

## Connecticut Public Transportation Commission

Minutes of February 6, 2014

Fourth Floor Conference Room  
Union Station, New Haven

**Attendance: Members:** Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Alan Sylvestre, Yvonne Loteczka, Richard Sunderhauf, Mort Katz, Robert Rodman, Russ St. John, Ed McAnaney. **Ex-officio members:** David LeVasseur (OPM), Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Jon Foster, Dennis King. **Guests:** Rodney Chabot, Terry Hall, Jan Lindberg.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm. The minutes of the meeting of January 9 were approved as written.

### Featured Speaker

Jon Foster of the ConnDOT Office of Rail provided a comprehensive overview of the operations of Shore Line East. The ConnDOT-funded Shore Line East passenger service operates between New Haven and New London under a contract with Amtrak who operates the service. Shore Line East operates 33 weekday trains, 20 of which run as far east as Old Saybrook, and 13 of which serve New London. On the weekends, Shore Line East runs 21 trains per day, 16 running between New Haven and New London, and 5 between New Haven and Old Saybrook. Additionally, two morning westbound trains continue past New Haven to serve West Haven, Bridgeport and Stamford, with one morning eastbound train running from Stamford to Old Saybrook. Two evening eastbound trains originate in Stamford and continue on to Old Saybrook or New London. Amtrak cross-honors Shore Line East multi-ride tickets on select weekday Amtrak trains.

Foster next noted some of the major service milestones for Shore Line East. Originally begun as a weekday service only, weekend service between New Haven and Old Saybrook was added in July 2008. Extra mid-day and late evening service on weekdays was added at that same time. Weekday service to New London was expanded in February and May of 2010. Weekend service to New London was extended in June 2013. Foster noted that service expansions to New London have to be coordinated with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection because of the impacts of running more trains on the marine traffic passing under the three moveable bridges at the Connecticut and Niantic Rivers and Shaws Cove.

For ridership numbers, Foster related that the 2013 Shore Line East ridership was 657,930 riders, up 5% over 2012. Average weekday ridership was 2,245, up 3% from 2012. Average weekend and holiday ridership was 760 riders, an increase of 1.5% over 2012. The biggest ridership increase was for New London trips, with 49,125 rides to or from New London in 2013, an increase of 60% over 2012. For the weekend service, over 20% of the trips had either an origin or a destination at New London.

The dominant travel direction on Shore Line East is westbound in the morning and eastbound in the evening. Only limited stops are offered for reverse commute service because

most Shore Line East stations have platforms only on the south side of the tracks. This condition is in the process of being remedied. A second high level platform and overhead pedestrian bridge will be completed at the Westbrook station by the end of this month. Construction is now just beginning on a second high level platform and overhead pedestrian bridge at Branford. Guilford Station already has two platforms but an extension of the northside platform is currently under construction. Clinton will be the next station in line for a second high level platform and pedestrian bridge. Similar improvements are eventually planned at Madison Station also. Reverse direction stops will be added on Shore Line East as these platforms become available.

ConnDOT owns 7 of the 9 stations served by Shore Line East, namely State Street Station, Union Station, Branford, Guilford, Madison, Clinton and Westbrook. Amtrak owns the station at Old Saybrook and the platforms at New London, which has a privately-owned station.

Other improvements mentioned by Foster are the addition of a second parking lot at Old Saybrook where ConnDOT is currently pursuing the purchase of some vacant land, and a new interlocking at Clinton to split the long block between Guilford and Old Saybrook.

Metro-North-style bicycle racks will be added to Shore Line East trains. In other rolling stock news, Foster said the Shore Line East locomotives will soon be overhauled; this work is just going out to bid now. In response to a question about rider complaints of leaky coaches and other passenger comfort issues, Foster admitted that the coaches do need a little work, which he hopes can be done but there is no funding identified for that at the moment. Longer term, M-8 equipment will be used on Shore Line East which will cure any equipment deficiencies.

Foster also distributed a chart of monthly ridership totals for 2010-2013 for Shore Line East total ridership and for the New London service. He pointed out that the New London ridership has more than doubled since the service expansion in mid-2013.

Fred Riese noted out that multiple speakers at the Commission's New London public hearing of last October mentioned that they drive from New London to Old Saybrook to catch a Shore Line East train if their return trips are going to be late in the evening because of the lack of any late night return trips to New London.

Regarding questions about the responsibility for routine maintenance and for car washing, Foster said routine fleet maintenance and basic station tasks such as snow removal are the responsibility of Amtrak under the management contract. Extra staff has been added to handle snow removal at stations this winter. That is a task that has proven to be of particular sensitivity to the riding public, and the lack of proper snow removal has generated rider complaints. As for carwashing, that is done at the Stamford carwash with one Shore Line East trainset cycled through the wash each week. Therefore, it takes approximately two months to cycle all 7 or 8 trainsets through the carwash.

### **Comments from the Public**

Rodney Chabot took Metro-North from his home in New Canaan to today's meeting. He took the New Canaan Branch train to Stamford, and then caught a train to New Haven, which proved to be a free ride since his ticket was never collected. He said a lot of people on his car

also got a free ride. He noted that conductors don't collect tickets as diligently east of Stamford. It was pointed out that this situation was highlighted in the Commission's 2013 Annual Report.

### **Reports from Operating Entities**

Rich Sunderhauf said that a request for proposals for the fare collection system on CTfastrak buses has gone out. Eventually, this new technology will be used on the rest of the CTTransit fleet. Other capabilities will include GPS and automated stop announcements.

Russ St. John noted that progress has been made on securing an agreement between Connecticut DEEP, the Valley Railroad and Providence and Worcester to secure the latter's access rights to use the southernmost portion of the Valley Railroad corridor in Old Saybrook. Fred Riese elaborated that a draft license agreement has been drawn up and was approved by the Valley Railroad. Providence and Worcester is currently reviewing the agreement and to date has requested only minor changes and clarifications.

### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Maloney noted that bike racks will soon be installed on fifty M-8 rail cars, thanks to a \$45,000 purchase of 110 bike racks by ConnDOT. If these racks work out well, additional racks could be purchased for the other 330 M-8s.

Chairman Maloney next commented on the press release for the CPTC Annual Report. It was picked up by the Waterbury Republican-American and the Hartford Business Journal, both of which keyed on the report's first recommendation concerning diversion of monies from the Special Transportation Fund.

Lastly, Kevin distributed a summary of the 2013 Connecticut Transportation Survey undertaken by the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, the Stamford Chamber of Commerce, the Connecticut Construction Industry Association and the Connecticut Motor Transport Association in September and October 2013. The survey of business leaders generated 651 responses. The respondents generally found Connecticut's transportation system to be deficient and cited the condition and capacity of our highways, bridges and train station parking as hindering the state's economy and their individual businesses, both as to the shipment of goods and the ability to attract good workers. A need for more financial resources for transportation improvements was cited. The survey also found strong support for legislation to prevent the diversion of Special Transportation Fund resources to cover General Fund shortfalls.

### **Old Business**

Fred Riese reported on two meetings he attended in late January. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission hosted a January 23 evening meeting for the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative, a planning study evaluating the expansion of passenger rail service connections from Springfield north to Vermont and Montreal and east to Worcester and Boston. The Vermont Agency of Transportation and MassDOT, respectively, are leading the two service studies.

Second, Senator John Kissel sponsored a January 28 meeting at the Legislative Office Building to consider ways to fund improvements to the Springfield Line including double

tracking between Windsor and Springfield (\$250, 000,000 estimated cost), construction of four new passenger rail stations (\$100,000,000 cost), and eventually the replacement of the Connecticut River bridge north of Windsor Locks. In light of the declining Federal support for passenger rail projects, Senator Kissel and others want to explore other potential sources of funding including State funding, private contributions, or Congressional efforts to earmark funds for this use. Terry Hall pointed out that much of the corridor between Windsor and Springfield is already double-tracked. Commission member Ed McAnaney also attended both of these meetings.

### **Discussion of 2014 Public Hearings**

A discussion of locations for the Commission's 2014 public hearings took place. Stamford, New Haven and Danbury were selected as sites for the spring hearings. Storrs, Waterbury, Torrington, Meriden and Hartford are the tentative sites for the fall public hearings.

### **New Business**

Fred Riese mentioned that Kim Dunham of the Greater Hartford Transit District was recently offered a position at the Greater New Haven Transit District, which she accepted. He also mentioned that Joe Comerford, Executive Director of Nine Town Transit in the Connecticut River Estuary Region, will be the speaker at the Commission's March 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, again in New Haven.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:08 pm.