

12. THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT CONNDOT ACTIVELY PURSUE BOTH THE PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF RAIL FREIGHT TERMINAL SITES SUCH AS CEDAR HILL YARD AND THE HARTFORD CLASSIFICATION YARD TO ENSURE THEIR CONTINUED AVAILABILITY FOR RAIL FREIGHT PURPOSES.

The active consideration of a new rail freight tunnel in New York City and the continued problem of traffic congestion on Connecticut's Interstate highway system, especially due to the volume of truck traffic, has resulted in renewed interest in shifting some truck shipments to rail. To accommodate these new trains, adequately sized rail terminals are needed. Connecticut has large rail terminal areas still available at the Cedar Hill Yard north of New Haven and at the former Hartford classification yard. In fact, Cedar Hill Yard was once the largest such yard in New England and still has more space available than any rail yard in northern New Jersey, where both CSX and Norfolk Southern find their facilities strained to their limits.

Connecticut's valuable terminal sites should be protected from loss to incompatible development. C.G.S. 13b-36 provides that the State of Connecticut, acting through the Commissioner of Transportation, has the right of first refusal to purchase any rail properties being offered for sale by a railroad. It applies to land, buildings, equipment or facilities in active, inactive or abandoned status used for railroad purposes that the Commissioner finds necessary for the operation or improvement of transportation services. This statute appears sufficient in scope to protect Connecticut's freight yards from incompatible sale and development. ConnDOT reports that railroads have generally had a good compliance record with notifying the department when property sales are contemplated. The Commission encourages ConnDOT to use this statute with vigilance to maintain the efficacy of Connecticut properties that could support significant intermodal terminal development.

In conjunction with these efforts to promote more shipments of freight by rail, ConnDOT should revise its policy of seeking exceptions to the overhead rail clearance requirements established by C.G.S. Section 13b-251 and instead, by both general and selective overhead clearance projects, enable "double stack", trailer-on-flatcar and plate "F" boxcar access to Connecticut. Also, lateral side clearances for freight should be provided by gauntlets at high level platforms or via non-platform through tracks.