

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION MEETING

June 5, 2008 - 1:30 PM

Union Station, Fourth Floor Conference Room
New Haven

1. Approval of the May 1, 2008 meeting minutes
2. Speaker: TBA
3. Comments from the public
4. Comments from operating entities
5. Chairman's report
6. Old business
7. New business

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of May 1, 2008

Fourth Floor Conference Room
Union Station, New Haven

Attendance: Members: Russ St. John, Richard Schreiner, Kevin Maloney, Terry Hall, Richard Sunderhauf, Richard Carpenter, Yvonne Loteczka, Morton Katz, Edward McAnaney. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Peter Richter, Dennis King. **Guests:** Jim Cameron, Leo Petry.

Chairman Tom Cheeseman was attending a Federal Transit Administration Drug and Alcohol Seminar in Orlando, Florida this day. In Chairman Cheeseman's absence, Fred Riese opened the meeting at 1:30 pm. The minutes of the meeting of April 3 were accepted subject to some corrections under New Business submitted by Terry Hall concerning work at the Amtrak Thames River Bridge. The clarified text should read: "On June 1, the Thames River channel will be closed to all marine traffic for a two week period. During the next week and a half, the four million pound counterweight will be removed from the present lift span. Trains will continue running until Saturday, June 14 when, for the next four days, the old lift span will be removed and the new vertical lift span will be installed. Trains are to restart operation on Wednesday, June 18th. During this four day bridge outage, Amtrak is not planning to operate any Northeast Corridor or Acela service east of New Haven. Amtrak plans to execute a maintenance blitz to repair track in various places on the Corridor during this outage of service."

Fred next asked Ed McAnaney, the Commission's newest member, to introduce himself. Mr. McAnaney is an attorney who lives in Suffield where he serves as probate judge and town attorney. He also serves as a volunteer at the Railroad Museum of New England.

Featured Speaker

Jim Cameron, Chairman of the Metro-North / Shore Line East Rail Commuter Council, addressed the Commission covering a wide range of timely topics concerning the state of passenger rail service on the New Haven Line. Jim has been on the Council for 14 years and previously served as the vice chairman before moving to the chairman's role two years ago. He also writes a weekly column titled "Talking Transportation."

Paraphrasing Charles Dickens, Cameron sees the current state of the New Haven Line as being "the best of times and the worst of times." The arrival of the new M-8 cars beginning in late 2009/ early 2010 will mark a vast improvement in the quality of the rail service, but until that time, over-crowding and standing room only will be the rule of the day. As rail ridership continues to climb, there are no seats available at rush hour. Even the 'dreaded middle seats' are taken.

Development of the new M-8 cars continues on schedule. Once delivery begins, the new cars will arrive at the rate of 10 per month. Cameron says he is 99% pleased with the new cars, the one exception being the configuration of the seats, but this issue is not a deal breaker.

A lack of sufficient parking is the biggest hindrance for would-be new train riders. With a few exceptions, nothing is being done to address the parking shortfall. The 'crazy quilt' of parking lot management and operation along the New Haven Line really complicates the parking issue. Implementation of the recommendations of ConnDOT's Rail Governance Study will likely require State ownership of the stations but the towns make a lot of revenue from the parking lots so they will be reluctant to give them up.

Cameron expressed some worry that the New Haven Yard maintenance facility may be delayed or postponed due to budget problems. The acceptance procedure for the new M-8 rail cars requires that the facility be in place when these cars begin to arrive in late 2009 or early 2010.

In response to a question on the proposed Springfield Line Commuter Rail Service, Cameron felt that this will eventually happen and that the opportunity for legislators to take a train which stops directly behind the Legislative Office Building would help change mindsets toward transportation, and transit in particular. He also expressed his hope that the availability of a larger car fleet after the arrival of the M-8s will allow for more off-peak service, perhaps two off-peak trains per hour.

Cameron also sees a need for maps at train stations to orient travelers as to where they are. He cited an example of a passenger arriving at Stamford Station and asking a cab to take him to Swiss Bank, not realizing that the bank is directly across the street from the station.

Asked about the usefulness of a New Haven Line connection into Penn Station, Cameron said this is an idea Bombardier is pushing, but there is really no capacity at Penn Station to put any extra cars. He thinks the Penn Station connection will happen ultimately but not now. He noted that the East Bronx has no rail service but that a Penn Station connection would allow reverse commuters from the East Bronx, Co-op City and Queens into Connecticut, which would increase the pool of job seekers for jobs in Connecticut. He noted that reverse commuting in general has driven much of the growth in New Haven Line ridership. Leo Petry of Rideworks noted a need for earlier trains into Connecticut if reverse commuting from New York is to really work.

Asked about security and inspections on New Haven Line trains, Cameron said there is little or no apparent security. New York City and Westchester County do some security inspections and occasionally Cameron sees Amtrak Police on ACELA trains but in Connecticut the only security measure is the very occasional presence of unarmed National Guard personnel on Metro-North trains.

The news is better on the subject of train cleanliness. The main issue with train cleanliness is that there is not enough dwell time at New Haven to clean the cars. The railroad does the best it can, and cleanliness is getting better. There has been a noticeable improvement with the bathrooms and the odor from there, and the delivery of the new cars will help further in this regard. He also noted that some passengers need to do a better job of cleaning up after themselves and not leave their trash on the trains.

Fifteen percent of Connecticut's New Haven Line car fleet is out of service at any given time due to the advanced age of the cars. The Critical Systems Replacement Program on the M-2s has been very successful, with the overhauled M-2 cars now logging an average of 201,000 miles between breakdowns. This is triple the mileage interval that the M-2s achieved previously between breakdowns. He did not have any current figures on the number of M-2 cars that have undergone Critical Systems Replacement overhauls but noted that many of the treated cars have not had complete component replacements due to slow arrivals and low inventories of replacement parts.

Cameron sees ConnDOT as an unequal partner in running the New Haven Line service. Metro-North really calls the shots on all the major decisions but, on the positive side, they do a generally good job on running the service. He said that Metro-North really set the direction on the selection of the M-8 design but the cars are coming out very nice. Cesar Varga did a great job with the M-8 design to customize it to the needs of the New Haven Line. The design incorporated lots of input from focus and commuter groups.

Lastly, Cameron noted that the New Haven Line is the only commuter railroad in North America that has bar cars, currently eight of them. The new M-8 car order will also have bar cars but they will be the last cars delivered in the order.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Russ St. John attended the New England Rail Forum on March 25 in Providence. As part of the forum, Providence and Worcester gave tours of its facilities at the Port of Providence including the ethanol facility and the coal dock. At the latter facility, low sulfur foreign coal is brought in to mix with domestic coal in order to achieve lower overall sulfur content.

Russ also mentioned that Volkswagen is now using the Port of Davisville to deliver VWs assembled in Mexico. Accessories on the cars are added at Davisville, not at the factory, thereby creating jobs in Rhode Island. Davisville is also a major export facility for older cars and trucks shipped to foreign, often third world, countries.

Continuing his report, Russ noted that the annual meeting of Providence and Worcester Corporation was held yesterday. A board member from GATX was added to the P&W board. GATX has formed a partnership with P&W whereby it is providing 200

auto racks and other cars to P&W and is taking an equity interest in the carrier. Also, P&W has now reopened the Plainfield to Willimantic track which will allow connections to the Central Vermont Railway and through it to the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific. Using these connections, new P&W marked cars from GATX will be run from Prince Rupert, British Columbia to New England, cutting two days off the transit times of the routes previously available to eastbound P&W traffic.

Terry Hall informed the Commission that Amtrak passenger loadings are up significantly, with many ACELA trains being sold out.

Rich Sunderhauf distributed schedules for the South Hartford Restaurant Shuttle which began service April 18. He also reported that the City of Hartford, in conjunction with an association of North End merchants, has relocated, realigned and consolidated bus stops along Albany Avenue. These moves are causing confusion on the part of bus riders.

Rick Schreiner said Housatonic Area Regional Transit (HART) is doing an analysis of its SweetHART demand response system including looking at trip lengths, numbers of wheelchair passengers, waiting times, performing a customer satisfaction survey, and doing a peer analysis. A short history of transit in the Housatonic Region is being prepared for the HART website.

Kevin Maloney said the legislative proposal for a 6% tax on deliveries does not look like it is going anywhere, but with a looming budget deficit, everything is back on the table. A coalition of 38 organizations is opposing the delivery tax.

Chairman's Report

As mentioned earlier, Chairman Tom Cheeseman is in Orlando, Florida at an FTA seminar. Vice-chairman Fred Riese mentioned that he has received notice that ConnDOT is establishing a steering committee to advise on the upcoming environmental assessment of the Springfield Line Commuter Rail Service. The study effort is expected to take two years. Fred will be serving as DEP's representative on the steering committee.

Fred also mentioned that very slow progress is continuing on the crafting of an agreement between DEP, P&W and the Valley Railroad to formalize P&W's access to the lower portion of the Valley Railroad lease at the Old Saybrook Wye. Currently, the lease agreement between DEP and Valley is being revised. The proposed changes in the lease agreement will allow, among other things, adjustments to Valley's lease payments to reflect expenditures made for maintenance and upgrades of the affected track to FRA Class II standards. Approval of the revised lease agreement between DEP and Valley should allow the 3-party license agreement for the Old Saybrook Wye to be finalized.

Old Business

Mort Katz reported that former Commission member Ben Byers passed away April 21.

Terry Hall gave an update on the Amtrak service outages due to the replacement of the Thames River Bridge. Starting June 14 there will be a 4-day outage of all Amtrak service east of New Haven. Getting to Boston will be very difficult during this period. There will continue to be service to Springfield but train connections from there to Boston will not be available on some days. Bus service from Springfield to Boston will involve a 2-hour wait. There has not been sufficient public notice by Amtrak of the service implications of the bridge outage.

New Business

Rick Schreiner reported that the Transit Roadeo will be held in Manchester June 1.

Moderators were selected for the four spring public hearings. Fred Riese will moderate the May 13 hearing in Waterbury. Dick Carpenter will chair the Fairfield hearing on May 21. Russ St. John will run the Old Saybrook public hearing on June 3. Lastly, Mort Katz will preside at the June 17 Hartford hearing.

Terry Hall mentioned that Amtrak will be hosting National Train Day on May 10 in order to publicize rail travel. Major events will be held in New York City, Washington, Chicago and Los Angeles. Smaller celebrations will take place in other cities around the country.

Vice-chairman Riese adjourned the meeting at 3:01 PM.