

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of September 3, 2015

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

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Robert Rodman, Mort Katz, Alan Sylvestre, Chris Adams, Rich Sunderhauf, Nicholas Lownes, Bill Kelaher, Francis Pickering, Robert Hammersley, Yvonne Loteczka, Ed McAnaney. **Ex-officio members:** Garrett Eucolitto (OPM), Fred Riese (DEEP). **Guests:** Eric Feldblum (ConnDOT), Barbara Kalosky (North East Transportation), Catroina Stratton, Kinson Perry, Chris Zavagnin, Lawrence Truman.

Chairman Kevin Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:37 pm. The minutes of the meeting of August 6 were accepted as written.

Featured Speakers

Eric Feldblum, Project Engineer in the Facilities Design Unit at ConnDOT, stood in for scheduled speaker John Hanifin and gave an overview of the new bus storage and maintenance facility being constructed in Watertown to serve the vehicle fleet needs of North East Transportation which operates the Waterbury Division of CT Transit under contract for ConnDOT. The existing bus facility, originally built in 1946 as part of a brass mill, is on Thomaston Avenue in Waterbury. This facility was converted to bus use in 1982 and is now operating beyond its capacity. Expansion of the current facility is not feasible.

Feldblum noted that an alternatives analysis done in 1997 initially looked at eight potential sites for the bus facility. A minimum site size of twelve acres was needed. The site which was selected was formerly the Watertown Drive-in Theater. It fronts on Frost Bridge Road in Watertown and is immediately west of the Naugatuck River. The site lies within the mapped 500-year floodplain of the Naugatuck River.

Feldblum said the new facility is designed to accommodate 49 transit buses and 49 paratransit vehicles. The building will be 180,519 square feet with 107,258 square feet of bus storage capacity. Including the enclosed employee parking floor, the total structure size is 276,092 square feet. All of the facility will either be elevated above the 500-year flood zone or protected by the ring road embankment which exceeds the 500-year flood elevation.

Another feature of the bus facility site design is the incorporation of a multi-use trail and a parking lot for trail users. Two bathrooms will be constructed

at the parking lot. These will be maintained by the Town of Watertown. The multi-use trail will continue across the adjoining parcel to the north which is being developed to process construction and demolition debris.

Another element of the project being handled as a separate phase of construction is the extension of water and sanitary sewer lines to the facility site. These extensions are approximately 7,000' long, with the water line to be extended along Echo Lake Road while the sewer line will run along Route 262.

The bus facility will include a bus wash, a paint shop, locker room, and administrative offices.

Site work for the bus facility began this past May. The stormwater detention basin is already constructed. The approximately \$100 million facility is slated for completion in May 2017. Funding is an 80/20 split between the Federal Transit Administration and ConnDOT. The CT Transit bus facility in Hamden was used as the basis for the design of this facility.

Barbara Kalosky, General Manager of North East Transportation, spoke of the complexities and limitations of operating out of the existing facility and compared that to the efficiencies of the new facility. When North East Transportation (NET) moved into the existing facility in 1982, it was intended to be only a temporary home. At that time, NET operated 30 fixed route buses; today it operates 82 revenue vehicles. The existing facility is extremely congested causing a need for constant jockeying of the buses. Maintenance capabilities at the existing facility are extremely limited. As one example, Kalosky said that to perform a chassis wash, a mechanic must get into one of the pits with a rain suit and a power wash. Exhaust fumes are vented simply by leaving the garage doors open. Bus interiors are cleaned wherever the bus is parked, indoors or outdoors.

The current facility provides 80 parking spaces for 125 employees, with the resulting congestion further limiting bus circulation and maneuverability. Approximately 30 of the paratransit vehicles must be parked outside, regardless of weather. Snow must be cleared from these vehicles in the winter. With regard to fueling, some of the gas engine buses must fill their tanks daily at local gas stations. On-site fuel use must be recorded manually.

Other shortcomings of the current facility are a lack of shower or exercise rooms, limited inventory storage area so that purchasing supplies in bulk is not possible, a single spare room that functions as an employee interview room, union meeting room, hosts vendor or insurance meetings, is used for training, serves as the auditors room and is used as the lunch room when available.

Kalosky contrasted these conditions to those at the new facility. It will have 12 maintenance bays, on-site gas and diesel fuel tanks, two automatic bus wash lanes and a chassis wash. The large parts room will allow for ordering inventory parts in larger quantities to save on costs. Employees will enjoy covered parking, a lunch room, a quiet room, lockers, showers and an exercise room. The new facility will have a security system and cameras. All in all, it will be a much better working and operating environment. The current NET fleet consists of 39 transit buses and 43 paratransit vehicles. As the new facility is designed for 49 buses and 49 paratransit vehicles, it can efficiently meet all NET's vehicle storage needs.

Comments from the Public

Lawrence Truman questioned whether the number of buses housed at the new facility would constitute a pollution source, particularly for carbon dioxide. He suggested that an all electric fleet of buses would be more appropriate.

Comments from Operating Entities

Richard Sunderhauf noted that many bus stop locations in downtown Hartford were being moved. In particular, he mentioned that there will be no more buses stopping in front of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Rick Schreiner informed the Commission that the contract between Naugatuck Valley Community College and HARTransit to implement a UPass system in the Danbury area for NVCC students has been drawn up and is now under review by the Attorney General's office.

Francis Pickering related that ConnDOT Commissioner Jim Redeker had spoken at a MORE Commission meeting at the Greater Hartford Transit District. One topic that came up with potential consolidation of some transit districts. Commissioner Redeker said there is potential for this at some future time but no action on this front is imminent.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney mentioned that a Wall Street Journal article noted most railroads will not meet the 2015 deadline for the installation of positive train control on their locomotives. Only 39% of all locomotives and only 29% of commuter railroad locomotives are likely to be PTC-equipped by the end-of-2015 deadline. Amtrak is running well ahead of these averages with 85.8% of its locomotives expected to be fully PTC equipped by the deadline, including 97.9% of its Northeast Corridor locomotives.

Another Wall Street Journal article discussed Atlanta's new 2.7-mile streetcar system, which opened in December 2014 with a \$98 million price tag. Transit advocates debate whether that amount of money could have accomplished

more if used to expand bus service in Atlanta. A similar streetcar system set to open in Washington, DC later this year is over two years behind schedule. The Portland, Oregon streetcar system, which has expanded several times from its initial 4.8-mile length to 14.7 miles today, was cited as a successful example of this concept.

Kevin next mentioned an invitation from Nick Lownes for the Commission to make a presentation at a transportation seminar series Nick is hosting for graduate students at lunch times on Mondays. A November 16 date has been set aside for the Commission. The format of a Commission public hearing was discussed with either speakers from UConn presenting testimony on current transportation topics at the university or using testimony that is typically brought before the Commission to illustrate the types of issues raised and how the information presented to the Commission is put to use.

Francis Pickering began a discussion regarding whether the UPass format for bus transportation for college students could be expanded from piecemeal programs to a universal program, perhaps via a mandate from the Board of Regents. The benefits of this and some obstacles to doing this were noted. Francis also mentioned that the Western Connecticut Council of Governments is working on a study of the transportation needs of the students at the Stamford UConn campus. Another COG study is looking at standardizing the procedures and pricing of parking at the rail stations along the New Haven Line.

Old Business

Fred Riese said that the agreement between HARTransit and Naugatuck Valley Community College to expand that school's UPass program to the Danbury campus is good news but that there has been no progress on the larger issue of crafting an arrangement to use Peter Pan's service between Waterbury and Danbury to fashion a discount bus connection between the NVCC campuses in those two cities. After a very productive meeting at the college on July 1, there has been no feedback from Peter Pan.

Fall Public Hearings

Fred Riese reminded members of the four fall public hearings which have been scheduled for September 9 in Derby, September 30 in Old Saybrook, October 6 in Windsor Locks and October 13 in Stamford, all at 7:00 pm. A press release for the Derby hearing went out and he had one radio interview covering the fall hearings. He encouraged members to attend the hearings.

New Business

Fred Riese mentioned that the Federal Railroad Administration has just released the Tier I Environmental Impact Statement and Service Plans looking at alternatives for upgrading and/or expanding infrastructure and service in the

Northeast Corridor. On another rail note, the Waterbury Republican-American had an article yesterday on plans by Pan Am Railroad to construct a propane reload facility on their rail line in Waterbury adjacent to Thomaston Avenue.

According to Al Sylvestre, a recent Washington Post article reported that taxis in New York City are now commonly parked at mid-day due to a lack of business in the wake of the loss of customers to Uber and Lyft. This prompted Francis Pickering to wonder if the State could benefit by using the Uber/Lyft model to operate subsidized ADA service along the lines of the Metro Access Voucher Program, providing that the operators had accessible vehicles.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:03 pm.