

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of October 2, 2008

Fourth Floor Conference Room
Union Station, New Haven

Attendance: Members: Tom Cheeseman, Russ St. John, Terry Hall, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Chris Adams, Alan Sylvestre, Kevin Maloney, Ed McAnaney, Richard Carpenter. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Eugene Colonese, Peter Richter, Dennis King. **Guests:** Brooke Hoberman.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:45 PM. The minutes of the meeting of September 4 were approved as written.

Featured Speaker

Eugene Colonese, Administrator of the ConnDOT Office of Rails, provided a progress report on the status of the new M-8 rail cars currently under development and on the work on the new rail maintenance facilities at New Haven Yard.

The contract for the development and manufacture of the new M-8 rail cars was awarded to Kawasaki in July 2006. The first prototype is scheduled for delivery in the second half of 2009 for testing. The prototype development is on schedule. Three hundred M-8s were purchased with an option for eighty additional cars. The Legislature has provided the funding for these additional eighty cars. The M-8s will be used on the New Haven Line and on Shore Line East, and will be capable of operation to Penn Station, should New Haven Line service be extended there. The cars, which are being assembled in Lincoln, Nebraska, will be delivered at a rate of 10-12 cars per month.

While the M-2 cars have 116 seats per car, the M-8s will only offer 105 seats each. This is due to two factors: ADA requirements and the desire to move some mechanical systems from underneath the cars up into the cars for greater reliability and protection in poor weather.

Both ConnDOT Commissioner Joseph Marie and new Deputy Commissioner Jeff Parker have experience in rail car manufacturing projects and are lending their oversight to this project.

The M-8 acceptance facility at New Haven Yard will be ready in time for the arrival of the first cars. The overall facility plan for New Haven Yard is being undertaken in three phases, known as Phases 1A, 1B and 2. In addition to the M-8 acceptance facility, other elements of Phase 1A include the component change out shop and the wheel true shop. The M-8 acceptance facility will have continuing utility for car storage after all of the M-8 cars are in service.

Colonese reported that train ridership continues to increase on both the New Haven Line and Shore Line East. Shore Line East carries 500-600 riders per day on its new weekend service.

Now that a full body of service is offered on Shore Line East, with weekend service, more mid-day service and late evening service, riders see Shore Line East as a full service provider that they can count on. Also, more service has been added to the New Haven Line through better cycling of the equipment, and two new mid-day trains have been added to the Danbury Branch service. And an early morning train has been added to the Waterbury Branch service where ridership is also increasing.

Train reliability also continues to improve thanks to the critical systems replacement (CSR) program. Whereas M-2 cars formerly averaged 40,000 miles between failures, that rate has now dropped to one failure per 80,000-90,000 miles.

In response to a question, Colonese noted that the Danbury Branch Electrification Study is continuing, with evaluation of the options arising out of Phase I of the study on-going. He also noted that the rates of rider complaints over issues of New Haven Line car and bathroom cleanliness have declined. Extra New Haven Line trains will be added for the Christmas shopping season, as in past years, to accommodate shopping trips to New York City. Extra intrastate trips will also be added. Peter Richter, Assistant Administrator of the Office of Rails, mentioned that Shore Line East would also be running more holiday service.

In response to a question on the catenary replacement project on the New Haven Line, Colonese said the Stamford to State Line and Devon to New Haven portions of the project are now complete. Work is currently on-going on two other segments: Stamford to Norwalk and Norwalk to Bridgeport. Completion of the project is expected in 2015-2017. The need to do much of the work at night and to work around train schedules slows the rate at which work can be accomplished. But overall, the project is going well.

Peter Richter provided more specifics on the ridership increases. New Haven Line ridership is up 5%, while Shore Line East ridership exploded up 24% to a daily average of 2,355 riders. Most of this increase is due to the addition of the weekend service. The addition of two more trains on the Danbury Branch, to 22 trains per day, has boosted ridership there, while ridership on the Waterbury Branch has grown phenomenally. The addition of the new early morning train has been popular there. The next step to increase service will be the extension of Shore Line East service to New London. This will require additional funding and the permission of DEP to alter the schedules for openings of the three moveable bridges between Old Saybrook and New London.

Progress is being made toward implementation of the Springfield Line commuter rail service. Amtrak has proven to be a good partner there, Richter said. More parking is needed along the line. ConnDOT may be able to put more service on the line even before the environmental impact statement for the full project is completed.

Terry Hall mentioned that recent Boston to New Haven Amtrak trains are operating with two empty cars at the end of the trains due to crew issues. Upon arrival in New Haven, a third crew is added and these two cars are opened up. Richter thanked Terry for this information which he said would be useful.

In response to a question on the status of improvements to Waterbury Station, Peter Richter said the Department is working to make that station more consumer-friendly. Security cameras have been added there. ConnDOT has considered removing the derelict parking platform there to provide extra parking capacity and to make the station more accessible from the street. The Department had been waiting for the completion of the Rail Station Governance Study before moving ahead with any improvements at specific stations. Richter said the Department would take another look at Waterbury Station now to see what improvements might be undertaken there.

On the Danbury Branch, Richter noted that the upcoming installation of centralized traffic control will be valuable in adding capacity and avoiding operational snafus. With CTC installed, it may be possible to run up to 30 trains per day on the single track Danbury Branch.

Lastly, in response to a question on accommodating bicycles on the New Haven Line, Richter said the Department was working on providing more parking capacity for bicycles, first via bicycle racks, then in more secured and covered bike areas, like one at New Haven's Union Station. The M-7s on the Harlem Line have tie-down spaces for bicycles. These are not well designed but ConnDOT is looking at them as a starting point to see how the design can be improved. New bike storage designs will be tested by Metro-North on the Harlem Line M-7s. There is still a peak hour restriction on bicycles on the trains. ConnDOT is doing a study with Metro-North of a new vertical tie-down design.

Comments from the Public

Brooke Hoberman, the Employment Coordinator at Rideworks, noted that the posted agenda for today's meeting did not list the speaker. She finds it helpful to know in advance of the meeting who the speaker will be. It was explained that the speaker for this meeting was not confirmed until after the minutes went out, but that generally the speaker is known in advance of posting the agenda.

Reports from Operating Entities

Fred Riese reported that the second meetings for two studies were coming up later this month. The second meeting of the Branch Line Study for the New Canaan and Waterbury Branches of Metro-North will be held Tuesday, October 7 from 9-12 am at the Bridgeport City Hall Annex. The second meeting of the New London Intermodal Transit Center Study will be held Tuesday, October 21 at the New London City Hall Annex. At the New London meeting, the selection of the project site will be announced. The two locations under consideration are the area around New London Station in downtown New London and an area referred to as the Fort Trumbull Peninsula site, involving land on and adjacent to Fort Trumbull State Park, south of downtown.

Riese also reported that the revised lease agreement between DEP and the Valley Railroad has been approved by the Attorney General's office and now will be sent to the Office of Policy and Management for final approval.

Riese encouraged members to attend the Commission's remaining fall public hearings October 8th in Willimantic and October 21st in Danbury. Lastly, he reminded any members who had not yet submitted their spring reimbursement forms to get those in soon.

Rich Schreiner reported increasing ridership on HART's Harlem Line shuttles. September ridership on the Ridgefield-Katonah shuttle was up 48% to 220 riders per day, or 4,670 for the month. The Danbury-Brewster shuttle also saw a dramatic increase in September, with ridership up 33% to 349 riders per day or 7,328 for the month. Work in continuing to institute a third Harlem Line shuttle from New Fairfield to Northeast, NY. Ridership on the Route 7LINK bus service between Danbury and Norwalk was up 26% to 276 riders per day or 5,794 for the month.

Russ St. John attended Connecticut Transit's public meeting at the Hartford Public Library last night. Despite the poor acoustics and hostile environment, some useful input came out of the meeting. Needs were expressed for more cross-town service and more weekend service. More service was also sought on the Bradley Field Route (Route 34) but this is a Jobs Access route designed to serve specific employment sites, not general public needs.

Speaking in his role as a representative of the Providence and Worcester Railroad, Russ noted that the railroad is in the process of installing a safety railing on the Middletown swing bridge.

Rich Sunderhauf noted a dozen or so instances of bicycles being left on the bike racks of Connecticut Transit buses when the passengers depart. He suspects they are stolen bicycles. Tom Cheeseman said he has experienced a similar phenomenon at Middletown Area Transit where bikes are left at the bus station's bike rack.

Chairman's Report

Tom Cheeseman expressed his concern that an \$8 billion emergency transfer to the Federal Highway Trust Fund was necessary last week due to declining revenues into the fund. He fears that the continued funding shortage will lead to cuts in transit projects. He also mentioned that Governor Rell had cut the funding for the tourist transit project in Norwich. Norwich had not been able to come up with the local match for this project.

Old Business

Terry Hall reported that two-track operations have now been restored on Amtrak's Thames River Bridge and the last remains of the concrete counterweight for the previous bridge have been removed.

New Business

Terry Hall just returned from a 7,200 mile trip around the US in a private rail car. He attended the meeting of the American Association of Private Rail Car Owners in Los Angeles (San Pedro). He observed much rail infrastructure expansion and improvements west of Chicago and, in particular, he saw a large amount of work being done in Long Beach to handle increased container traffic, including the construction of the Alameda Corridor which was built to handle the heavy container traffic from the Long Beach area. The Union Pacific has double tracked

much of the old Southern Pacific route from Los Angeles to El Paso. Installation of the double track and high speed switches has greatly improved traffic flow on this route. On his return trip, he observed Connecticut-owned Budd cars in New Orleans, which were loaned to Amtrak to assist in the evacuation ahead of Hurricane Gustav. He observed at least eight such cars.

Terry also mentioned that Bill HR 2095 passed the Senate last night by a 74-24 vote. Titled the Passenger Rail Improvement and Investment Act, this legislation will fund several intercity rail projects nationally including two in Vermont and one in Maine.

Richard Carpenter reviewed plans for the Tappan Zee Bridge and the I-287 corridor on the Tri-State Transportation web site. The plans show rail access being provided along the entire corridor from Suffern, NY to Rye, though it was not clear if this would be for passenger service only or would also accommodate freight use.

Carpenter also noted that the petition to create the joint venture Pan Am Southern Railroad calls for the creation of two new intermodal facilities at Mechanicville, NY and Ayer, Mass.

One final note mentioned by Carpenter is that the MBTA has reached a preliminary agreement with CSX to purchase the CSX lines east of Worcester toward Boston and the lines into southeastern Massachusetts. The agreement calls for improving clearances to provide for double stack container movements from the New York state line to I-495, with joint responsibility of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and CSX for clearance improvements.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:20 PM.