

Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study

**Public Information Meeting
Thursday, March 11, 2010
7:00 – 9:00 PM**

Derby City Hall – Aldermanic Chambers 2nd Floor
2 Elizabeth Street
Derby, CT

Attendance

Advisory Committee Members and Public who signed in: 24 in attendance

Connecticut Department of Transportation Staff:

Andrew H. Davis	Transportation Planning, Study Manager
Anna Bergeron	Transportation Planning
Mark Foran	Rail Operations
Jon Foster	Rail Operations

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. He then introduced elected officials in attendance, Senator Joseph Crisco, State Representative Theresa Conroy, and Mayor Anthony Staffieri, each making a brief statement in support of the recommendations being presented at the meeting and the efforts of the consultant team, Valley Council of Governments, and the Connecticut Department of Transportation. 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:

- What is the concern about interrupting service on the mainline for Waterbury Branch trains?
Schedule slots on the mainline are already full or reserved for Metro-North New Haven Line and Amtrak service, limiting the number of additional Waterbury Branch trains that can operate on the mainline.
- What happens when service is extended to Springfield from New Haven?
The proposed New Haven-Hartford-Springfield project is outside the scope of this study.
- Is it possible to put passenger trains on industrial sidings?
No, freight sidings are a different class of track so it is not feasible.
- Pan Am currently owns the freight track in Waterbury.
- Is there an existing siding in Beacon Falls?
There is a remnant of one, but it would need to be reconstructed to be used for passenger service.
- Can sidings be phased?
Yes, sidings could be added one at a time rather than all at once.
- Does the Waterbury Branch require a signalization system to comply with the federal mandate for positive train control (PTC)?
Regardless of the current Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines study, CTDOT will have to meet federal requirements for PTC on all branches by 2015. Metro-North has applied to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a waiver for the Waterbury Branch.
- Rick Dunne, Executive Director of the Valley Council of Governments, thanked the project team for their work. He noted community concerns about having to give up one-seat rides; however, the concept of a shuttle to Devon that permits Waterbury Branch service that meets all mainline trains offers the connectivity improvement wanted by commuters and fills service gaps. There are pieces of the recommendations package that can be implemented in the short term, such as station/parking improvements. Opportunities for transit-oriented development also should be looked at for every station.
- Note that the \$300 million cumulative cost for operational improvements is in 2008 dollars and is conceptual only. The cost of completing an EIS or other environmental documentation is not included.
- There is no downside to acquiring the property required to construct a five-track storage yard at Waterbury earlier rather than later.
- A passenger who uses the branch daily commented that even one siding would make a tremendous difference.

- This train line is important to the Valley.
- The next phase of the study depends on funding, either through a state bond or new state transportation bill. Federal funding will be sought for construction.
- Ridership modeling is important as we will be competing for funding with New Canaan/Danbury/mainline/new service.
- The Waterbury Branch is important for communities who are trying to reinvent themselves.
- Pleased to see express bus alternative dropped.
- Senator Joseph Crisco commented that he supports Station Improvement Packages 1 and 2; the costs are justified. There are many state-owned right-of-ways, and they should be chartered and reserved for future public transportation initiatives.

Parking:

- Will parking issues be considered? In Seymour?

Parking issues at specific stations will be considered in greater detail during the next phase of the study.

Station Amenities:

- Why is the Naugatuck Station being relocated to accommodate TOD considerations while the Seymour Station is not?

Due to its location on a curve, the Naugatuck platform has to be shifted in one direction or another in order to improve it to a high-level platform, regardless of any proposed station area development and even if the platform is not lengthened. The decision was made to shift the platform location several hundred feet to the south, because this location would make more sense, given the planned parking structure and approved Renaissance Place development, than a location north of the existing platform.

The existing Seymour Station can be improved to a high-level platform without shifting the location, so the current recommendation leaves the platform in its current location. However, CTDOT notes that the proposed Haynes development with a relocated Seymour Station has the Town's support, and this alternative will be examined in greater detail in the next phase of the study. In the meantime, the Phase I Report notes the following:

"The potential relocation of Seymour Station to a new site north of the Naugatuck River adjacent to property owned by Haynes Development was not included on the Long List of Alternatives because development plans at the site are still in the early stages. This concept, which would place the station along the proposed Beacon Falls Passing Siding – South Option described in Alternative W-10, has community support and will be considered in the future if the Haynes master plan is implemented, and would not be precluded by any of the other Long List commuter rail alternatives."

The formal presentation adjourned at 8:40 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