

**Connecticut Public Transportation Commission**  
Minutes of June 2, 2011

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room A  
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

**Attendance: Members:** Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Mort Katz, Russ St. John, Richard Sunderhauf, Ed McAnaney, Yvonne Loteczka, Alan Sylvestre, Richard Carpenter. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Al Naudus, Mike Klubek, Terry Hall, Jan Lindberg.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:38 p.m. The minutes of the meeting of May 5 were approved as written.

**Featured Speaker**

Featured speakers for this meeting were Al Naudus, Operations Manager for the Greater New Haven Transit District, and Mike Klubek, Maintenance Manager for that transit district. Al Naudus led off with an outline of the District's Accessible Taxicab Program, which began operation in February of this year and is funded through a New Freedoms Grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). In addition to the Greater New Haven Transit District (GNHTD) and FTA, other partners in the planning for and operation of this program included the City of New Haven, ConnDOT, Metro Taxi, and the South Central Connecticut Council of Governments.

The Accessible Taxicab Program is run as a voucher-based program where users purchase travel vouchers at 50% of face value with FTA grant funds being used to cover the 50% subsidy. Thus, for \$50 a user can purchase a \$100 voucher good for that amount of travel on the accessible vans operated by Metro Taxi. Thirty vouchers have been sold thus far, with perhaps 19-20 total people participating in the program, with the remaining vouchers representing repeat purchases. The vouchers have no expiration date and are good until their face value has been used up. Naudus reported that Hartford will soon be implementing a program of similar design.

Fares charged for the Accessible Taxicab Program are on the same schedule as standard taxi service. Vouchers are limited to \$100 per month unless they are used for work-based trips. \$36,000 of funding has been allocated to run this initial program round in the New Haven area.

Mike Klubek, GNHTD Maintenance Manager, discussed the plug-in electric/ hydrogen hybrid vehicle that that District bought eight months ago. It is a 22-passenger, 22' long, wheelchair-accessible, low floor vehicle powered by a hydrogen fuel cell with electric battery back-up. The vehicle has a top speed of 45 mph. It has a very smooth ride due to its floating air suspension; it has no springs. The Ballard fuel cell has a 19 kV rating, while the nickel-cadmium battery can power the vehicle for 40 miles. The total range of the vehicle is 150-250 miles.

Klubek said the GNHTD hydrogen fuel cell hybrid is one of only four such vehicles in existence. They cost \$600,000 each. One of these vehicles is in Texas for research and

development purposes, while the other two are at the University of Delaware, also for R&D evaluation. GNHTD's vehicle, which is still undergoing testing at present, will be the only one of these four vehicles to be employed in revenue service when it goes into public use expected in late June. These four vehicles were manufactured in Downey, California.

The GNHTD is in the process of building a hydrogen fueling facility in Hamden. The vehicle has a regenerative braking system, so some of the energy generated from braking is used to recharge its battery. Klubek mentioned that these vehicles are very quiet, which can be a disadvantage in some situations.

In response to questions about the comparative costs of buying and operating this vehicle versus a conventional diesel van, Klubek said a 22-passenger diesel-powered bus of equivalent size would cost \$70,000. One kilogram of hydrogen costs approximately \$10 and is equivalent to two gallons of gas in terms of mileage, so the fuel costs are not too far out of the ballpark compared to conventional vehicles. Klubek is in regular contact with the University of Delaware on vehicle maintenance and design issues.

### **Comments from the Public**

Terry Hall reported that work on Amtrak's bridges in southeastern Connecticut is moving ahead. Work on the Niantic River Bridge will not be completed for two more years. Work is continuing at two bridges in Stonington. Terry also reported that 20 M-8 cars have been accepted to date and 16 M-8s are in actual service.

### **Reports from Operating Entities**

Rich Sunderhauf noted that the GNHTD hydrogen fuel cell vehicle is mentioned on page 2 of the current issue of *CT TRANSIT Connections*. He also mentioned that the Roadeo will be coming up on June 12.

Ed McAnaney mentioned that the Railroad Museum of New England will be running a restored steam locomotive this weekend on its scenic train out of Thomaston all three days this weekend. The locomotive will only be here for a brief visit.

### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Maloney mentioned that he had read a Hartford Courant article concerning revamping railroad stations along the Springfield Line, including substantial work at Union Station in Springfield. Greenfield, Mass. and Burlington, VT are also seeing new development at and around rail stations in anticipation of improved rail service north of Springfield all the way to Montreal.

### **Old Business**

An extensive discussion followed concerning the costs and value of the New Britain Busway project. Several recent media articles focused on these subjects. Whereas the previous debate pitted the busway against a rail option for the corridor, the current debate options are the construction of the busway or no project at all in the corridor. Chairman Maloney noted that the project was an expensive undertaking in a time of severe State fiscal constraints. Fred Riese said that the busway suffers from being poorly understood by the public and he pointed out that it will

offer four types of service: service connecting New Britain and Hartford, travel time savings for other routes which can use the busway for part of their routes, travel time savings for express service to Hartford from the west, and local feeder lines which will serve busway stations.

Al Naudus cited the transit-oriented development (TOD) value of the busway by virtue of being a permanent, fixed guideway system which will spawn development in the vicinity of its stations. Alan Sylvestre pointed out that the State would have to pay back \$62 million in FTA funds if the busway is not built. Further discussion centered on the value of having Mike Sanders address a future Commission meeting to discuss the busway and the criticisms raised against it. It was further debated whether to have one or more credible busway opponents speak either at the same meeting or a separate one. Susan Simmat expressed that all the critical decisions concerning the busway have already been made and there may be little value in revisiting the issue at this point.

Moving on to other Old Business, Kevin and Fred gave a brief reprise of the four hearings in May. The Willimantic hearing was not well attended, in contrast to the previous hearing there. A new bus facility for the Windham Regional Transit District was the foremost issue, along with the need for bus service linking Storrs to Buckland Hills and/or Hartford. At the New Milford hearing, numerous speakers favored rail service to New Milford either as an element of expanded Metro-North Danbury Branch service or through a privately funded proposal by the Housatonic Railroad. Advocacy of expanding Springfield Line service as quickly as possible was heard in Meriden as an important ingredient of the economic development plans in that city. Lastly, the major topic at the West Haven hearing concerned improved transit service to the Marsh Hill Road area of Orange where United Illuminating is building a new operations center and where several other economic development initiatives are underway. Kevin encouraged more Commission members to attend the public hearings as it is not a good reflection on the Commission when only a handful of members are present.

### **New Business**

Russ St. John reported that Charles Hunter, Government Affairs Specialist at Rail America, has committed to speak at the Commission's August 4 meeting.

Two other topics cited as potential issues for future meetings were transit travel training and the Greater Hartford Transit District's paratransit program including its upcoming accessible taxi initiative.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:20 p.m.