Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of April 2, 2009

Connecticut Department of Transportation
2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington
Conference Room B

Attendance: **Members:** Tom Cheeseman, Mort Katz, Kevin Maloney, Russ St. John, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Yvonne Loteczka, Bill Kelaher, Robert Zarnetske, Ed McAnaney, Kathleen Anderson, Gail Lavielle, Richard Carpenter, Alan Sylvestre. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Peter Richter, Dennis King, Sherry Osterling. **Guests:** Terry Hall, Brooke Hoberman.

Chairman Cheeseman called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm. Morton Katz corrected the March 5 meeting minutes to note that the venue of the February 20 conference "Can Rail Save Connecticut's Cities?" was the University of Connecticut Law School, not the Hartford Law School. Also, Terry Hall's tenure on the Commission, 1998-2008 inclusive, was 11 years. The March minutes listed him as having served for 10 years. The minutes were approved subject to these changes.

Featured Speaker

ConnDOT Assistant Public Transit Administrator Peter Richter provided a detailed description of the purpose and format of the Connecticut State Rail Plan 2010-2014, which he is in the process of preparing. The plan is a requirement of the federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008. Whereas previous state rail plans in Connecticut were principally inventories of lines and identification of lines which might be abandoned, the new rail plan will provide guidance for future investment in Connecticut's rail network. The preparation and adoption of a State Rail Plan will make the state eligible to receive funding under a range of federal programs. Specific projects contained in the plan will be included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). Although the plan will be labeled as 2010-2014, it will take a twenty year look into the future, but will be updated every five years. The plan will form the basis for future federal and state investments and will include freight and high speed intercity passenger components.

Preparation of the State Rail Plan will incorporate a heavy dose of coordination with stakeholders and the public. Indeed, Richter just met with representatives of the state's freight railroads yesterday. Richter reported that the plan will be listed on the ConnDOT webpage in the publications section.

The plan will incorporate an inventory of Connecticut rail lines completed last year by Carmine Trotta. The next step will be to review the condition of all rail lines in the inventory against a state of good repair benchmark.

Following federal guidance, the format of the State Rail Plan will involve eleven topical areas, as follows:

(1) Inventory and analysis of the role of rail transportation in Connecticut
(2) Review of all rail lines in the state
(3) Statement of passenger rail service objectives
(4) Analysis of the economic and environmental impacts of rail transportation
(5) Long-range rail investment plan
(6) Public financing issues
(7) Identification of rail infrastructure issues developed in consultation with stakeholders
(8) Review of passenger and freight intermodal connections and facilities to maximize service integration
(9) Projects to improve rail safety and security
(10) Performance evaluation of passenger rail service operations, possible improvements and strategies
(11) Compilation of studies and reports on high-speed rail corridor development.

Related to topic #3 above, Richter noted that Governor Rell has set a goal to double rail ridership in 20 years. All northeastern governors have adopted this goal. The historic long-term growth rate for rail ridership has been 1.5% annually. This rate will need to be doubled if the 20 year goal is to be achieved.

Related to topic #4 above, the need to accommodate 286,000 pound cars on Connecticut's rail lines is necessary if Connecticut is going to continue to be accessible to regional and national freight service. Many lines in the state are only certified to 256,000 pounds at present. Unless Connecticut can achieve the 286,000 pound national standard, we will be limited to an ever dwindling number of rail cars that can operate into the state. Chapter 4 of the plan will also look at the potential for rail movement of freight to reduce NOx and carbon dioxide emissions and to increase the amount of gross tonnage transported.

The long-term rail investment plan of section 5 will form the real core of the State Rail Plan. Section 8 will analyze the first mile and last mile of passenger and freight movements in Connecticut to understand the intermodal connections involved in each trip. It will also consider transit-oriented development as a strategy to optimize intermodal connectivity.

Richter noted that rail security has been improved lately including enhanced safety measures and more fencing and cameras at New Haven Yard.

Commission member Robert Zarnetske asked Richter if the rail plan will look at how to protect abandoned rail rights-of-way and even return them to active rail use. Richter noted that in some ways the federal government values bikeways above rail lines as there has been federal money available to convert rights-of-way to bike paths, but not to enhance or protect rail lines. In response to a question from Dick Carpenter concerning the East of Hudson Rail Freight Task Force, Richter said that ConnDOT does attend the meetings of that group, although not every one of them. Regarding the Cross Hudson rail tunnel proposal in New York City, Richter said that Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Joan McDonald has endorsed that proposal but ConnDOT has not taken a formal position on it.

Richter mentioned that ConnDOT has performed modeling of the Springfield Line based on a schedule of 56 trains per day for the purposes of looking at scheduling options. Those 56 trains include both high speed and commuter service trains.

Russ St. John asked whether the rail plan would look at reconnecting the Armory Branch in Massachusetts to provide an alternate freight route to the use of the Amtrak corridor between Springfield and Hartford. Richter said the department would like to see this happen and has discussed it with Massachusetts. However, there is some public opposition in East Longmeadow to reviving rail service in the corridor, and some of the right-of-way is now in private ownership.

Ed McAnaney enquired as to whether the plan will include a look into possible commuter rail service between New Britain and Waterbury as has been discussed recently by legislators and in the media. Richter said the rail plan will include a checklist of all the infrastructure and rolling stock needs involved in instituting this or any other new rail service, as well as their costs. This will assist in informed decision-making about the pursuit of new rail services.

Comments from the Public

Brooke Hoberman of Rideworks discussed the NuRide Challenge which runs through April 30. Winning commuters receive $100 Peapod gift certificates from Stop and Shop. Hoberman also mentioned that a recent changed in federal tax law will allow for pre-tax deductions of up to $230 per month for transit use, which puts transit on par with the existing pre-tax parking expense deduction at that amount.

Terry Hall informed the Commission that the federal stimulus package contains over two dozen transportation projects in Connecticut, with the most significant ones being the signal system for the Danbury Branch and funds for elements of the New Haven Yard rail maintenance facility. Amtrak received funds for the replacement of its Niantic River Bridge.

Amtrak will also be working on the track bed between New Haven and Old Saybrook this summer, which work will require the removal of one track from active service. The track work will be done in two phases, first from New Haven to Guilford, then from Guilford to Old Saybrook. The work will necessitate repeated schedule changes to Amtrak service. These changes will be posted on the Internet but other than that, there will not be a lot of publicity for the changes, in part because the changes will be too frequent to print written schedules.

Reports from Operating Entities

Rich Sunderhauf mentioned that retired union Officer Alvin Douglas has remained active with the AFL-CIO and has submitted proposed legislation which has become Committee Bill 6276, An Act Increasing Fines and Penalties for Certain Offenses committed Against a Transit Worker in Connecticut. This bill went through the state senate smoothly. Chairman Cheeseman expressed his feelings that there has been a need for legislation such as this for a long time.

Richard Schreiner received notification from consulting engineers URS that the next meeting of the steering committee for Phase 2 of the Danbury Branch Electrification Study will

likely occur in early summer. The timeframe for completing the draft environmental impact statement is 2010 and the final EIS in 2011. Rick also informed the Commission that HART will be initiating a new Harlem Line shuttle service from New Fairfield to Southeast, NY in May.

On March 24, Fred Riese attended the first advisory committee meeting on the State Rail Plan and then the New England Rail Forum in Worcester. He has also reviewed the draft ConnDOT Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Strategy Board's draft Electronic Tolling and Congestion Pricing Study in the past couple weeks. He reported that a substantial favorable development has occurred in the last few days with the draft lease agreement between DEP and the Valley Railroad when DEP staff and an OPM attorney met on March 31 and resolved the outstanding issues which had been impeding progress on approval of a revised lease agreement. Final approval of the revised lease will allow for the longstanding process to develop a license agreement for Providence and Worcester Railroad to use the Valley Railroad's lease property just north of the Old Saybrook Wye to be completed. This would satisfy a condition in the Federal Railroad Administration's Record of Decision on the Northeast Corridor Electrification Project.

Russ St. John also attended the New England Rail Forum and was impressed with the two low emissions locomotives on display at P&W's Worcester Yard. Separately, he also noted P&W has been awarded funding by the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management (NUSCAUM) to install auxiliary power units on its locomotives to limit the need for idling the locomotives, and thus limit the emissions they produce.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Cheeseman reported that a new bill to provide $4,000,000 for the State's Matching Grant Program to support paratransit services is progressing in the General Assembly. Though this amount is a reduction from the $5,000,000 level of state support for the Matching Grant Program the last two years but is a big improvement on the loss off all funding as had been proposed earlier.

Cheeseman also attended the March 24 State Rail Plan steering committee meeting and the Connecticut Association for Community Transportation legislative breakfast on the theme "Moving from the Past, Serving the Present, Preparing for the Future". Also, the New England Passenger Transit Association conference was held in Hartford, March 17-19, and was very well attended and very interesting.

Lastly, Tom mentioned that a Connectivity Forum Round Table featuring federal, state and local authorities will be held at Hartford's Union Station April 29 at 1:30 pm to discuss intermodal transportation issues.

Discussion of Electronic Tolling and Congestion Pricing Study

The Transportation Strategy Board contracted with Cambridge Systematics to perform a detailed study of options for electronic tolling on some or all of Connecticut's highways. The study was delivered to the TSB on February 19. Eight options for electronic toll collection were evaluated in the study, which made no final recommendation as to the adoption of these options.

Fred Riese briefly explained the eight tolling concepts evaluated in the report. Although he prepared DEP's comments to the TSB, he sees the study and the selection of any specific tolling option as primarily a public policy decision as to what the purpose of the tolls is. The comparative environmental consequences of the particular tolling options are relatively minor and are difficult to predict. The installation of the tolling system itself would have very minor environmental impacts. The Cambridge Systematics study's evaluation of environmental impacts such as air emissions, energy use and water quality impacts rested on comparing the effects of the extra traffic that would divert from highways to local roads to avoid the tolls to the emissions and energy savings of a more efficient movement of traffic on the highways after tools were installed. Predicting the level of traffic diversion to local roads is a very imprecise exercise, as acknowledged in the study.

Susan Simmat of OPM stressed that ground rule #1 for the study is that any future tolling system will not include physical toll booths, but would use either electronic or photographic methods to assess fees on vehicles. The Transportation Committee of the General Assembly held a public hearing on several electronic tolling bills and seemed to have a preference for the border tolling concept but was searching for a way to focus the tolls on out-of-state motorists. Simmat cautioned that there are legal issues with differential rates between resident and out-of-state vehicles because of commerce clause considerations. Fred Riese mentioned that federal regulations require that any revenue raised by tolls on federal highways be expended to expand or enhance the facility on which the tolls are collected. Thus, tolls collected on Interstate 84 must be spent to expand or enhance that road. Simmat noted that a possible exception to this restriction could be obtained if the tolled roadway was accepted into a congestion mitigation study as allowed for under federal law. In such a case, toll revenue could be used to enhance transit service or support other measures to reduce corridor congestion. How the toll revenue would be used under any of the options would be a policy decision made by the Governor and the General Assembly. The study found that people are less averse to paying a toll if they receive improved transportation (roadways and transit) in return.

The TSB will be holding a public hearing to get citizen input on the toll study and its various options but no date for this hearing has yet been established.

Old Business

Fred Riese indicated that all reimbursement requests for last fall have now been forwarded to ConnDOT and he issued a last call for any remaining submittals.

New Business

Moderators for the three spring public hearings will be as follows: May 5 in Norwich- Robert Zarnetske, May 19 in Norwalk- Dick Carpenter, and June 2 in West Haven- Fred Riese.

Pursuant to a request from a Commission member concerning recording reasons for absences from meetings in the monthly minutes, it was mentioned that the reasons for member's absences will not be recorded in the minutes.

The Commission meeting was adjourned at 3:47 PM.