips in 2012, more than doubling. Governor Malloy's Lets Go CT initiative proposes \$350 million of improvements on the line. In December, the State Bond Commission approved \$7,000,000 for design work on a signal system for the Waterbury Branch, which, in conjunction with planned passing sidings, will greatly increase capacity on the single track line. Comparatively affordable housing in Waterbury and in the Naugatuck Valley in

general makes rail commutation an attractive option for workers in Fairfield County and even in Westchester County and New York City.

Maloney also summarized a recent New Haven Register article on the challenges and declining fortunes facing New England ports. The use of much larger ships handling containerized cargoes has meant that most New England ports, including Connecticut's, are being bypassed. The Port of New Haven, which ranked 33rd nationally in 1972 with 13.1 million tons handled, saw those numbers drop to 57th place and 8.4 million tons by 2013. The use of Bridgeport Harbor is severely constrained by a need for dredging to reclaim a 35' channel depth. With the exceptions of Boston and Portland, Maine, New England harbors cannot generally accommodate large container ships. New England ports must identify and serve smaller niche markets and ships. Davisville, RI is one prime example. It specializes in receiving and distributing automobiles and handles an average of 18,000 vehicles per month.

Lastly, Kevin discussed an article from last Sunday's Hartford Courant which noted that the subsidy for the CTfastrak service had increased from the originally projected \$10,000,000 annually to \$17,500,000 annually due in part to an expanded level of service and broader network of routes. Farebox recovery is on track to be 22%, or \$4.9 million out of \$22.4 million in operating costs. Francis Pickering said that once an adequate track record of the performance of each route has been compiled, some routes may need to be pruned. He pointed to a circulator route at CCSU as a route which might potentially be cut.

Fall Public Hearings

Fred Riese gave quick summaries of the testimony given at the Derby and Old Saybrook public hearings. The Derby hearing on September 9 drew five speakers. Major topics were the travel needs of disabled citizens and the gaps in the services provided for this community, a current study of ways to provide better on-demand transit services for disabled citizens, the lack of good bus options from the Lower Naugatuck Valley south to Trumbull and Bridgeport and north to Waterbury and Naugatuck, needed improvements to the Waterbury Branch rail service, the need for a new bus route to serve the Lakewood Road commercial area of Waterbury, and options for a new bus pulse point near the Waterbury Green at the site of the former Prospect Street garage.

The Old Saybrook hearing featured testimony expressing concern about potential rebranding or even operational consolidation of Estuary Transit District's 9 Town Transit service, the desire for designated, official bus stop locations along Estuary Transit District routes, the need for more coordination between Estuary Transit District, Middletown Area Transit and CT Transit, the need for a bus storage and maintenance building for the Estuary Transit District vehicle fleet, a desire to see bicycles accommodated on the code-shared Amtrak trains providing

some Shore Line East trips, and the recently completed study of the Valley Railroad and the potential benefits and limitations for restoring its connection to Middletown.

Featured Speaker

Doug Hausladen, Director of Transportation, Traffic and Parking for the City of New Haven, began his remarks by saying that Mayor Toni Harp is extremely interested in intermodality, including establishing bike lanes and improving bicycle to bus connections. All New Haven Division buses now have bike racks.

Cleaner, more inviting bus shelters are needed in the city and region, preferably with solar-powered LED lighting. The current budget only allows for the construction of seven new shelters annually. Hausladen is currently researching bus shelter designs, looking for the design that is right for New Haven.

The City is excited by the possibilities presented by the upcoming New Haven-Hartford-Springfield rail service with its 25 trains per day to Hartford and Springfield. One obvious related local need is for better connections between Union Station and the New Haven Green. Only one or two bus routes currently make this connection.

Another major local initiative is a study of the local bus route system. An RFQ is out right now for a firm to undertake this \$950,000 study. With 30% of New Haven households having no access to a car, and with transportation having been consistently identified as the #1 barrier to finding and maintaining a job, it is important to maximize the efficiency of the bus transportation system and route structure and to improve upon the current state where accessing a majority of local jobs requires a 90 minute trip to reach by transit. Mayor Harp has characterized access to transit as a civil right. We must do a better job of providing it.

One service format that may merit consideration is to create one or more 'BRT-light' corridors for major routes where buses would have signal pre-emption and distinctive branding or logos, and operate very frequent service, perhaps on 15 minute headways. These priority corridors would then be fed by conventional feeder routes. Hausladen also referred to the example of Houston, which updated a very outmoded route structure to produce such significant efficiency improvements that twice as much service was able to be provided within the same operating budget.

A new Go New Haven Go initiative has been implemented to incentivize the use of public transportation. This 12-month program will offer benefits to employees and allow competition between employers for use of public transportation. Riders simply log onto a website and document the trips taken by

transit to earn benefits such as gift cards to local merchants. Similar programs have been implemented in other cities.

New Business

Fred Riese reported on a September 23 meeting at ConnDOT to discuss options contained in the Federal Railroad Administration's NEC Future study of options to upgrade and expand capacity on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. A No Action alternative and three levels of upgrades are presented in the study. Briefly, Alternative 1 would maintain the role of the Northeast Corridor by improving it to a state of good repair and expanding its capacity to accommodate ridership growth due to population and employment increases. New capacity would be provided at chokepoints along the corridor and potentially a new route bypassing southeastern Connecticut would be constructed from Old Saybrook to Kenyon, RI to provide higher speed service and to complement the existing alignment, which would continue to be operated and maintained.

Alternative 2 would grow the Northeast Corridor with improved levels of service, chokepoint relief, and, in Connecticut, a second NEC route from New Haven to Hartford to Providence, the latter link being a new rail alignment which would serve UConn as well as providing more capacity and higher speeds. The existing NEC Shoreline Route would also be maintained.

Alternative 3 is an ambitious plan involving a new second spine to the NEC for dedicated high speed service, with several potential new alignments considered on Long Island and in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The outcome of the meeting stressed the need to prioritize the upgrade of the existing infrastructure, the budgetary realities for any major expansion, and the political/public difficulties associated with new rail alignments. FRA will release the Environmental Impact Statement evaluating these options and their benefits and impacts later this fall.

Francis Pickering spoke about an upcoming replacement project for a Route 1 bridge over Interstate 95 in Stamford. The new bridge design makes no provision for any widening of I-95. This is not consistent with plans to widen Interstate 95 contained in Let's Go CT.

Chairman Maloney closed the meeting at 3:03 pm.