

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MEETING

Thursday, May 5, 2005 - 1:30 PM

D.O.T. Headquarters, Conference Room B

Newington, Connecticut

1. Approval of the April 7, 2005 meeting minutes
2. Featured speaker: Peter Cohen, Vice President for Governmental Affairs, Amtrak
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, April 7, 2005

Union Station, Fourth Floor Conference Room
New Haven

VOTING MEMBERS

Linda Blair

Tom Cheeseman

Richard Carpenter

Yvonne Loteczka

Richard Schreiner

Richard Sunderhauf

Russ St. John

Morton Katz

GUESTS

Rodney Chabot

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Frederick Riese

ConnDOT STAFF

Carmine Trotta

Peter Richter

Cindy Gollareny

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Minutes of April 7, 2005

Union Station, Fourth Floor Conference Room
New Haven

The meeting was convened at 1:35 P.M. Chairman Tom Cheeseman announced that Peter Cohen, Amtrak's Vice President for Government Affairs, was not able to make today's meeting due to a schedule conflict but has agreed to speak at the Commission's May 5 meeting.

REPORTS FROM OPERATING ENTITIES

Peter Richter of the ConnDOT Bureau of Policy and Planning described some flood-related events of the previous weekend. Last Saturday afternoon, April 2, ConnDOT had received a call from the Office of Emergency Management ordering that three railroad openings in the Hartford Dike be closed by 7 A.M. Sunday due to rising waters in the Connecticut River. He and Bureau Chief James Boice inspected the dike opening at Wilson Line where Amtrak's Springfield Line runs through the dike. The water level Saturday afternoon was at least 20' below the opening in the dike. Amtrak was already in the process of mobilizing forces to remove their tracks at Wilson Line Gap, a process which involves cutting and removing a section of rail and removing all ballast so that the stop logs can be inserted into the gap in the dike. However, after seeing how far the river was below the track bed, Boice and Richter persuaded the Office of Emergency Management to delay the order to close this gap in the dike, and to monitor the river level instead. Amtrak's forces remained on stand-by at Interstate 91 near the site. The two other openings in the dike for the Manchester and Wethersfield Secondaries were closed. Ultimately, there was no need to remove Amtrak's rails and close the Wilson Line Gap, which saved much time and expense. But Richter said this event pointed out the need for more coordination to prevent future premature closure orders.

Carmine Trotta, also of the Bureau of Policy and Planning, updated the Commission on the status of six studies the Bureau has underway or is participating in.

- Buckland Area Transportation Study – ConnDOT is in the process of selecting a consultant and should start the study in late summer or early fall.
- New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail Implementation Study – This effort is undergoing final review by ConnDOT, and will be published at the end of April. The recommended option has a capital cost of \$300,000,000 and an annual operating cost of \$10,000,000.
- Rail Station Governance Study – URBITRAN Associates has completed this study. Public hearings on it were poorly attended.
- Danbury Branch Electrification Study – Screening of the alternatives from Phase 1 is being done to produce a manageable number of options for Phase 2 analysis.
- Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Line Studies – Funding for these studies was recently authorized by OPM. An advisory committee is being assembled to partake in the development of a scope of services.

- New England Rail Operations Study – The Interstate 95 Coalition is doing this study. Carmine reported that he had given the study committee a copy of the CPTC’s 2004 Annual Report with its recommendations on rail service on the Northeast Corridor. The recent meeting in Worcester was not well attended. The goal of the study is to identify choke points on the rail system in the region.

Dick Carpenter asked what comments were made at the Worcester meeting for the New England Rail Operations Study. Carmine mentioned that David Fink of Guilford Rail System was the most vocal participant, and his opinion was that there was no need for this study. Other than David Fink, there was little comment.

In response to a question from Fred Riese concerning the Springfield Line Commuter Rail Study, Carmine said there is currently no money available to go beyond the study. The next steps, when funding materializes, are to do an environmental study and then design work. The three new rail stations proposed at North Haven, Newington Junction and Enfield will be major subjects of the environmental study, since all other improvements will occur on the existing rail bed or at existing stations.

Tom Cheeseman read an article in which U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Minetta discussed a potential reorganization plan for Amtrak that would include selling the stations to the states and providing matching grants to those states to improve and maintain them. USDOT would assume control of all Amtrak-owned tracks, fix them up to a state of good repair, and then transfer them to the states. Tom expressed his disappointment that Secretary Minetta would propose such a plan.

Regarding Amtrak, Peter Richter reported that the House has included \$1.2 billion for Amtrak in its version of the budget, while the Administration proposes \$300 million to continue Amtrak until a liquidation plan can be put into place. He mentioned that the Amtrak Reform Council’s report of 2002 is still valid today and worth reading. Dick Carpenter mentioned that the freight railroads over whose lines Amtrak runs are not enthusiastic about the possibility of having multiple successor operators running on their lines should Amtrak be broken up.

Richter also mentioned that, on March 29, the General Assembly’s Transportation Committee reported out the Governor’s transportation budget pretty much intact. The governor’s proposed \$667 million for new rail cars, the new car maintenance shop, and the money for Interstate 95 and other highway improvements were all in the bill. The only three dissenters on the vote wanted more money, not less, included in the transportation spending plan. Regarding the proposed new equipment for the New Haven Line, Richter said the next step, assuming the budget passes with the new car funding, will be to get a consultant on-board to design the new cars. Dick Carpenter asked how long this would take, and Richter responded that he would have a better idea by next month’s meeting.

Richter was asked whether any decision has been made regarding centralized traffic control (CTC) being installed on the Danbury Branch. He responded that Phase 2 of the Danbury Branch Electrification Study will answer that question. The last task in Phase 1, which will be completed in June or July of this year, is to narrow the range of alternatives to be

evaluated in detail in Phase 2. Phase 2 will also prioritize Danbury Branch improvements. CTC is not required, Richter said, to support higher levels of service on the Branch. A longer siding at Bethel is the key improvement necessary to run bi-directional morning service.

Rich Sunderhauf mentioned that hearings on the Connecticut Transit fare increase will be held in Bristol, New Britain, Hartford, Stamford, Waterbury, Wallingford and Meriden. The fare increase is proposed to go into effect on October 30, 2005. He mentioned the proposed increase in the all-day bus pass from \$3.25 to \$4.00, as one he thought was particularly steep.

Chairman Cheeseman backed up in the agenda to take up the approval of the minutes of the March 3 meeting which had not been considered at the meeting's outset. The minutes were approved with one abstention.

Russ St. John thanked Peter Richter and the Department for their cooperation on the dike closure issue. He reported that the first Providence and Worcester train on the reopened Wethersfield Secondary ran this morning.

Rick Schreiner recalled that Mike Sanders mentioned at the March meeting that funding to continue the Section 16 TSB demonstration projects had not been included in the Governor's budget. Rick said that is still the case. In his region, that will have a huge impact with the Harlem Line shuttles and the Route 7 Link bus service being affected. He volunteered to write a letter to the General Assembly advocating funding for the continuation of the Section 16 projects, if the Commission so authorized. A motion to do so was approved on an 8-0 vote.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Tom Cheeseman noted that the Governor's proposed budget does not adequately support bus operations. He mentioned that the general manager of the Greater Bridgeport Transit District told him that his operation will need to make substantial cuts in service if the funding levels remain as currently proposed.

Cheeseman also discussed the growing level of support for Bill 6338, which would provide matching State grants to support Dial-a-Ride transportation. AARP held a rally at the Capitol in support of this bill yesterday. The bill is now up to 50 co-sponsors. This bill would provide \$5,000,000 for the State to match town spending for Dial-a-Ride services. Tom was unsure if the current bill wording stipulated that the funding would come from the General Fund or the ConnDOT budget.

Due to the volatility of fuel prices of late, the transit districts are having difficulty obtaining a fuel contract. The transit district consortium has been unsuccessful in 3 tries to get a contract for one million gallons of fuel, so the districts have been buying their fuel on the spot market. A fourth attempt at a fuel contract is being readied for advertising.

NEW BUSINESS

Fred Riese announced the spring public hearing schedule. The three spring hearings will be held: May 9 in Willimantic, May 16 in Wethersfield and June 13 in Greenwich. All hearings will begin at 7:30 P.M. Tom Cheeseman, Yvonne Loteczka and Dick Carpenter, respectively, volunteered to moderate these hearings. Fred thanked Cindy Gollareny for her efforts to arrange the hearings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:02 P.M.