

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MEETING

Thursday, March 3, 2005 - 1:30 PM

D.O.T. Headquarters, Conference Room B

Newington, Connecticut

1. Approval of the February 3, 2005 meeting minutes
2. Featured speaker: H. James Boice, Bureau Chief, Office of Policy and Planning, Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT)
3. Comments from the public
4. Report from operating entities
5. Chairman's report
6. Old business
7. New business

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

MEETING ATTENDANCE

THURSDAY, February 3, 2005

Fourth Floor Conference Room, Union Station
New Haven, Connecticut

VOTING MEMBERS

Dorothy Adamson
Linda Blair
Tom Cheeseman
N. Terry Hall
Morton Katz
Yvonne Loteczka
Richard Schreiner
Richard Sunderhauf

GUESTS

Richard Doyle
Brooke Hoberman

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese

ConnDOT STAFF

Michael Sanders
Carmine Trotta
Peter Richter
Mark Foran
Cindy Gollareny

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Minutes of February 3, 2005

Union Station, New Haven
Fourth Floor Conference Room

Meeting convened at 1:31 pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the December 3, 2004 meeting were approved as written. The January 6, 2005 meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather and thus there were no minutes to consider for January.

FEATURED SPEAKER

Richard Doyle, Regional Administrator for Region I (New England) of the Federal Transit Administration noted that he had traveled from Boston to New Haven aboard Amtrak's ACELA Express and found the service to be very good. He also complimented Commission Chairman Tom Cheeseman on doing an excellent job running the Middletown Transit District.

Mr. Doyle explained that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is one of 11 modal administrations within the US Dept. of Transportation. FTA began in 1964 as the Urban Mass Transit Administration (UMTA) with a budget of \$300 million. It now has a budget of \$7.8 billion. Five hundred employees work for FTA, 2/3 of them in the Washington office, with the remainder in 10 regional offices. He noted that Metro-North's operations fall under Region II of FTA.

Virtually all of FTA's assistance is today allocated through Congressional earmarks. Formerly, FTA staff had discretion in the awarding of funds. The no longer aptly named 'discretionary funds' program distributes \$700 million, while the New Starts Program is currently funded at a level of \$1.4 billion.

Doyle noted a nationwide interest in improved transit, even in formerly auto-centric new cities of the west. Several such cities have implemented new taxes in their jurisdictions to support light rail systems.

The last transportation authorization act, known as TEA-21 or the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, expired in late 2003. USDOT has been operating through a series of continuing resolutions to TEA-21. Proposed funding for a new transportation bill ranges from \$256 billion in the Administration's version to \$318 billion in the Senate version, with the House figure in between these. Under all of these bills, funding for FTA is likely to increase to at least \$9 billion, figure in the Administration's version, known as SAFTEA. Coincidentally, safety and security planning will be much emphasized in the new transportation bill, regardless of which version emerges.

A change in emphasis that has occurred at FTA, according to Mr. Doyle, is that the metric for measuring the effectiveness of the agency has changed from how much money it could get “out the door” to recipients or how many buses it could get on the road at the local level to looking at how much its financial support is increasing ridership. Total transit ridership is up 2% nationally this year, which is the real goal which now drives FTA. Doyle also observed that smaller and medium sized transit systems, such as the Middletown Transit District, are the sources of much of the innovation in transit delivery.

Doyle next discussed the New Starts Program. He described a vigorous review and ranking process that the applications for New Starts money undergo at FTA. There is an upper limit of \$550 million of total funding to any one project, spread out over several years. He cited the New Britain Busway and the Stamford Transitway as New Starts recipients in Connecticut. He also mentioned the Washington Street Busway in Boston and the Pierce Transitway in South Boston as other New Starts projects in New England. Each New Starts project must have a Congressionally approved full funding agreement. The ranking of the New Starts applications is done on a nationwide basis, not within the FTA regions.

In response to a question on the ‘flexing’ of highway monies to transit, Doyle noted that over \$10 billion in funding has been flexed to transit and that this has been done in every state in the union. Flexed funds get transferred to FTA for administration. Flexing will be a feature of whatever new transportation authorization legislation ultimately emerges.

Terry Hall noted the high levels of ridership on western US light rail systems and expressed a belief that light rail could be more effective than bus rapid transit. Michael Sanders of ConnDOT mentioned that for certain ranges of ridership levels, bus rapid transit (BRT) is a more appropriate choice, and that BRT actually had higher ridership numbers for the New Britain Busway corridor than a rail service would have had, in part because the buses could get off the busway and continue their routes without requiring a mode transfer. Doyle also noted that busways could be converted to rail corridors if ridership warrants, and cited the Dulles Corridor Busway in D.C. which was converted from bus to rail.

Michael Sanders said that Governor Rell’s State budget, to be released February 9, will contain increases in funding for rail and bus transit. He cautioned that this was not grounds to get “wild-eyed optimistic”, as ConnDOT was asking for a double-digit increase just to maintain existing services.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

REPORTS FROM OPERATING ENTITIES

Richard Sunderhauf noted that the 3 locals of Connecticut Transit have reached a tentative agreement with HNS Management and would vote on the contract on February 6.

Peter Richter of ConnDOT explained that some recent negative comments about the quality of Metro-North service in Connecticut reflected the juxtaposition of several recent circumstances such as the January fare increase, memories of last winter's operational problems, leaf season problems on the tracks of the Danbury Branch, and the comparison to New York's Harlem and Hudson Lines which have just received new cars. The system has had higher than normal out-of-service ratios again this winter in the coldest weather. However, Metro-North ridership is up 1.5% again this year on the New Haven Line. Over 2,000 seats of new capacity are being added through the Virginia Rail Express (VRE) cars acquisition. The fleet replacement plan to acquire 342 new cars for \$1.02 billion is currently before the Legislature. These cars could be delivered, if all went smoothly, over the years 2009-2013. In the interim, the overhaul of the M-2 cars is progressing at the rate of two pairs per month. Sixty-eight cars have already undergone overhaul and have proven themselves to be much more reliable now. Plans for an interim maintenance shop with 12 maintenance positions are underway. This \$18,000,000 facility is scheduled to be operational in January 2006 and will add substantially to the existing 18 maintenance and repair bays.

Twenty-six of the VRE cars are already on site with 10 of them placed into service already. This has allowed 8 Bombardier coaches to be transferred to mainline service. Reconditioning of the VRE cars is continuing on site. ConnDOT also has an agreement with Amtrak to purchase four used locomotives which will allow dual powered locomotives to be moved from the branch lines and Shore Line East to the mainline.

Richter also reported that a disaster simulation drill had been performed at New Haven Yard. This involved two simulated bomb blasts in close succession. New Haven Police, Amtrak, and Metro-North, among others, were involved in the simulation. Similar drills will be performed periodically in the future.

Lastly, Richter reported that the Shore Line East high level platforms and parking enhancement projects are moving along, with completion at Branford and Clinton due in June, and at Guilford in August.

Richard Schreiner mentioned that new information sites for HART service were being opened in grocery stores and other high volume traffic sites. He hopes to add a variable message sign at a prominent local location as well.

Terry Hall related ridership figures from Amtrak which showed an increase in Connecticut ridership of 220,000 or 18.7% from 1,172,000 in FY 2003 to 1,392,000 in FY 2004. Reportedly, President Bush's budget recommends no funding for Amtrak. Hall also mentioned an April 2 meeting of the New England Region of the National Association of Railroad Passengers in New London which will feature two speakers discussing railroad bridges in the region.

The meeting adjourned at 2.52 pm.