

**CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
2003 ANNUAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
RESPONSES**

1. THE COMMISSION AGAIN COMMENDS CONNDOT FOR UNDERTAKING THE NEW HAVEN, HARTFORD, SPRINGFIELD COMMUTER RAIL STUDY, WHICH IS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY, AND ENDORSES THE STUDY STRATEGY OF LOOKING AT A RANGE OF BUILD OPTIONS TO EVALUATE THE VALUE AND COST OF VARIOUS PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS AND SERVICE LEVELS. THE COMMISSION BELIEVES THAT AN AS-YET-UNIDENTIFIED MID-RANGE OPTION BETWEEN THE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM BUILD STUDY OPTIONS WILL ULTIMATELY BE THE MOST PRUDENT SERVICE LEVEL TO ADVANCE TO THE DESIGN PHASE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUTER SERVICE ON THIS LINE.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

The “New Haven – Hartford – Springfield Commuter Rail Implementation Plan” is being conducted to identify actions that would need to be taken to implement adequate and viable commuter rail service along this corridor. Rail commuter service scenarios include consideration of a transit link to Bradley International Airport. The study is scheduled to be completed in mid-2004.

The study includes the evaluation of existing facilities and track capacity to determine what level of commuter rail service can be accommodated with the existing infrastructure, as well as what level of service could be provided with various infrastructure modifications. A number of commuter rail service scenarios are being evaluated, along with the ridership, costs, and infrastructure improvements associated with each scenario. The evaluation will consider the type and procurement of rolling stock; rolling stock maintenance, shop, and storage yard requirements; the type of passenger boarding platforms (high vs. low level), and the need for grade separated pedestrian track crossings. Site-specific potential station locations and parking requirements are being identified in coordination with the municipalities, including the station’s potential to attract economic and transit-oriented development.

The current and future needs of all users (shippers, freight railroads, Amtrak and ConnDOT) are being assessed and environmental constraints and considerations will be identified. An Implementation Plan will be developed by the Department in coordination with the study Steering Committee, for consideration by the Transportation Strategy Board and State Legislature.

2. THE COMMISSION RECOGNIZES THE STRONG SUCCESS OF THE TWO INTERREGIONAL RAIL SHUTTLE SERVICES BETWEEN WESTERN CONNECTICUT AND METRO-NORTH RAILROAD'S HARLEM LINE. GIVEN THE POPULARITY OF THESE PROGRAMS TO STATE RESIDENTS, THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT THE REMAINDER OF THE STATIONS ON THE HARLEM LINE BE EXAMINED FOR POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION OF SIMILAR SHUTTLE SERVICES.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

The Department will consider the feasibility of conducting a study within its current budget, to determine the need for and viability of additional bus shuttle service between Connecticut and rail stations along the New York Harlem Line. The Department will report back to the CPTC regarding whether and when such a study can be initiated.

3. THE COMMISSION COMMENDS THE DEPARTMENT FOR ENTERING INTO A LEASE/LEASEBACK FINANCING AGREEMENT ON 84 PIECES ON CONNDOT-OWNED ROLLING STOCK, GENERATING \$29,000,000 FOR THE M-2 OVERHAUL PROGRAM. UNDER THIS FORM OF TAX ADVANTAGE LEASING, CONNDOT WILL MAINTAIN OPERATING CONTROL OVER THE 40 M-2 CARS, 40 BOMBARDIER COACHES AND 4 GENESIS LOCOMOTIVES COVERED BY THE LEASE, BUT HAS SIMPLY SOLD THE TAX DEPRECIATION RIGHTS FOR THIS EQUIPMENT TO A 3-BANK CONSORTIUM, THEREBY GENERATING \$29,000,000 IN NEEDED FUNDING FOR THE OVERHAUL PROGRAM AT NO COST TO THE STATE.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

The Department of Transportation acknowledges the Commission's support for the Department's use of lease financing arrangements for transit-related capital investments, such as the M-2 overhaul program. However, this funding mechanism may not be available to the Department in the future since Congress is considering several proposals that would eliminate this option. The Senate Finance Committee and the Bush Administration have introduced proposals that are aimed at blocking several corporate tax shelters, focusing on companies that reap billions of dollars in tax benefits by buying public works like subways and sewer systems from cities and states and then leasing them back. The Department has been in contact with Connecticut's Congressional delegation to alert them to our concerns. The Department suggests that the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission relay its position on this matter to the Congressional delegation.

4. THE COMMISSION CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT NEEDS TO AGGRESIVELY PROMOTE A FAVORABLE CLIMATE TO ENCOURAGE RAIL INTERMODAL FREIGHT INTO AND THROUGH THIS STATE, AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO INCREASING CONGESTION OF OUR HIGHWAYS, CAUSED IN SUBSTANTIAL PART BY THE MOVEMENT OF FREIGHT BY TRUCKS.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

As indicated in the past, the Department continues to promote the maintenance of the existing rail freight infrastructure and the expansion of rail freight service wherever feasible. ConnDOT has maintained a Local Rail Freight Assistance Program that has provided funds and rail infrastructure components to various Connecticut freight rail operators. Connecticut also has a Tax Exemption program, which permits freight railroads to avoid paying their gross receipts taxes as long as they are investing those funds in pre-approved infrastructure improvements.

To understand the issues and opportunities associated with the movement of goods within and through the State, ConnDOT has conducted intermodal freight studies, interviewed freight operators (all modes) and has conducted commodity flow studies regarding shipments into, out of and through the State. Findings indicate that the majority of the freight that travels into or through Connecticut is being transported using trucks. This is primarily because the nature of the commodity or the business (either the size of the load or the reliability of the shipment delivery) determines how that trip is made. ConnDOT has found that the most difficult issue to deal with in Connecticut regarding the diversion of freight from one mode to another is that the major decision that determines how a commodity is shipped to or through Connecticut is made outside of Connecticut. Shippers and receivers are influenced by their business requirements. Even if a less expensive or more socially acceptable alternative mode exists for the movement of their goods, the over-riding factor that determines how the shipment is made is based upon the best interest of the company.

Connecticut continues to participate in the I-95 Corridor Coalition, which is involved in addressing the constraints associated with providing more rail service in the I-95 corridor and the region. The Department also continues to work with the Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials (NASTO) to improve the movement of freight throughout the New England region.

Connecticut has been participating in the New York Economic Development Corporation (NYEDC) process of conducting a New York Cross Harbor Tunnel Study. The benefits and/or effects of this proposal on Connecticut have not yet been demonstrated.

In addition, the Department continues to participate as a stakeholder in the Environmental Impact Statement that is currently being prepared by the New York State Thruway Authority and the Metro North railroad regarding the I-287 corridor, which includes the Tappan Zee Bridge crossing. This study will identify and evaluate alternative multimodal and highway proposals to address the transportation needs of the study corridor.

The Department will also continue to participate in and support the Transportation Strategy Board initiatives regarding the movement of freight to and from Connecticut. The Department is aware of the issues that affect freight movement throughout the region. ConnDOT has and will continue to participate locally and regionally, in efforts to explore opportunities to improve the movement of goods in Connecticut and the region.

5. THE COMMISSION COMMENDS CONNDOT FOR ITS MOVEMENT TOWARDS AN ADVANCE QUARTERLY PAYMENT SYSTEM FOR TRANSIT DISTRICT REIMBURSEMENT. ONCE IMPLEMENTED, THIS NEW SYSTEM WILL EASE THE FINANCIAL BURDENS IMPOSED BY DELAYED PAYMENTS WHICH CURRENTLY EXIST. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF QUARTERLY PAYMENTS HAS BEEN DELAYED DUE TO THE INSTALLATION OF A NEW FINANCIAL SOFTWARE PROGRAM. CONNDOT IS WORKING DILIGENTLY TO RESOLVE THE REMAINING GLITCHES.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

The implementation of a quarterly payment system began in January 2004.

This system will provide “cash advances” rather than “reimbursements” during the course of the fiscal year. This should minimize the need for large credit lines by contractors. Not only will there be little or no “float” time between the posting of an expense and the payment from the State, but in most cases the State funds will be in advance of expenses, with a reconciliation adjustment made after documentation of actual expenses has been compared to the advance.

6. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FIXED ROUTE BUS SERVICE FROM BRISTOL TO TERRYVILLE AND PLYMOUTH, OPERATING THREE DAILY RUNS TO PROVIDE MORNING, MIDDAY AND AFTERNOON SERVICE.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

In the current fiscal environment there is little opportunity for experimenting with new services. If the towns involved and/or the regional planning agency wish to pursue this with the Department, they should provide more detail on the demand for such services, estimates of potential usage, and possible sources of subsidy funds besides the state operating assistance budget. At that point, a plan can be developed which matches demand and level of service, and the proposal can be compared with other service proposals from around the state and prioritized. One important consideration that must be evaluated would be determining if this new service would be of a level that would necessitate complementary ADA paratransit service. Adding a day-long ADA paratransit service requirement would easily double or triple the cost estimates of the bus service alone.

7. THE COMMISSION COMMENDS THE DEPARTMENT FOR THE INITIATION OF THE DANBURY BRANCH ELECTRIFICATION STUDY IN MARCH 2003 TO EVALUATE THE FEASIBILITY OF RE-ELECTRIFICATION OF THE DANBURY BRANCH AND OTHER INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE SERVICE. THE STUDY FOLLOWS MULTIPLE ANALYSES OVER A TWELVE YEAR PERIOD BY AREA REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCIES, AND SEVERAL RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE COMMISSION THAT EMPHASIZED THE NEED FOR IMPROVED SERVICE ON THE BRANCH.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

The initial phase of the Danbury Branch Electrification Feasibility Study is scheduled to be completed in mid-2004. The scope of this study is focused on an evaluation of the ability to physically construct the catenary and power supply infrastructure and the estimation of construction costs. The overriding goal of this study however, is to determine if electrifying the Danbury Branch, as well as potentially other modifications would increase its utility, allowing for reduced travel time and more frequent service. Such modifications may include assessing the viability of extending the existing service area northerly to New Milford, track geometry improvements, providing passing sidings or double tracking, and the institution of innovative technologies.

A second phase of this study will be initiated following the identification of actions that warrant further consideration.

8. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT ALL MUNICIPALITIES WITHIN LARGE AND SMALL URBAN SYSTEMS, AS DEFINED BY THE FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION, AND WHICH CURRENTLY ENJOY THE BENEFITS OF FIXED-ROUTE BUS SERVICE, PAY A PORTION OF THE OPERATING DEFICIT FOR SUCH SERVICE.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

The differences in levels of local financial support for transit and paratransit are historical, going back to the 1960's and 1970's. Some local governments took responsibility for underwriting some of the costs of public transportation services by creating transit districts and assuming the role of provider or subsidizer of services. These localities still take an active role including a role on the policy boards of the various local transit districts. In the service area of the state-owned CTTransit system only one town, Wallingford, contributes to the financial support of the fixed-route public transportation system. In the Waterbury area, seven towns contribute a modest amount to help support the non-ADA paratransit system. Unlike the transit district member towns, none of the CTTransit-served towns have a significant role in the policy-making process.

Creating a new funding formula, and enforcing it on the municipalities will be difficult. And the State would have to be prepared to eliminate service to non-participating municipalities, which could create situations where a bus route may be funded at both ends by the towns served, yet may not be subsidized by the town in the middle. Thus the conundrum of "do we discontinue the route because we do not have subsidies from all the served towns?"

9. THE COMMISSION AGAIN COMMENDS THE DEPARTMENT FOR FUNDING THE FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A NEW BUS STORAGE AND MAINTENANCE FACILITY FOR THE NORTHWESTERN CONNECTICUT TRANSIT DISTRICT. THE STUDY WILL BE RELEASED IN FINAL FORM IN JANUARY 2004. THOUGH PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADVANCING THIS FACILITY TO REALITY AND SECURING THE NECESSARY FUNDING RESTS WITH THE TRANSIT DISTRICT, THE COMMISSION REQUESTS THE SUPPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT IN ASSISTING THE DISTRICT BY SUPPORTING ITS EFFORTS TO SECURE SUCH FUNDING.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

Upon receipt and review of the final report, the Department can offer technical assistance to the District in navigating the funding process. As stated by the Commission, it is the responsibility of the district to develop a project proposal and submit the proposal to the Department for consideration and inclusion in our statewide transit capital program. At that point, the project proposal will be considered along with all other capital project proposals competing for the limited supply of transit capital funding.

10. THE COMMISSION AGAIN RECOMMENDS THAT THE OPERATIONAL IMPACTS, INCLUDING THE EASE OF MAKING TRANSFERS AND THE ABILITY TO COMPLETE ROUTES ON SCHEDULE, BE THOROUGHLY EVALUATED BEFORE MAKING ANY DECISION ON INCLUDING THE WATERBURY FIXED ROUTE BUS SYSTEM IN A POTENTIAL NEW INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION CENTER.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

The Department has been involved in some steps of the feasibility design of the intermodal center project, and has shared its concerns that the impacts on the CTTransit fixed-route system in Waterbury must be considered before final decisions are made on design and operation of the intermodal center.

There are some clear benefits to creating a focused transportation hub in Waterbury, and assembling some of the various public transportation services into that centralized hub. However, the routing of all buses into the hub simply to provide connections for customers of the Waterbury branch rail services may be insufficient justification. There must be more substantial customer-driven reasons to justify routing one or more bus routes into the hub.

Issues the Department will weigh and provide input on during subsequent design efforts will include: issues of how many of the bus routes can reasonably be routed through the intermodal center without adversely affecting overall operation; the safety problems created by pull-in, back-out bays in the terminal; and the financial impact of any significant alteration to the CTTransit Waterbury operation.

THREE OTHER TIMELY ISSUES WHICH THE COMMISSION WISHES TO HIGHLIGHT ARE: 1) THE CONTINUATION OF TRANSIT DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY BOARD AFTER CURRENT FUNDING EXPIRES, 2) THE ACCOMMODATION OF BICYCLES ON BUSES AND TRAINS, AND 3) THE CONTINUATION OF REMAINING TRAIN SERVICE ON THE WATERBURY BRANCH OF METRO-NORTH. THOUGH THESE ISSUES ARE NOT PRESENTED AS FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS, THE COMMISSION FEELS THAT THEY ARE OF SUFFICIENT IMPORTANCE IN CONNECTICUT'S PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM TO MERIT DISCUSSION IN THIS ANNUAL REPORT.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE:

Public Transportation Demonstration Projects Funded by the Transportation Strategy Board

ConnDOT continues to work with the Transportation Strategy Board to administer these (Section 16) projects, and recognizes that continuation of such projects will require extending the duration of the legislation, and additional funding. The Department encourages the CPTC to underscore the need to support these projects.

Bicycle Intermodal Accommodation

ConnDOT's Bicycle Coordinator in the Bureau of Policy and Planning and the rail and transit staff in the Bureau of Public Transportation will meet to discuss near-term opportunities to address issues raised by the Commission.

Waterbury Branch Rail Service

ConnDOT reiterates its policy statement that the recent institution of midday bus service is not a precursor to discontinuing any of the remaining rail service.