

Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study

**Public Information Meeting
Wednesday, March 10, 2010
7:00 – 9:00 PM**

Waterbury Development Corporation
Brass City Room 2nd Floor
24 Leavenworth Street
Waterbury, CT

Attendance

Advisory Committee Members and Public who signed in: 25 in attendance

Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) Staff:

Andrew H. Davis Transportation Planning, Study Manager
Anna Bergeron Transportation Planning

Consultant Team:

Elizabeth Federico Parsons Transportation Group
Donald Maley Parsons Transportation Group
Mike Morehouse Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Leslie Black Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Opening Comments

Mr. Andrew Davis welcomed the audience to the second round of public information meetings for the Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study. He outlined the agenda for the presentation and emphasized the importance of the question and comment period that would follow the presentation to hear from the public regarding the draft recommendations presented. Mr. Davis then turned the presentation over to Ms. Elizabeth Federico of Parsons Transportation Group.

Ms. Federico opened her discussion with a review of the study process and thanked the Study Advisory Committee for their diligence in guiding the study and providing feedback throughout the duration of this important initiative. The Study Advisory Committee is comprised of a variety of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as local elected officials, community groups, and key stakeholders.

Study Goals and Objectives for the Waterbury Branch include the following:

Goal: Encourage integrated transportation improvements that foster safety, efficiency, and mobility in the study corridors

Goal: Enhance transit opportunities along the Waterbury Branch Corridor

Objectives:

- Reduce vehicle trips/congestion on Route 8 and local roads
- Improve transit service in the corridor
- Provide more frequent service
- Attract new ridership through more effective service
- Improve connection to mainline service to provide better access to employment centers (e.g., Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford, and NYC)
- Promote multi-modal transit connections
- Maintain rail freight service

Goal: Improve environmental quality and land use planning in Connecticut

Presentation

Ms. Federico summarized the public outreach process. In addition to Study Advisory Committee meetings, Ms. Federico outlined the various methods of public outreach including a mailing list, comment forms, stakeholder interviews on transit-oriented development (TOD), and a study website where meeting notices and study documents are made available: www.waterbury-newcanaanrail.org. The presentation from this meeting will be available on the website. The study website also provides a comment form under “Contact Us” to receive feedback regarding the study. All public comments have been incorporated into the study process as it has moved forward. Public comments will be taken on the draft recommendations presented at this public information meeting until March 26, 2010.

Ms. Federico and associate, Donald Maley, then presented a PowerPoint presentation of the study progress to date including a review of the two-tiered screening process that narrowed the long list of alternatives developed during the study to a short list of alternatives and, ultimately, to a set of draft recommendations. She commented that tonight’s meeting was an opportunity to hear from the public regarding the draft recommendations.

The study team opened the meeting to the public audience to take questions and comments.

Public Question and Comment Period:

General Comments:

- Does there have to be synergy between the improvement to full signalization of the branch line and making any other improvements?

To some extent, the recommendations can be separated and/or phased differently than listed in the report; for instance, high-level platforms (Recommendation 5) could be added before sidings (Recommendations 1 and 4), signalization (Recommendation 2), or a Waterbury storage yard (Recommendation 3) without affecting the ability to implement the other recommendations in the future.

However, some improvements must be implemented in a certain order for their benefits to be realized. For example, it would not make sense to invest in a new station at Devon without first constructing sidings and signalizing the branch, as the frequency of service that the Devon alternative is intended to achieve would be impossible without these other improvements.

The proposed order of recommendations also reflects corridor needs and priorities, attempting to address the most pressing operational needs first. The main intent of Recommendation 5 is to increase capacity on the branch by enabling longer train consists, yet capacity will not be an issue on the branch until service frequency is improved, attracting new riders. Therefore, improvements that address the infrastructure issues that currently limit service on the branch (i.e., sidings and signalization) should, from an operational perspective, be implemented first.

- Access is an issue – why use the train if it is not easy to get to the station and if parking is not available or safe.
- Capacity on the mainline versus the branch line – there will be significant impacts on mainline capacity as Waterbury branch line improvements are made and ridership improves.
- Has any consideration been given to rolling stock/rail car availability as longer trains are required?

It is assumed that existing diesel rolling stock would be shifted from other parts of the rail system. The potential use of electrified equipment for the Shore Line East service, as well as the ongoing acquisition of new M-8 electric multiple unit (EMU) cars, will free up diesel rolling stock for use on the Waterbury Branch.

- Service from Naugatuck to Stamford is great inbound but a nightmare outbound. There is no way to get home – please look at outbound service for commuters for evening return service.
- State Representative Larry Butler asked what the timing was for expected improvements to be implemented.

There is no current funding for further study. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would be required for major improvements like the Devon Station concept – this would likely take around 2 years to complete. The siding at Beacon Falls and branch line signalization can be done without an EIS because those improvements fall within the state-owned right-of-way, and could therefore be implemented more quickly once funding is available.

- Is there any Federal funding?

Federal Transit Administration grants can be applied for and the state bond commission can be approached for further funding.

- What is the typical length of time required for improvements to be made?
 - *Siding improvements average 2 years*
 - *Signalization improvements average 2.5 to 3 years*
 - *For major improvements that require an EIS: once funded, an EIS takes about 2 years to complete; following that, the design phase takes an additional 2 years, and construction, 3 or more years*
- In the short term, we must do better for improving return trips for commuters so that ridership numbers will improve; then funding will be considered a priority.
- What will a siding bring to the branch line?

The ability to operate more than one train on the branch at any given time, allowing higher frequency of service.
- The recommendations chart should have a column added to show what could be done in the short-term.

Station Improvements:

- Has the Waterbury Multi-Modal Transportation Center proposal gone forward?

It is the understanding of the study team that this proposal has been turned down by the state bonding commission.
- A new station concept at the Devon wye would improve the reverse commute to New Haven as well as back up to Waterbury.
- Why would a new station be considered at Devon when there are stations at Stratford, New Haven and West Haven already?

A Devon station east of the wye would provide Waterbury branch line passengers more frequent access to mainline trains without interrupting mainline service. The branch line train would run up and down the branch line without having to enter the congested mainline. Existing branch line service to Bridgeport and Stamford will remain in effect; the Devon shuttles would be in addition to existing service.
- What about considering stretching the Stratford station up to meet the wye?

The placement of a station west of the wye is not feasible due to proximity to an electrical substation, power plant, and the Housatonic River.
- Suggestion for next phase: separate out the recommendations because cumulative cost assumes order of phasing; one needs to see linkages. Include information about timeline, capital cost, cost prediction, employment statistics.
- Is there any consideration being made for buying tickets at the stations?

This is an operations issue –adding ticket kiosks at all stations is being considered separate from this study.

Economic Development Impacts:

- Benefit not listed here is the economic development impacts and these should be considered in the assignment of priorities.

Economic development impacts will be looked at in the EIS phase of the study.
- A major selling point for getting funding would be job creation and other benefits.

Waterbury Yard:

- What are the improvements proposed for the Waterbury Station Yard?

Proposed improvements include the addition of five tracks for train storage so that more morning peak time trains are available at the north end of the branch line, lengthening the platform for patron access to more rail cars, adding canopy for shelter, and better access to the station with parking improvements and added bus bays.

- Can the Waterbury yard improvement be done without an EIS if buildings are not taken into consideration?
CTDOT is required to conduct an environmental study if building a new facility such as a train storage yard.
- Can eminent domain be considered to move this improvement alternative forward?

Freight Service:

- Has any thought been given to maintaining freight service on the branch line?
Yes; all recommendations have been developed based on the assumption that freight service will be maintained, and that the amount of freight on the branch will double in the future.

The formal presentation adjourned at 8:45 p.m. to permit the public to return to the open house stations to view study maps and speak with the study team. The open house stations included:

- Study Area and Background Information
- Study Goals and Objectives
- Branch Needs and Deficiencies
- Screening Process to Analyze Alternatives
- Draft Study Recommendations
 - Beacon Falls siding north and south options
 - Full signalization of the Waterbury Branch
 - Waterbury Yard
 - Three additional passing sidings at Devon, Derby, and Waterbury
 - Increased train length – platform improvements
 - New Station Alternative – Devon
 - Multi-modal Station Alternatives – Derby-Shelton Station and Waterbury Station
 - Derby-Shelton parking improvement options
 - Naugatuck relocated platform
 - Shuttle bus to serve gaps in rail service