

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Minutes of November 3, 2005

ConnDOT Building, Conference Room B
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Chairman Cheeseman called the meeting to order at 1:31 pm. The minutes of the meeting of October 6, 2005 were approved as written with one abstention.

Dennis King was introduced as the new ConnDOT liaison to the Commission. Former liaison Cindy Gollareny gave birth to a baby daughter since the October meeting.

FEATURED SPEAKER

Tom Cheeseman introduced Linda Mizzi, Assistant Program Director with the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities. Ms. Mizzi presented the findings of a series of public forums conducted by her agency in September. The purpose of the forums, conducted over three nights in five towns, as well as taking comments on-line and by phone, was to identify transportation issues affecting people with disabilities in Connecticut. The survey covered public transportation and paratransit.

Seven dominant issues were revealed in the public forums.

- There is a lack of available and accessible public transportation, especially in rural areas. This was the primary issue reported by people with disabilities participating in the forums.
- Transportation systems, whether paratransit, fixed route, or on-demand, are territorial and often do not provide seamless, coordinated service across municipal and regional boundaries.
- Fixed route systems often present accessibility issues both with the vehicles and at the bus stops. Inadequate training and sensitivity on the part of drivers can exacerbate these barriers.
- Paratransit services have limitations in that they often do not operate door-to-door, are limited in schedule and routes, and have higher fares than fixed route systems.
- Dial-a-Ride systems are generally limited to one or two towns, do not cross town lines, do not provide for employment trips, and have limited hours of operation.
- Taxi companies are not required to have accessible vehicles in their fleets.
- Crosswalks signals often lack audible components, intersections often lack curb cuts, and the transportation needs of the disabled are not considered when planners design municipal infrastructure.

Ms. Mizzi said that these issues remain consistent from year to year as her office has conducted these surveys annually.

Tom Cheeseman mentioned that the matching grants program for Dial-a-Ride services is to be accessible to towns by July 2006. The program is still being set up. Program rules will be in place by March 2006. \$10 million will be available to support matching grants over a 2-year period. Tom mentioned that some legislators have expressed their desire to make this program permanent.

Linda Blair seconded the survey findings on problems with the lifts and ramps, and mentioned that many of these issues arise from a lack of adequate driver training, which is a bigger problem than actual failure of equipment.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

REPORTS FROM OPERATING ENTITIES

Richard Sunderhauf mentioned that the Star Shuttle, operating in downtown Hartford, has its good days and its bad days for ridership, but overall there is a growth trend. Increasingly, local residents and downtown employees are using it. Funding is in place to the end of the year. The shuttle operates a Saturday schedule of 3-11 PM. Mike Sanders mentioned that the shuttle has run the last two Saturday mornings also. Ridership then was not great, but this service had not been advertised either. ConnDOT is weighing the option of Saturday morning service, as it would require an extra driver shift to operate.

Mike Sanders of ConnDOT reported that the Star Shuttle has on some days carried over 800 people and has repeatedly been in the 700 – 800 riders per day range during conventions such as the National Science Teachers Convention, the National Math Teachers Convention and the Women of Faith Convention. The shuttle carries 200 riders per day in the absence of special events. Overall, Sanders said the Star Shuttle has found a good reception by the public and it would be difficult to discontinue the service. He and Rich Sunderhauf related one story of a wedding limousine breaking down and the entire wedding party boarded the Star Shuttle to reach its destination.

Sanders also reported that September bus ridership was 9% above the budget projections, with express bus ridership up 10% over projected levels. Some commuter connection shuttle services are seeing 30-40% increases in ridership. The extra revenue from these increased ridership levels would cover less than half the added cost at the recent fuel prices of the 7,000,000 gallons of fuel used to run Connecticut's transit systems.

Peter Richter, Acting Assistant Rail Administrator, reported that New Haven Line ridership for September 2005 was up 5% versus Sept. 2004. Year-to-date ridership is up 4% for the New Haven Line. Shore Line East saw an even bigger jump in September ridership of 9.2%, though its YTD increase in a more modest 2%. He also reported that the New Haven Line fleet replacement effort is moving forward. There have been four bidders interested in supplying the new equipment: Alstrom, Bombardier, Kawasaki and Siemens. Specifications for the equipment will go out at the end of this year. The projected date for delivery of the first pilot cars is the end

of 2008. Peter also gave November 14 as the date for interviews for the bidders on the new maintenance facility at New Haven Yard.

Thus far, 86 M-2 cars have undergone rehabilitation. Peter also offered that the new running repair facility will be open and operating by summer 2006.

On Shore Line East issues, Richter said Amtrak is developing a new policy to standardize access charges to the Northeast Corridor. This will affect Shore Line East costs. Also, the Shore Line East Branford and Clinton station high level platforms are done, with the Guilford station to be completed in December 2005. New Westbrook and Madison stations with high level platforms are still in process.

Lastly, the procurement order for six dual power locomotives is proceeding.

Carmine Trotta of the Bureau of Policy and Planning announced that two public informational meetings will be held November 29 (Wilton) and December 1 (New Milford) to present the findings of Phase 1 of the Danbury Branch Electrification Study. Five options will be brought forward to Phase 2 for detailed evaluation.

Rick Schreiner of HART reported that funding has run out for one Job Access service, the Ridgefield Loop, which provided peak hour service to the commercial district of Ridgefield.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairman Cheeseman reported that many New Orleans buses could not be moved to higher ground before floodwaters hit. It is estimated that it will require \$700,000,000 to repair or replace all the damaged buses.

Tom also mentioned that Connecticut legislators speaking at this morning's AARP forum in Southington made unsolicited remarks that last sessions \$1.3 billion transportation package was just the beginning of new funding to address transportation needs. Tom also announced that he has been named as the 2006 Connecticut delegate to the Community Transportation Association of America.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Terry Hall reported that demolition of the New Haven Coliseum has begun and noted the need to provide more parking at New Haven Union Station.

Terry cited the Amtrak Board's recent announcement of its intent to create a separate subsidiary to assume ownership of the Northeast Corridor. The objective of this move is not clear. The National Association of Railroad Passengers opposes this change in Amtrak's structure. It wants to see the Amtrak system kept whole. Regarding Amtrak, Terry said that the

Senate Appropriations Committee is voting on a \$1.45 billion appropriation for Amtrak today. Amtrak's financial situation is looking more encouraging.

Terry just recently completed a 10,000 mile cross-country rail trip, of which 6,000 miles was taken on Amtrak. He sees improvement in Amtrak's equipment and infrastructure, reliability, customer satisfaction, and employee service.

Fred Riese reminded members of the Annual Work Session at 5:00 PM, Thursday November 17 at Union Station in New Haven, in the Fourth Floor Conference Room.

Mike Sanders mentioned that a Transportation Finance Summit was being held Nov. 14 at Central Connecticut State University with prominent state legislators and state and federal transportation officials participating.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 2:51 p.m.