

Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study

Public Information Meeting

Monday, March 8, 2010

7:00 – 9:00 PM

New Canaan Town Hall - Auditorium

77 Main Street

New Canaan, CT

Attendance

Advisory Committee Members and Public who signed in: 39 in attendance

Connecticut Department of Transportation Staff:

Andrew H. Davis	Transportation Planning, Study Manager
Anna Bergeron	Transportation Planning
Mark Foran	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, New Canaan First Selectman Jeb Walker, State Representative John Hetherington, and Senator Scott Frantz, each making a brief statement in support of the recommendations being presented at the meeting and the efforts of the consultant team and the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT). 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.

The Goals and Objectives for the New Canaan Branch Line are as follows:

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

Goal: Improve service on the New Canaan Branch

Objectives:

- Increase capacity, including both train capacity and station access capacity
- Improve operational efficiency and reduce travel time
- Improve and/or increase direct service to NYC
- Identify TOD options and station opportunities

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:

- Will any stations be closed while recommended improvements are constructed?
No closures are anticipated.
- Is there enough rolling stock to increase service frequency?
Yes. By the time these recommendations are carried forward to implementation, new rolling stock will be available.
- Can Recommendation 1 – Full Signalization and 2 – Springdale Siding be switched in priority?
Yes, these two particular recommendations can be switched.
- Peak hour increases to train service would occur in the peak hour for auto travel – will more trains worsen traffic on Route 106 and in New Canaan as trains cross roadways?
The traffic impacts of the proposed recommendations will be evaluated during the next phase of the study.
- Will existing amenity improvement projects still occur?
Yes, existing projects will not be impacted by this study.
- Passing siding and amenity improvements should be implemented prior to signaling New Canaan Station.
- How will increased frequency of trains impact noise?
The Town of New Canaan has looked at several options for implementing a Quiet Zone, including channelization, wayside horns and four-quadrant crossing gates. Currently, the Town does not have funding available for such initiatives.
- Applaud recommendations.
- Add rail cars to each train to add capacity.
- Residents encourage the DOT to move forward with New Canaan and mainline initiatives.

Parking:

- There is a lack of parking, especially at Springdale Station.
- Parking is pushed onto residential streets; there is a lack of permits.

Pedestrian Issues:

- Focus on sidewalks, especially for pedestrians walking on Route 106.
- Pedestrian safety is important.

Station Amenities:

- Signage and loudspeaker announcement improvements need to be implemented.

CTDOT and Metro-North are working on improving the means to inform the public and provide train times/platform numbers at branch line stations.

- Consider the impact of loud speakers on residences nearby; visual notices would be better.
- Covered platform amenities will be appreciated.

Full Signalization of Branch Line to New Canaan:

- What is signalization?

Along the New Haven Line and most of the New Canaan Branch, trains are controlled from an operations control center at Grand Central Terminal, where Metro-North operates the signals that let a train know when it is safe to enter a certain section of track, as well as automated switches that move trains between tracks. Currently, this system ends just south of New Canaan Station, which means that train conductors have to manually throw the switches that move trains between the three tracks at the station, which slows movements in and out of New Canaan.

Springdale Siding:

- If a passing siding is added at the Springdale station location, will there be an increase in travel time?

In the rail simulations conducted for the study, the addition of a siding actually decreased travel time. Current speeds will be maintained.

- Put the Springdale passing siding as a first priority to get service improvements and reverse commute advantages.

Springdale Platform Extension and Two-Track, Two-Platform Springdale Station:

- Improvements at Springdale Station will be greatly appreciated. A resident commented that she travels to New York City daily from Springdale and the trains are crowded to the point of standing room only. She is thrilled with recommended improvements.

Talmadge Hill Second Platform and Pedestrian/Parking Improvements Recommendation:

- Why is it fair to add parking only at Talmadge Hill? Talmadge Hill is a historical area. Route 106 is a parking lot now. Talmadge Hill residents are very concerned with added parking. Instead, put the parking where it is needed – at New Canaan and Springdale.
- Make pedestrian improvements so that people who live close enough can walk to the station and avoid taking a car.
- There are open parking spaces at Talmadge Hill now – why add more parking when the lot is not at capacity?
- Pound Ridge, NY resident is thankful for commuter rail service availability at Talmadge Hill but understands the concerns of Talmadge Hill residents.
- New Canaan resident opposes Talmadge Hill parking improvements; suggests adding second platform only, which would not require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) level of study.
- Residents who live next to Exit 36 on the Merritt Parkway have a letter from the Town stating that the Town and State will not build across the street in exchange for using their property to add Exit 36 – grass area east of Route 106 was not to be reused as parking.

Bus Transit Services Comments:

- Please inform the public when replacement bus service is in effect and provide bus times and stop locations.
- The timed transfer shuttle concept has not been considered – it is used elsewhere in the country and is very successful to provide connections between transit lines and fill service gaps.

Transit-Oriented Development Comments:

- John Roman of the East Side Partnership in Stamford represented the group and stated that the East Main Street Station concept was an alternative on the Long List of Alternatives that was not carried forward to become a recommendation. TOD is a focus in this area of Stamford, and many area residents would use and benefit from a station in this location. The East Main Street area is considered an urban village. 200 housing units have been recently built and 250 units are to be built.

A New Canaan branch line station concept would not serve the area adequately, and a mainline station is not within the scope of this study. CTDOT has agreed to study the potential for a mainline East Main Street Station separately.

- Josh LeCar with the City of Stamford commented that CTDOT had agreed to provide a scope for a mainline station study so the City of Stamford can move forward and include this initiative as a work program funding option.

Mr. Mark Foran stated that he will take this request by the City forward to Rail Operations management on March 9, 2010.

- Could the East Main Street Station function as both a branch line and mainline station?

Yes, it could be built to serve all five tracks.

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
 - Full Signalization of Branch Line to New Canaan
 - Springdale Passing Siding
 - Two-Track, Two-Platform Springdale Station
 - New Canaan & Springdale Platform Extensions
 - Talmadge Hill Station – 2nd platform (plus parking/pedestrian improvements)