

## ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION IN 2001

Among the major issues occupying the Commission's attention this year were advocating for the provision of sufficient funding for the Job Access transportation efforts underway across the state, and monitoring the progress of the regional Job Access transportation efforts. The Commission also worked on the development of a policy with Connecticut Transit for the provision of temporary replacement wheelchairs when riders' chairs or mobility aids are damaged while boarding, riding or leaving Connecticut Transit buses. Regional transportation improvements in the Capitol Region, including the New Britain-Hartford Busway, the proposed Downtown Hartford Circulation Project, and other elements of the Regional Transit Strategy developed by the Capitol Region Council of Governments were the subjects of several Commission meetings in 2001. The Commission also wrote to the members of Connecticut's Congressional delegation twice in 2001 on the issues of federal Job Access transportation funding and on the effort to secure a new cross-harbor rail connection across the Hudson River to provide more direct rail freight access into New York City, Connecticut and southern New England from New Jersey and points south and west.

As has been the case for the last several years, at both its monthly meetings and its public hearings, the Commission heard ample testimony about the role Job Access transportation is playing in reshaping people's lives. The success stories and high ridership on these services are a real bright spot on the public transportation picture and have enabled life changes which reflect both individual financial empowerment and reductions in State general assistance expenditures. The continuing reliance of these transportation programs on temporary and uncertain funding sources, however, has kept these enhancements, though unarguably highly successful, on a footing of recurring jeopardy, often rescued from cutbacks only at the eleventh hour. Job Access transportation is the subject of recommendation #10 of this report.

The Commission's Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Task Force spent much of this year in discussions with Connecticut Transit involving that carrier's obligations when a wheelchair or mobility aid is damaged by the lift or tie-down equipment of CT buses or the improper operation of this equipment by CT employees. Though the vast majority of wheelchair trips on Connecticut Transit are uneventful, occasionally chairs are damaged while handicapped riders are entering, riding or leaving the buses. As is discussed later in this section, the extended discussions with Connecticut Transit have resulted in the development of a policy on the repair and immediate temporary replacement of the damaged wheelchair or mobility aid. The Commission appreciates Connecticut Transit's cooperation and flexibility in this matter.

During 1999 and 2000, the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) undertook a comprehensive planning study of potential transit system solutions to serve the Capitol Region. This Regional Transit Strategy was formally adopted in 2001 and includes such elements as busways from Hartford to New Britain, Manchester, Rocky

Hill and Bloomfield/Windsor, commuter rail service between New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, and a downtown Hartford circulation bus service. Three Commission meetings in 2001 focused on elements of this study, including a year-end progress report on the various component projects of the strategy, a look at the Downtown Circulation Project in particular, and a briefing on emerging fixed guideway equipment and technologies in Europe.

The Commission wholeheartedly endorses both CRCOG's efforts to take a comprehensive, regionwide look at transit needs, and the projects ultimately recommended in the Regional Transit Strategy. Commission members are participating on the advisory committees of the New Britain and Manchester corridor studies and the Downtown Circulation Project, and expect to be involved in the shortly upcoming Griffin Corridor study also. We look forward to continuing to follow the progress of the various Strategy components, several of which have been the subject of Commission Annual Report recommendations, many of which pre-date the development of the Regional Transit Strategy itself. The Regional Transit Strategy approach used in the Capitol Region provides a good model for comprehensive analysis of transit needs and solutions in other metropolitan regions of Connecticut.

Twice in 2001 the Commission wrote to the members of Connecticut's Congressional delegation to express its views on transportation issues. Both of these letters went out in May as a result of votes taken at the Commission's meeting of May 3. The first letter advised the delegation of the negative impacts to Connecticut if the Federal Transit Administration altered the basis for awarding Job Access transportation grants from the competitive grant application process, under which Connecticut had fared very well, to a simple formula based solely on number of individuals in each state living below the Federal poverty income level. Connecticut would have been doubly penalized by this switch, first because we have submitted very competitive, well justified and ultimately successful grant applications and, second, because our higher income levels reduce the number of residents falling below the Federal poverty income levels, even though Connecticut's poorer residents have comparable needs to those in other states. Ultimately, the Federal Transit Administration did not revise the competitive grant application system. Though Connecticut has historically fared very well with competitive applications, the majority of the Federal Transit Administration's Job Access funds are not awarded via Congressional earmarks, greatly reducing the pool of funds available for award through competitive applications. ConnDOT is pursuing both available routes to secure FY 2002 Job Access funding.

The second issue on which the Commission sought the support of Connecticut's Congressional delegation was the Federal share of funding to complete the environmental review and planning effort for a proposed rail tunnel across New York Harbor which would provide direct rail freight access from northern New Jersey into New York City, and, by extension, Connecticut. The Commission has long advocated more direct rail freight access into Connecticut for shipments from the south and west. The necessary

Federal funds were secured and the environmental studies for the New York Harbor crossing are underway.

Frederick Riese served as Interim Chairman of the Commission in 2001, his fourth year in that position. Morton Katz continued to serve as Vice Chairman. Dennis Brenner joined the Commission in 2001. Other responsibilities led to the departure of four Commission members during 2001. The services of Tim Grandfield, Benjamin Byers, Sebastian Garafalo and Robert Stalsberg over many years on the Commission is much appreciated, and their contributions will be missed.

### Public Hearings

The Commission conducted seven public hearings during 2001, to gather public input from transportation users and providers, local officials and planners, non-profit organizations, and other members of the public. In the spring, the Commission traveled to New Britain, Bridgeport and Middletown. In the fall, hearings were held in West Haven, Willimantic, Winsted, and Kent. These hearings, a requirement of C.G.S. Section 13b-11a(b), provide information which is then used both in the formulation of the Annual Report, and also to directly resolve conflicts, issues and questions raised at the hearings, either by providing the information at the hearing or by facilitating the contact necessary to achieve a resolution.

The public hearings ranged from extremely well attended to very poorly attended, as seen in the public hearing summaries on pages 41-70. Many issues were consistent themes from hearing to hearing, while some issues were of a local significance and interest. Job Access transportation and funding, adequate funding for transit districts in general, delays in State reimbursements to the transit districts, and requests of expanded bus service, either by hours of operation or particular route extensions or new routes, were issues cited in almost every region. Efforts that transit districts are making to avoid service cuts in the face of tight funding were described in most regions. A repeated theme on the topics of new services was the desire for bus service connections between regions, particularly between Torrington and Waterbury, Torrington and Hartford, and Willimantic, Norwich and Danielson. Increased, or more appropriately timed, bus services to courthouses and community colleges were requested.

Far and away the dominant single local issue at any Commission hearing this year was the desire for a new New Haven Line rail station in West Haven. This call, expressed by over 30 speakers at the September 20 West Haven public hearing was heightened by the release of a ConnDOT study the previous day which favored Orange over the West Haven for a possible new rail station.

The other prominent local issue was the call for the northward extension of Danbury Branch Metro-North rail service to New Milford, an idea that has been promoted for the past decade in the New Milford, Brookfield and surrounding areas.

## Monthly Meetings

Twelve monthly meetings were held, on the first Thursday of each month, with six of these being held at Union Station in New Haven, four at ConnDOT headquarters in Newington and two at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. Four of these meetings were televised by Connecticut Television Network (CTN), increasing the visibility of the Commission and of public transportation issues in general.

John Hanlon, President of the Housatonic Railroad, addressed the Commission in January concerning the operation of his company in western and northwestern Connecticut. Peter Richter and Lynn DiNallo of ConnDOT briefed the Commission in February on Shore Line East commuter rail service issues including ridership, services, marketing strategy, parking expansions and new stations. Steve Warren, assistant General manager of Connecticut Transit, made a presentation at the March meeting on new transit bus and system technologies currently being employed in Europe, with an eye on the applicability of these systems for the proposed New Britain Busway or other busway corridors in Connecticut. At the April meeting, Richard Stoecker, a Senior Regional Planner at the South Western Regional Planning Agency, outlined a range of transit related studies for lower Fairfield County that his agency has underway or is about to commence.

ConnDOT Bureau Chief for Public Transportation Harry Harris discussed the progress to date in efforts to reduce peak hour traffic volumes on Interstate 95 in the Southwest Corridor 5% and how this progress is being measured. Mr. Harris also outlined new marketing research on how to better promote transit use at this May appearance with the Commission. A team from CSX Corporation discussed opportunities for expanded rail service to the Northeast and Connecticut at the June meeting. The speakers were Tom Eagen, Director of Shoreline and Regional Railroad Development, Michael Brimmer, Regional Vice President for State Relations for the Philadelphia/New York Region, and Paige Kane, Regional Vice President for State Relations for Southern New England.

The July meeting also featured three speakers, with the mutual topic of their discussion being the Downtown Circulation Project in Hartford. Scott Silsdorf of Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade and Douglas, Najib Habesch with Urban Engineers, Inc. and Bhupen Patel, Chief of Transportation for the City of Hartford gave an overview of this project. In August, Len Lapsis, a Supervising Transportation Planner at ConnDOT, gave an outline of the study on rail station governance which was just getting underway. Also, Carmine Trotta, Assistant Director in the ConnDOT Office of Intermodal Planning, discussed the recently completed Truck Stop and Rest Area Parking Study.

Carol Belforti, the Job Links Coordinator for Rideworks, discussed Job Access Transportation programs for the Waterbury, Danbury and Torrington areas at the Commission's September meeting. In October, Bill Messner, Administrator of Policy and Planning with ConnDOT, outlined the formation, mission and progress to date of the

Transportation Strategy Board. Sandy Fry of the Capitol Region Council of Governments gave an update on the elements of the Regional Transit Strategy for the Capitol Region in November, while Mario Marrero, also from CRCOG, provided an up-to-the-minute picture of the Hartford area's Job Access transportation efforts. Tom White, Manager of Transportation Programs with The Work Place, Inc., did the same in December for the Fairfield County Job Access transportation efforts.

Our thanks and appreciation go out to all of these speakers for keeping us well informed on timely issues affecting public transportation in Connecticut. The Commission was indeed very fortunate to have such knowledgeable and expert presenters at its monthly meetings.

#### East of the Hudson Rail Operations Task Force

The East of Hudson Rail Operations Task Force continued its regular meetings in New York City under the active chairmanship of Congressman Jerrold A. Nadler of New York. The Task Force consists of operating railroads which serve the New York City area, commuter operating agencies, city and state transportation officials and public planning agencies. Though the State of Connecticut is not officially represented on the Task Force, the informal recording secretary is also a member of the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission. The Task Force would welcome interest, participation and support from the State of Connecticut and Connecticut planning organizations.

During the past year, the Task Force heard regular reports from railroads and government agencies regarding their operations and studies. The railroads gave reports telling of new rail freight business and voiced continuing frustrations with weight restrictions and overhead clearance problems. Most urgent, however, was the problem of insufficient yard and intermodal transfer space and land. Regarding the latter, the Task Force is urging the preservation of key yard locations at Harlem River, Bay Ridge and the potential sites on the Phelps-Dodge property in Queens and at the Pilgrim State Hospital in east central Long Island. Action to preserve these sites is made more difficult by the multiple public agencies involved.

The Task Force continues to take a strong, positive interest in the Cross Harbor Tunnel and hopes that Connecticut officials will be persuaded to become involved in this aspect of the Task Force's work. Congressman Christopher Shays has taken a positive interest and has been invited by Congressman Nadler to be Co-chairman of the Task Force. Such a tunnel would shorten Connecticut's connection to the rest of the national rail network.

Overhead clearance studies are still underway on the Long Island Railroad. Also, the Long Island Railroad is examining its undergrade bridges with a view toward possibly increasing freight car weight limits. Metro-North, which desires to accommodate more freight trains, is measuring its overhead clearances. Metro-North is also working with New York State DOT to raise the so-called "Sugar Refinery Bridge" in Yonkers so that

trailer-on-flatcar (TOFC) trains can finally begin service to New York City, via the now complete “Full Freight Access Connection”.

Finally, the Task Force has benefited from a series of formal presentations from experts including railroad marketing officials and the consultants conducting the Mid-Atlantic Rail Operations Plan, and also by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council.

### ADA Task Force

The Commission’s Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Task Force felt there was a need for a wheelchair policy to be established by Connecticut Transit in order to handle situations where an accident on the bus damaged or disabled the wheelchair or mobility aid being used by a disabled bus rider. Under existing practice, Connecticut Transit would transport a passenger either to the hospital, in the event of an injury, or to the rider’s residence. In either case, the rider was left without functional mobility until the wheelchair or mobility aid could be repaired. As far as the repair itself, in most cases the chair owner arranged for the repair, with Connecticut Transit reimbursing the expense if they were responsible for the damage.

The ADA Task Force sought a policy whereby Connecticut Transit would provide immediate temporary replacement of the wheelchair or mobility aid until the bus rider’s equipment could be repaired. If the damage was done as a result of Connecticut Transit’s lift equipment operating improperly or due to bus driver error in the operation of the lift, Connecticut Transit would be responsible for the repair. The Task Force members met with Vicki L. Shotland, Connecticut Transit’s Assistant General Manager for Transit Services, to discuss a workable arrangement for handling such situations. The three geographically separate divisions of Connecticut Transit and the multiple types of wheelchairs and mobility aids made it impractical for Connecticut Transit to simply keep equipment on hand to handle such emergency situations.

This meeting and several subsequent phone conversations resulted in the development of a wheelchair policy by Connecticut Transit which will greatly improve the situation that disabled bus riders can find themselves in as a result of these infrequent incidents of wheelchair damage. Under the new policy, when such an event occurs, a supervisor will be dispatched to the scene to assess the situation. If the wheelchair or mobility aid is indeed damaged or inoperable, Connecticut Transit will arrange for a handivan or ambulance to transport the bus rider home. Obviously, if the accident resulted in an injury requiring medical attention, an ambulance would be called immediately and the injured person brought to the hospital.

The damaged wheelchair will be taken by the supervisor to a vendor who is capable of making the appropriate repairs. If the disabled individual is able to use a manual wheelchair, Connecticut Transit will supply one until the individual’s wheelchair is repaired and returned to them. If the person is unable to use a manual wheelchair and

requires a power assisted wheelchair or scooter, Connecticut Transit will contact a local supplier who can get the proper equipment to the disabled individual promptly. Upon repair, the individual's own chair or scooter will be returned to them.

This new policy will allow the disabled community to feel secure when traveling on Connecticut Transit buses. Admittedly, these situations do not arise often, but, as with the Guaranteed Ride Home program for other transit use, it is the peace of mind of knowing that alternative transportation is available in the event of an emergency, that is a strong incentive for encouraging transit use.

Another side benefit resulted from these discussions. The meeting of the ADA Task Force members and Connecticut Transit took place at the CT Transit Hartford Division facility on Leibert Road. The Task Force members had difficulty entering this facility due to the heavy, non-power assisted doors. This was brought to the attention of Ms. Shotland. We have since been advised that Connecticut Transit will install power assisted doors at the main entrance to the Hartford Division offices.

### Vehicle Occupancy Ratio Analysis

The Connecticut Public Transportation Commission is required by Section 13b-11b of the Connecticut General Statutes to monitor progress toward achieving a vehicle occupancy ratio of one and two-tenths persons per car by the year 2000. Beginning with the 1989 traffic year, the Commission has included this analysis in each year's Annual Report, using the ConnDOT-compiled Traffic Accident Database as the source for the analysis. Due to a concerted effort by ConnDOT to catch up on the compilation of Traffic Accident Database information, both years 1999 and 2000 were available for analysis this year and are contained in this report.

The year 2000 statistics showed the best ever vehicle occupancy ratio in the 6-9 AM morning travel peak. The AM peak occupancy ratio of 1.232 persons per vehicle topped the previous best morning ridesharing rate of 1.226 recorded in 1998. This record performance followed a poorer than normal AM peak ratio of 1.214 in 1999. (See Table 1 on Page 36.) The AM peak ratio is assumed to provide the best indication of employee commuting habits because the 6-9 AM timeframe contains the highest percentage of work trips.

In the 3-6 PM afternoon peak, 1999 showed the second highest vehicle occupancy ratio at 1.426 persons per vehicle, while the 2000 results were pretty close to the average of the last ten years. When viewed overall by combining the AM and PM peak rates in a weighted average and by considering the vehicle occupancy ratio for the complete 24 hour day, 1999 and 2000 produced remarkably similar results and were both better than average years.

A discussion of the vehicle occupancy ratios on a planning region basis is found in the report on pages 35-39. 1999 and 2000 were the ninth and tenth consecutive years for which the statutorily-set goal of 1.20 persons per vehicle was exceeded.

### Other Activities and Events

During the past year, many Commission members took part in various transportation-related events or served in various capacities related to the Commission's goals.

Russell St. John continued in his role as freight railroad representative to the Connecticut Operation Lifesaver Committee, dedicated to improving safety and awareness at railroad grade crossings. In this capacity, he attended three meetings and four presentations in 2001. Several other Commission members joined Russ in the July 27th Operation Lifesaver Awareness Day program at the Valley Railroad in Essex.

Commission member Tom Cheeseman, who is Administrator of the Middletown Transit District, attended the Community Transportation Association of America Conference in Salt Lake City in May and the American Passenger Transit Association (APTA) conference in Philadelphia in October. He is also active in the Connecticut Association for Community Transportation (CACT).

Several Commission members attended the dedication of Norwalk Transit District's new bus facility on October 11.

Frederick Riese participated as an active member of ConnDOT-sponsored project advisory committees for the New Britain-Hartford Busway project, the Manchester Busway study and the Interstate 84 West of Waterbury study. He is also active in the Federal Railroad Administration's Northeast Corridor Improvement Program meetings held approximately quarterly to monitor Amtrak's Northeast Corridor electrification program and coordinate that effort with other Corridor users including Shore Line East, Providence and Worcester Railroad, and recreational uses and facilities along the Corridor.

Yvonne Loteczka is a member of the Hartford Downtown Circulation Project Advisory Committee. She and Linda Blair also participated in a user's review of Connecticut Transit's new "New Flyer" buses to assess their user friendliness to handicapped riders.

Dick Carpenter continues to participate on the East of the Hudson Rail Operations Task Force and serves as the recording secretary for that group. As discussed earlier, the Task Force is chaired by New York Congressman Jerrold A. Nadler and is involved in securing better rail freight access across the Hudson River into New York City and, by extension, Connecticut and southern New England.



The Commission wishes to acknowledge the valuable assistance of liaison Laila A. Mandour of ConnDOT. Without her cooperation and service, always cheerfully rendered, the work of the Commission would be severely compromised.