

AGENDA

CONNECTICUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION MEETING

August 7, 2008 - 1:30 PM

Union Station, New Haven
Fourth Floor Conference Room

1. Approval of the July 10, 2008 meeting minutes
2. Featured Speaker: Donna Carter, Executive Director, New Haven Transit District
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 July 10, 2008

Legislative Office Building, Conference Room 1A
Hartford, Connecticut

Attendance: Members: Tom Cheeseman, Kevin Maloney, Morton Katz, Russell St. John, Terry Hall, Edward McAnaney, Richard Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Richard Carpenter, Richard Sunderhauf, John Zelinsky, Bob Zarnetske, Alan Sylvestre, Christopher Adams. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat(OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Glendine Henry, Stephen Troster, Bradshaw Smith.

Chairman Cheeseman opened the meeting at 1:33 PM. He first welcomed new member Alan Sylvestre to the Commission and mentioned his appreciation to Speaker Jim Amann for appointing Alan.

The minutes of the meeting of June 5 were approved with the following corrections: (1) the minutes approved at the June 5 meeting were those of May 1, rather than July 9, (2) under Operating Entities, Terry Hall had mentioned that New Jersey Transit planned to run a new service to the Meadowlands but this NJT service would not serve the new Yankee Stadium as the minutes advised, (3) the Boston to New York bus service described by Tom Cheeseman in his report should be described as interstate rather than intrastate service, and (4) Dick Carpenter's motion, described under New Business, requesting ConnDOT to intervene with the Surface Transportation Board in their review of the petition to create Pan Am Southern Railroad was worded so as to indicate that the creation on an intermodal yard at Cedar Hill or Waterbury was part of the petition by Norfolk Southern and Pan Am. This is not part of the petition but rather is the suggestion of Carpenter for inclusion in the recommendation requesting ConnDOT's intervention.

In addition, John Zelinsky requested that the July minutes reflect that his absences from the May and June Commission meetings were due to an automotive breakdown and a sprained foot, respectively.

Featured Speaker

Commission member Frederick Riese provided reports on several current transportation projects which are in the planning stages. The first of these is the Amtrak project to replace the moveable bridge across the Connecticut River between Old Saybrook and Old Lyme. A kick-off meeting to discuss alternatives for the bridge replacement was held July 8 in Old Lyme. This meeting begins the process of the preparation of an Environmental Assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The existing Connecticut River Bridge was built in 1907 and is thus 101 years old now. The 1,570' bridge consists of nine fixed spans and one moveable span which is a bascule rolling lift span of 160' length. The bridge supports approximately 3,400 openings per year. This bridge will be the last of Amtrak's five moveable bridges in Connecticut to undergo rehabilitation or replacement. The bridges at Shaw's Cove and Mystic River were done in the 1980s. The moveable span of the Thames River Bridge was just replaced two weeks ago with final elements of that project still underway. Replacement of the Niantic River Bridge with a new span to be located immediately downriver of the existing bridge is in the permitting phase now with construction scheduled to begin next year. This will leave the Connecticut River Bridge as the last of the previous generation of moveable bridges on the Amtrak-owned portion of the Northeast Corridor in Connecticut.

A number of options have been considered for the new bridge. Options already screened out of consideration are rehabilitation of the existing bridge, a partial replacement of the bridge (moveable span only) or an on-line bridge replacement. The advanced state of deterioration of the fixed bridge spans and the unacceptability of a long-term service outage are the reasons these options have been removed from consideration. Alternatives that are being considered further, in addition to the No Action Alternative which is required to be evaluated, are new bridges immediately to the north and south of the existing structure, bascule and vertical lift bridge designs, and relocation of the moveable span closer to the center of the river versus keeping it in its existing easterly location.

A northern alignment option would make use of the existing piers which extend northward of the current bridge. An alignment south of the current bridge would require either the extension of the piers or the construction of new piers.

There are various marine clearance considerations that come into play with a new bridge and the different design options. For horizontal clearance, retention of the current moveable span location provides a 150' wide channel. Moving the lift span to a mid-river location would allow for a 200' wide channel. However, there are difficulties, especially for barges, with how the centrally located opening would line up with the navigation channel through the Baldwin Bridge. Barges moving through the Baldwin Bridge coming downstream have difficulty making the turn to the existing opening in the Amtrak bridge due to currents which want to move the barges to the east shore. This turn would be even more difficult if the navigation channel was shifted to the west.

Regarding vertical clearance, a bascule bridge allows for unlimited vertical clearance but this clearance is not available for the full channel width due to the presence of part of the counterweight dropping into the opening. With a vertical lift bridge, the entire channel width benefits from the full vertical clearance, but this clearance is limited to the height to which the moveable span lifts. The current plan would be to match the clearance provided at the Baldwin Bridge, which is 83' MHW. Marine interests at the meeting asked for at least 90' under a lift span because of uses that could be accommodated in the estuary area between the Amtrak and Baldwin Bridges. Amtrak said that ultimately the Coast Guard will determine what amount of vertical clearance must be provided.

The cost of a new bridge is estimated at \$155-180 million with a southern alignment bridge being more expensive. A vertical lift bridge may be more expensive than a bascule design but would be more reliable and longer-lived. If the navigation channel were moved to the middle of the river, then a vertical lift design would be the chosen alternative because 150-160' represents the practical maximum length for a bascule span. Environmental considerations, chiefly tidal wetlands impacts, will play a major role in choosing between a northern or southern alignment.

Riese mentioned that meeting attendees included representatives from the offices of Senators Dodd and Lieberman, and from the Corps of Engineers, the State Historic Preservation Office, ConnDOT, DEP, the Connecticut Marine Trades Association, and the Coast Guard. State Senator Andrea Stillman also attended. No opposition to the project was voiced.

The schedule for construction of a new bridge calls for design and permitting work during 2009-2012 and construction from 2012 to 2015.

Fred next discussed the proposed rail maintenance facilities to be constructed at New Haven Yard. ConnDOT has prepared an environmental impact evaluation (EIE) on the work. Comments were due yesterday. The EIE is really a master plan listing a range of facilities proposed to be constructed between 2008 and 2020. The project has been in the news of late due to the substantial increases that have occurred in the cost of the work. The EIE lays out a phased approach for the construction of the storage tracks and the various new facilities, as well as the removal of two existing buildings. All work will occur with the existing ConnDOT ownership at the 74-acre New Haven Yard. DEP's comments on the EIE, which were submitted yesterday afternoon, were largely procedural and regulatory and did not contain any roadblock issues. In response to a question as to how much of the cost escalation resulted from increases in the scope of the project, Fred said he did not know. The employee parking garage and associated elevated walkway were the only elements he had heard cited as added project components, but there may be other facilities added since the initial \$350,000,000 project cost figure was released. Susan Simmat added that the Governor has contracted the firm of Hill International to perform an independent assessment of the facility cost, and to look at possible changes in the scope and phasing of the work.

Fred next mentioned that the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments is beginning an alternatives assessment study for an intermodal transportation center in New London, with an initial meeting to be held Monday, July 14. This study will look at sites in downtown New London near Union Station and on land near Fort Trumbull State Park.

Lastly, Fred discussed the scoping evaluation for Phase II of the Danbury Branch Electrification Study, which will look at five options for the upgrading of rail service on the Danbury Branch of the New Haven Line. A multi-agency scoping meeting was held June 17 in Danbury City Hall to get agency input on issues that should be evaluated in the study. The Corps of Engineers and DEP were the two agencies that presented comments. Also attending were representatives from the South Western Regional Planning Agency, Housatonic Area Regional Transit, the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials, and several corridor towns. The five options to be evaluated are (1) No Action, (2) a Transportation Systems

Management (TSM) alternative which would increase service within the constraints of existing track and station infrastructure and current equipment, (3) a build alternative which would include the addition of sidings, more parking, possible new stations, curve realignments and potential electrification of the line, (4) extension of Danbury Branch service to New Milford, and (5) partial electrification of the branch as far north as the Merritt 7 complex and expanded feeder and regional bus service. Elements of these alternatives could be mixed and matched in the final recommendation.

Riese also attended the scoping public hearing that evening at New Milford Town Hall. It was a very well attended hearing, standing room only, with unanimous support expressed for the extension of Danbury Branch service to New Milford as soon as possible. Other public hearings were held in Ridgefield and Wilton the following two nights, though Fred did not attend those or have any report on the issues raised at them or how well attended they were. Final scoping comments on this study are due July 25. DEP will be submitting comments to ConnDOT, probably on that date. Rick Schreiner noted that there has been a lot of frustration locally with the length of time involved in studying service improvements on the Branch, and the timeframe of perhaps another 10 years before implementation of the selected alternative. He mentioned that over the years since 1987, there have been 14 studies of the line produced either by HART, HVCEO or ConnDOT.

Comments from the public

None.

Comments from Operating Entities

Richard Sunderhau noted that Connecticut Transit and HART both had winners at the Bus ROADEO on June 8th. Silvio Tenesaca of HART placed first in the 35-foot transit bus class and Reginald Rice of Connecticut Transit took first in the 40-foot bus class.

Rick Schreiner said that ridership on HART continues to climb. Ridership on the fixed route system and the Route 7 LINK was up 9% over 2007, with the Harlem Line shuttle ridership up about 15% and Jobs Access ridership also up 15% . The Jobs Access service consists of extended hours on evenings and weekends on a scaled down portion of the full route system.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Cheeseman attended an award ceremony held by the Connecticut Association for Community Transportation in Waterbury on June 19. Tom was one of the recipients of the Founders Award, honored along with Speaker James Amann, Federal Transit Regional Administrator Richard Doyle and State Senator Edith Prague. Named in honor of CACT founder Tom Phillips who established the organization twenty years ago, the Founders Award honors those who work to make transportation in Connecticut work better.

Regarding Middletown Area Transit, construction of the new bus station entryway is progressing, system ridership is up 8%, and the union contract negotiations are in recess due to the vacation of the District's attorney who is their lead negotiator.

Old Business

Terry Hall wrapped up the construction news on the project to replace the moveable span of the Thames River Bridge. When the closure period for the span replacement was moved back by ten days, Amtrak was finally persuaded to add three trains per day between New York and Boston via Springfield during the bridge outage. Amtrak also ran Westerly to Boston in the morning and the reverse service at the end of the day. Shore Line East ran extra service to New London.

The process of lifting the old bridge span out went slowly but smoothly. Some stuck bearings delayed the final removal by 3-4 hours. The old span was placed on a barge and sent to Bayonne, New Jersey for recycling. The new span had to be winched into place very carefully, inch by inch, to avoid any damage to the new supporting piers.

Removal of the concrete counterweight on the old bascule span was the cause of the delay in the original construction schedule. Only 40% of the counterweight was removed because it had to be broken up by jackhammer. Part of the counterweight is still resting on the span to the west of the replaced span.

The Amtrak 'maintenance blitz' on track along the New Haven to Boston stretch went ahead on the original schedule for the bridge outage.

Tom Cheeseman mentioned that the motion passed at last month's meeting to ask ConnDOT to intervene with the Surface Transportation Board in the matter of the petition by Norfolk Southern and Pan Am Railways to create a new, jointly-owned railroad called the Pan Am Southern did not produce the recommended letter to the department only because it had become a moot point before the letter was written, as the department had at that time decided on its own to intervene. Dick Carpenter asked if an appropriate representative from ConnDOT could speak at an upcoming meeting to give us the department's thinking on the petition. Specifically, he was also interested in ConnDOT's thoughts on the value of enhanced north-south service as well as the proposed enhanced service on the east-west Patriot Corridor. Dick noted that the distance from White River Junction to New Haven is actually longer in mileage than the Patriot Corridor. Also, Dick was interested to know if ConnDOT saw any value in advocating for an intermodal facility in Connecticut.

Mort Katz mentioned a recent Hartford Courant article which discussed cutbacks in the Jobs Access service linking Bradley Field and Hartford. As described in the article, it is getting very difficult for Hartford workers to get to the airport. Tom said he will ask Chris Donovan about this at a soon-upcoming meeting.

New Business

Terry Hall reported that there is a possibility that Amtrak will get increased funding next year, possibly a substantial increase. Also, a matching funding system with the states may be set up to expand the Amtrak system. This is currently done on an ad hoc basis but the process could be formalized.

Amtrak has been doing very well with the business traveler market on the Northeast Corridor, with many ACELA trains virtually sold out on most weekdays. The Federal Railroad Administration recently did a study of the benefits of further service improvements and travel time reductions on the Northeast Corridor. Amtrak has inventoried the physical improvements that would be required on the southern end of the Corridor between Washington and New York. Amtrak is also raising the issue of replacement of equipment to go into service as older equipment nears retirement.

Mort Katz took a high speed train in France on a recent European trip and was impressed with both the speed and the well thought out design and layout of the train, even down to the rest rooms.

Fred Riese noted that 17 Commission members were in attendance for a meeting during prime vacation season and, in fact, the Commission was within one member of perfect attendance. He took this as a good measure of the dedication of the group.

Chairman Cheeseman adjourned the meeting at 3:14 p.m.

