

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of September 1, 2011

Legislative Office Building, Hearing Room 1-C
Hartford, Connecticut

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Mort Katz, Chris Adams, Yvonne Loteczka, Russ St. John, Richard Sunderhauf, Bill Kelaher. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM) Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Michael Riley, Terry Hall, Jan Lindberg, Mary Dixon.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:32 pm. The minutes of the meeting of August were approved with the correction that Richard Sunderhauf be added to the attendance list for that meeting.

Featured Speaker

Chairman Maloney introduced Michael Riley, president of the Connecticut Motor Transport Association, and welcomed him to the meeting. Riley noted that a new surface transportation act is due to be developed in this Congress and mentioned some of the issues the trucking industry would like to see reflected in the new legislation, including:

- a greater percentage of funds allocated to the maintenance and expansion of the National Highway System. The NHS includes only 4% of the nation's total road miles but carries 45% of all traffic and 75% of all truck traffic.
- a focus on congestion relief in bottleneck corridors
- promotion of public/ private partnerships but limit the use of tolls
- reform truck size and weight regulations to allow individual states to authorize larger trucks. This is a national position; the Connecticut Motor Transport Association is not asking for anything above the current limits of 53' trailers or twin 28' trailers in Connecticut.

CMTA is strongly opposed to adding tolls to existing highways and bridges. Riley noted that trucks currently pay a national average of 50c/ gallon in federal and state fuel taxes, and truckers in Connecticut pay much more than that. In addition, truckers pay a federal excise tax on equipment and tires. Thus, the addition of tolls would amount to a double taxation.

Riley said the trucking industry does support the establishment of a federal clearinghouse to track drug and alcohol testing violations for drivers. There is currently no good mechanism for doing this. Other positions supported by the trucking industry include a national 65 mph speed limit for class 7 and 8 trucks and standards for improved crashworthiness of trucks. The industry would also like to see the existing 12% federal excise tax on trailers and equipment, which operates as a disincentive to upgrading to newer and safer vehicles, replaced by a revenue-equivalent increase in the federal fuel tax. The industry also supports the administration's efforts to raise fuel economy standards for trucks, and Connecticut's efforts to discourage truck idling.

Riley next highlighted the many extra credentials and endorsements truck drivers may need to carry and the costs of these credentials. A hazardous materials endorsement costs \$90. The Transportation Workers Infrastructure Credential (TWIC) needed from the TSA to access port facilities costs \$132. The Secure Identification Display Area needed to access airport facilities costs \$30. An Air Cargo Security Threat Assessment costs \$28. The Free and Secure Trade credential, needed to cross international borders, costs \$50. In Florida, a Uniform Port Access Credential, needed to access Florida ports, costs \$85. Riley asked if these various credentials could be consolidated into one coded credential with the applicable endorsements included to save on both costs and bookkeeping.

The trucking industry also supports greater 2-way access at the Mexican border. He noted that Mexican trucks and drivers have to meet all American standards for equipment and qualifications and have to be competent in English.

In response to a question concerning whether there has been any improvement in overnight trucking capacity along Connecticut's highways, Riley replied that in fact there has been some diminishment of the overnight parking supply as the Interstate 95 service plaza in Milford is under reconstruction and the truck parking capacity there has been temporarily lost. ConnDOT had considered eliminating truck parking at this location altogether but has had a change of heart on that issue. Mike noted that every night, every public and private truck parking space in Connecticut is occupied and still 1,200 trucks go looking for parking spaces, ending up on highway shoulders or in Wal-Mart lots, etc. Police generally are pretty good about not harassing these truckers as they know there are no good options for them and sending them back on the road usually means they are driving an illegal number of hours without rest. Planned upgrades of all state rest areas will ultimately provide some new spaces but not nearly enough to meet the demand.

Responding to a question as to whether auxiliary power units (APUs) are now standard equipment on new trucks, Riley replied that they are not. They are generally a \$6,000 option and their 400 pound weight decreases the allowable cargo carrying capacity of the trucks they are installed in. But in Connecticut, a recent change allows trucks with APUs to receive a 400# waiver on gross vehicle weight. Such units are coming into greater and greater use. Most use diesel fuel but some are battery powered.

Riley was asked if Connecticut trucking companies are still going out of business, as was the case when he spoke at an April 1, 2010 Commission meeting. Riley replied in the affirmative, citing the moving industry and construction equipment haulers as being particularly hard hit. But freight haulers are beginning to experience better times now.

When asked about any progress being made in formulating a new Surface Transportation Act to replace the now-expired SAFETY-LU, Riley said he expects to see a big transportation infrastructure construction component in the President's upcoming jobs bill.

Much of the revenue raised from Connecticut's gross receipts tax, which is supposed to be targeted to the State's Special Transportation Fund, still goes into the General Fund. Further, of the money going into the Special Transportation Fund, much is used to support transit

services, such as covering the deficit on Shore Line East as one example. Riley pointed to the need to widen Interstate 84 in Waterbury as a more pressing need for such funds. He also cited last year's 3c/ gallon increase in the diesel fuel tax rate, which along with an annual adjustment of 3.3c/gallon, saw diesel fuel taxes increase by 6.3c per gallon in the last year.

Comments from the Public

Terry Hall informed the Commission that construction work is progressing on Amtrak's Niantic River bridge, with concrete foundation work now largely in place. Once work on this and other bridges is in place, then passenger loadings and service levels on Shore Line East can be improved. Hall also advocates extending Shore Line East service to Westerly, Rhode Island.

Reports from Operating Entities

Richard Sunderhauf distributed flyers outlining the proposed CT Transit fare increases and providing the times and locations of the six public hearings which have been held to discuss the fare increases and service cuts. Sunderhauf also noted that funding to operate the Rocky Hill-Glastonbury Connecticut River ferry has been restored through 2013.

Bill Kelaher informed the Commission that most of the rail union bargaining units representing Amtrak and the freight railroads now have contracts in place but Metro-North workers have now gone two years without a contract and there are still no negotiations scheduled. He also mentioned that there has been some talk about pulling the Northeast Corridor out of Amtrak and making it a free-standing private entity.

Fred Riese mentioned two upcoming meetings at ConnDOT. A multi-agency meeting is scheduled for September 13 to discuss the upcoming environmental impact statement (EIS) for the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield commuter rail service. Another meeting on September 9 will discuss a New Jersey Transit model for rating and ranking transit investments.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney extended his congratulations on Jim Redeker's promotion from Acting Commissioner to Commissioner.

Chairman Maloney also mentioned that the aging New Haven Line catenary system, which has been cited as the cause of the July 22 service interruption in Westport that stranded passengers on Metro-North cars for hours, is now approximately 60% replaced, but the catenary replacement won't be completed until 2015. Chris Adams cited the continuing problem with a lack of timely communication from Metro-North when problems such as this develop. Dennis King mentioned that Commission member John Zelinsky had spoken in support of a proposed passenger bill of rights at the public hearing in Stamford. State Senator Toni Boucher has proposed such legislation.

As a last item in his report, Chairman Maloney said that, as he was authorized to do at the August meeting, he had written to Governor Malloy on behalf of Dennis King asking for a reconsideration of his layoff notice. At the request of members, Maloney read the text of his letter.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Russ St. John attended the August 25 meeting on the CT Transit fare increases and service cuts held at the Hartford Public Library. Dennis King moderated that meeting. Russ made comments on one route and three bus stops on the service to Granby. Russ also mentioned that he had taken the new Megabus service yesterday to the Port Authority terminal in New York. The trip down on an express bus took two and three-quarter hours. Russ found the bus to be top-of-the-line equipment and said it was about 50% occupied. For the return trip he selected a route that made local stops and it took four hours. The round trip fare was \$52.

Dennis King mentioned that six public hearings on the bus and rail fare increases have been held thus far in New Britain, Stamford, New Haven, Hartford, Meriden and Waterbury. A seventh hearing has been scheduled for September 7 at the New London public library. Rail fare increases are proposed to average 16%, followed by 1% annual increases through 2018. The 1% annual increases are a given but the 16% fare hike is still a proposal at this time. On Shore Line East, weekend service is proposed for elimination. The proposed bus fare increase is 10%. Any new rates would go into effect on November 1, 2011.

Copies of the draft 2012 Commission meeting schedule were distributed for discussion. Due to the paucity of New Haven meetings on the schedule, it was decided to move the March meeting from Newington to New Haven, and to slot the unassigned May meeting also to New Haven to add more balance to the schedule. As amended, the 2012 schedule would see five meetings in Newington, three at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford, and four meetings plus the annual work session in New Haven. One or more of these locations may be revised as opportunities of special interest arise during 2012.

Chairman Maloney mentioned that he is planning to schedule a tour of a new M-8 trains for the October 6 meeting in New Haven. [Note: Subsequent to the September 1 meeting this inspection tour was confirmed.]

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 2:55 pm.