

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MEETING

Thursday, April 7, 2005 - 1:30 PM

Union Station, Conference Room A

New Haven, Connecticut

1. Approval of the March 3, 2005 meeting minutes
2. Featured speaker: TBA
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, March 3, 2005

ConnDOT Building, Berlin Turnpike
Newington, Connecticut

VOTING MEMBERS

Linda Blair
Tom Cheeseman
Richard Carpenter
Yvonne Loteczka
Richard Schreiner
Richard Sunderhauf

GUESTS

Brooke Hoberman
Rick Dumas
Stephen Troster
Bradshaw Smith

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese

ConnDOT STAFF

Michael Sanders
Charles Barone
Carmine Trotta
Peter Richter
Mark Foran
Cindy Gollareny

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Minutes of March 3, 2005

ConnDOT Building, Conference Room B
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

The meeting convened at 1:31 pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the February 3 meeting were approved subject to a clarification that Richard Schreiner offered. The schedule information that will be posted on the HART system will consist of fixed signs at bus stops carrying location-specific information on schedules for that stop, and a variable message sign at the pulse point.

FEATURED SPEAKER

Charles Barone, Acting Policy Administrator for ConnDOT's Bureau of Policy and Planning, discussed the 2005 Master Transportation Plan recently released by the department. This 2-year plan is mandated by C.G.S. section 13b-15 and must be released by January 31 of each odd-numbered year. The Master Transportation Plan is guided by the Long Range Transportation Plan (2004-2030), the Long Term Strategy developed by the Transportation Strategy Board, and the State Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut.

The six driving goals of the Master Transportation Plan are to:

- Ensure safety
- Maintain the existing system
- Increase system productivity
- Promote economic development
- Provide required capacity
- Utilize all available State and Federal funds effectively

Barone briefly listed the major projects identified for the airport, bus, rail, waterways, highways, bridges and trail components of the Plan. Eight major planning studies affecting rail and bus transit were also identified in the Plan: the Hartford-East Bus Rapid Transit Study, the Danbury Branch Re-electrification Study, the New Haven Line Rail Needs Assessment, the West Haven/Orange Railroad Station Study, the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail Service Implementation Plan, the New Haven Line Fleet Replacement Study, the Rail Station Governance Study and the Northeast Rail Operations Study.

The major sources of transportation funding were highlighted by Barone. Forty-eight percent of the Special Transportation Fund revenues come from the motor fuels tax. Motor vehicle receipts are the next largest income source at 24%. Debt service consumes 46% of the Fund expenditures.

On the Federal side, TEA-21 expired on September 30, 2003. The current extension of that act will expire May 31, 2005. Connecticut's goals for the new transportation act, as

communicated to the Congressional delegation, are: maintain existing minimum guarantee at 90.5%, maintain needs-based funding formula for five core appropriations programs, place high priority and regionally significant projects outside of the minimum guarantee calculations, preserve and extend firewalls and general fund guarantees for highways and transit, protect transit by maintaining 80/20 split of Highway Trust Fund revenues and maintain 40/40/20 revenue split between three major capital programs (New Starts, Fixed Guideway Modernization, and Bus/Bus Facility), and support efforts to conduct a National Surface Transportation Study.

Dick Carpenter expressed the opinion that the Plan places too much emphasis on highways, and does not contain a rail freight component. Carpenter also expressed his disappointment with the ConnDOT response to CPTC recommendation #6 on the proposed Cross Harbor Tunnel Project in New York City. ConnDOT favors a freight routing via Selkirk, NY to Worcester and questions the value of the expenditures for the tunnel system and its benefits to Interstate 95 and Connecticut. Barone pointed out that ConnDOT does support full funding for Amtrak and its continuation as a national system.

Barone then discussed the Governor's Transportation Initiative as outlined in her recent State of the State speech and as further detailed to the Transportation Strategy Board on February 15. A total capital investment of \$1.25 billion is proposed, of which \$667 million is for the purchase of new rail cars for the New Haven Line, \$300 million for a new car maintenance facility at New Haven, \$187 million for improvements to Interstate 95, \$150 million for improvements to other highways, \$7.5 million for new transit buses, and \$180 million in other capital improvements.

For the New Haven Line, the purchase of 342 new rail cars is proposed, to replace the 30-year old M-2 cars and to expand the fleet to accommodate the 1.5% annual ridership growth. The remainder of the current car fleet consists of 17-year old M-4s and 10-year old M-6s. Ridership on the New Haven Line is currently running at 33,000,000 per year. If all goes according to plan, delivery of the new cars would occur beginning in 2009 and run through 2015.

The Interstate 95 improvements would consist of operational improvements, such as longer acceleration and deceleration lanes, in southwestern Connecticut and the near-term improvements from the recently completed Southeast Corridor Study from Branford to Rhode Island. These latter changes would include acceleration and deceleration lanes, interchange improvements, median improvements in Old Lyme and East Lyme, and improvements to local intersections near some interchanges.

The 25 new transit buses would be used for improved Greater Hartford commuter express service and other initiatives. The \$150 million proposed for other highway improvements will be allocated to projects as priorities are identified and as approved by the Bond Commission. Additional parking at New Haven Line stations and marketing Bradley and Tweed Airports to attract additional carriers are other specific initiatives contemplated in the Governor's plan.

Financing of the projects contained in the Governor's Transportation Initiative will rely on a combination of funds from the Transportation Strategy Board account, a gas tax increase

phased in over 5 years, a surcharge of \$1.00 on New Haven Line tickets beginning in 2008, and reprogramming of some other ConnDOT funds.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

REPORTS FROM OPERATING ENTITIES

Peter Richter of ConnDOT reported on the status of a new parking garage for Union Station in New Haven. The City of New Haven now has conceptual design plans for the new 1,000 space garage to be constructed in the east surface parking lot. The City will be going out to public hearings shortly on the plans.

Dick Carpenter asked Richter about the grounds for the selection of the EMU equipment over push-pull equipment for the New Haven Line and cited some benefits of the push-pull choice, including lower cost. He suggested that public hearings be held on this issue. Richter responded that EMU cars work better for the New Haven Line, in part because it was designed for the use of such equipment, but he said the equipment choice has not been irrevocably made.

In response to a question from Rick Dumas of Hoyle, Tanner and Associates about the choice of diesel or alternative fuel buses in the Governor's plan, Mike Sanders replied that either choice could be made, but that a non-diesel selection would likely result in fewer buses being purchased. He also noted an EPA requirement for the use of ultra-low sulfur fuel beginning in 2006, which will minimize the emissions benefit of the alternative fuel buses. He related that Connecticut Transit is currently running ultra-low sulfur fuel specification buses fitted with particulate filters in Stamford.

Mike Sanders then provided a budget update. The Governor's proposed budget for both the bus and rail sides falls a little below the levels needed to maintain existing services. Three factors not reflected in the proposed budget are higher trackage fees being charged by Amtrak on the Shore Line East service, higher fuel costs, and the costs of continuing to operate the Transportation Strategy Board-funded demonstration services. Also, the Governor's budget contemplates a bus fare increase going into effect in September, but as a practical matter, the absolute earliest that a fare increase could be implemented would be November 2005. Thus, maintenance of existing services will require supplemental appropriations.

Peter Richter felt the Governor's budget and initiatives were very good for the rail side. He mentioned improvements at rail stations as one benefit. He also mentioned that high level platforms at Shore Line East stations will become a reality at Branford and Clinton in June, and at Guilford in August. The Branford station will be in a new location. A new station in Madison and an expanded station in Westbrook are currently in the early design stage. Additionally, the purchase of the Virginia Rail Express (VRE) equipment has provided more cars for Shore Line East. The VRE cars have also allowed eight Bombardier coaches to be shifted from the Metro-North Branches to mainline service.

In other equipment issues, up to 10 new dual mode locomotives will be purchased, with bid packages to go out in April. These will run on either DC or diesel power. Richter reported that 66 M-2s have been overhauled thus far and that these cars are performing well, improving to 100,000 miles between equipment failures, up from the pre-overhaul rate of 50,000 miles between such occurrences. Also, the interim maintenance facility at New Haven is slated to open in January 2006.

Some results of all these efforts are an on-time performance rate of 94.6% for Shore Line East in February, and 97.8% on Metro-North. New Haven Line ridership was up 0.7% for January compared to January 2004, in contrast to the Harlem and Hudson Lines of Metro-North, which saw declines. Revenue for January 2005 grew 3.4% from the preceding January.

Mike Sanders explained the significance of the downgrading of the New Britain Busway project from 'RECOMMENDED' to 'NOT RECOMMENDED' by FTA. Sanders explained that this is a yearly grade. The new grade reflects FTA's concern over the slippage of the project schedule by 30 months and the increased cost figure for the busway, which is due to more detailed engineering work having identified more bridge repairs, property needs, and other costs. The project cost is now estimated to be \$337,000,000. Much of the time slippage is due to Amtrak's refusal to allow access onto their property to perform environmental and surveying work. Sanders explained that the status downgrade is not a death knell for the project. FTA has offered to work with the department to provide technical assistance in revising the financial plan. ConnDOT has also designated an internal project manager for the busway project. Of the 30 months of slippage in the schedule, Sanders pegged 12 months as arising from Amtrak's lack of access permission, and 18 months being due to the change from a design-build project to a design-bid-build project.

ConnDOT is now ready to interview design consultants for the busway. For this purpose, they have broken the project into five project segments. Sanders said that several projects have come back from 'NOT RECOMMENDED' status to 'RECOMMENDED' or to be built. There is no practical ramification to the downgrade in rating since the rating applies only to the award of New Starts money to the project, and the project schedule does not envision any New Starts money until 2008.

Sanders also clarified his earlier remarks on the proposed budget by saying that no transit service cuts are being planned now, though they may be necessary later if the final budget figures are not adjusted. He also mentioned that Job Access transportation has received a \$2.5 million Federal earmark that will allow the continuance of all current Job Access transportation programs.

The increased ADA funding the department sought is in the proposed budget but it is in the wrong line item, being added to Dial-a-Ride instead of ADA. So this money will need to be moved, but it is in the budget.

Lastly, the Governor's budget proposes a 20% bus fare increase to a base fare of \$1.50. Sanders envisions a deep discount being offered through the monthly fare passes so that frequent riders are not penalized as much.

Linda Blair mentioned that Southern Connecticut State University has begun running shuttles to Union Station to pick up employees and students. This provides for a much quicker trip than the local bus which involves a longer route to campus and a transfer at The Green. Brooke Hoberman of Rideworks mentioned that other employers are doing this too.

Richard Sunderhauf reported that a new 3-year contract with Connecticut Transit has been signed, of which one year has already gone by. He said it is a contract that all parties can live with.

Rick Schreiner discussed a concern in his area that a further delay in the implementation schedule for the installation of Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) on the Danbury Branch has been announced by ConnDOT. He moved that the Commission send a letter to the department requesting a set timetable for the installation of CTC on the Branch. This motion was unanimously approved.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairman Tom Cheeseman announced that House Bill 6338, which provides for a 100% State match of local support for Dial-a-Ride services is gaining momentum and has picked up 20 additional sponsors in the last day, making 30 in all. Mike Sanders said that ConnDOT agrees with the intent of this bill but will testify in opposition to it because the wording "from the General Fund" was stripped from the bill, meaning that, as currently written, funds for the matching grants would come from the Special Transportation Fund. Chairman Cheeseman agreed that the original language needed to be restored.

Sanders mentioned another bill to refund state gas tax money to municipalities and non-profit organizations. He mentioned that, while ConnDOT normally opposes any legislation that reduces money to the Special Transportation Fund, it will not oppose this bill since the department ends up reimbursing non-profit providers for many of their expenses anyway.

NEW BUSINESS

Fred Riese distributed a list of recommended locations for the 2005 public hearings. Greenwich, Wethersfield and Willimantic were suggested as the locations for the spring hearings. Cindy Gollareny will work on arranging those hearings before the April meeting. New Haven, New Britain, Winsted, Norwich, and perhaps a second Fairfield County hearing in either Trumbull or Fairfield were suggested for the fall.

The meeting adjourned at 3:32 pm.