

Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study

**Public Information Meeting
Wednesday, June 17, 2009
6:00 – 8:00 PM**

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

Attendance

Advisory Committee Members and Public who signed in: 21 in attendance

Connecticut Department of Transportation Staff:

Andrew H. Davis	Intermodal Planning,
Jon Foster	Rail Operations
Anna Bergeron	Intermodal Planning
Colleen Kissane	Intermodal Planning

Consultant Team:

Elizabeth Federico	Parsons Transportation Group
Nick LaRocco	Parsons Transportation Group
Bhoomi Vala	Parsons Transportation Group
Debbie Hoffman	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Leslie Black	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Opening Comments

Mr. Andrew Davis welcomed everyone to the second of three Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study Public Information Meetings. 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 alternatives presented. He then turned the presentation over to Ms. Elizabeth Federico from Parsons Transportation Group.

Ms. Federico discussed the study process and thanked the Study Advisory Committee for their diligence and help with 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.

Presentation

Ms. Federico discussed the public process further. In addition to Study Advisory Committee meetings, Ms. Federico outlined the various methods of public outreach including a mailing list, comment forms, and a study website where meeting notices and study documents are made available: www.waterbury-newcanaanrail.org. The presentation from this meeting will also 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 will be incorporated into the study process as it moves forward.

Ms. Federico then presented a PowerPoint presentation of the study progress to date reviewing a long list of alternatives under consideration for the Waterbury branch line. She commented that tonight's meeting was an opportunity to hear the public's feedback on the draft alternatives, which are still conceptual in nature at this point in time. Public input is critical to making sure the alternatives are what the community wants to see in the future.

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

Public Question and Comment Period:

General Comments:

- Is the exploration of all the alternatives a waste of funds? If the state has already purchased new railcars, why not just use them? ***Andy Davis responded that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires a full analysis of all the alternatives before they will fund improvements.***
- Relocating existing station stops to better serve the area is not included among the study alternatives. ***CTDOT will consider relocation of stations as an alternative only if endorsed by the Towns and Regions.***
- The Town of Seymour has endorsed relocation of the existing Seymour Station.
- What is the timeframe to finish this project? ***The study portion will be completed at the end of 2009. Once the study is completed, recommendations that can be implemented without further environmental study will go to the legislature for funding. For more complex alternatives, a Federal environmental study may be required to secure FTA funding.***
- It seems that there are two categories of options: amenities improvements, and infrastructure improvements to increase ridership. The primary goal should be to increase ridership to get people on the trains in the AM and PM peak periods. Other recommendations like increasing the height of the platform should be of secondary importance.
- Availability of service on this line is a issue of funding; the DOT needs to get money from the legislature.
- State Representative Theresa Conroy asked about the timeline of this project and whether the study team will conduct additional surveys. She suggested that the phone surveys be redone because 400 people were not enough. ***The random survey sampled a statistically significant population to gather the required data.***
- The Valley is a bedroom community for Fairfield County and Manhattan.
- It as suggested that a survey be added to the study website to collect additional input. The availability of the survey should be advertised more to people, including Route 8 commuters and others who do not currently riding the train.
- Make stations ADA-accessible.
- Station improvements to consider: At Seymour Station, stairs are an access issue, and Beacon Falls Station has no telephone and is poorly lit at night. We want more than a facelift of existing stations – want same service as the New Canaan Branch.
- You need to look at people who would be willing to take the train if the service improves.

Commuter Rail Comments:

- Commuters want increased flexibility of service to make taking the train a viable option.
- The 5:57 AM train that was added earlier this year has been very successful; why not just add additional trains?

- The CT Commuter Rail Council lobbied for the addition of the 5:57 train, and ridership increased about 39% as a result in AM inbound peak service. The study team should add return service later in the day, which would further increase ridership.
- The PM train from Bridgeport is packed; more trains are needed.
- Add passing sidings as a first step to improve the transit service along the Waterbury Branch; full double tracking can be added later if needed.
- Sidings must be long enough to accommodate both freight and passenger rail.
- It was suggested that the tracks near Naugatuck Station that have standing stone cars could be used as passing sidings for the passenger trains.
- Add late night service up the line; people enjoy spending time in NYC and returning home late.
- Does signalization go hand in hand with sidings?
- If you increase the service on the Waterbury Branch, then the parking issues on the main line will decrease.
- More trains could be added by adding/dividing blocks along the Waterbury Branch Line tracks.
- The Devon Station alternative is not a good idea, as building the station in the proposed location would require relocating the neighboring land uses.
- Instead of a new Devon Station, the existing Stratford Station should be made a hub for transfers between Waterbury Branch and New Haven Line trains.
- The Wilbur Cross Station would add a lot of vehicular traffic to the Milford Parkway and worsen highway congestion by attracting commuters who would drive to the station.
- Devon Station is a good option. By building this station, the trains along the Waterbury Branch Line would serve as a shuttle to transfer to New Haven Line trains.
- An additional evening train would improve service significantly.

Transit Oriented Development Comments:

- Tom Haynes of Haynes Development, which owns a property in Seymour, talked about his project and how Transit Oriented Development (TOD) initiatives such as this should be reflected in the study. *In the coming weeks, the study team will be conducting a series of stakeholder meetings to collect data for its TOD Report, to be completed in late summer 2009. Haynes Development will participate in these meetings.*

Bus Transit Services Comments:

- Is the study team considering a light rail option from Waterbury to Hartford? *No, the scope of the current study is limited to the existing Waterbury branch line corridor.*
- What is light rail transit (LRT)? Describe the type of vehicle used and how it's different from the existing commuter rail equipment. *The LRT uses a lighter vehicle similar to a streetcar, as opposed to heavy commuter rail vehicles.*
- Rail passengers aren't going to want to switch to bus; this would be a step down in service.
- Bus service is not as reliable as train service. During bad weather conditions you cannot take the bus, but you could always ride the train.
- People like light rail; however, the problem is funding; it's a very expensive infrastructure to implement from the ground up.

- Based on the Boston BRT experience, BRT would not be a good alternative mode for the Waterbury Branch Line.
- Commuter rail is a better mode of transit than the BRT; trains will be able to operate in bad weather while the buses may not be able to do so.

The formal presentation adjourned at 7:50 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:

1. Study process
2. Existing conditions
3. Alternatives for signal and track modifications
4. Alternatives for electrification
5. Alternatives for double-tracking
6. Alternatives for passing sidings
7. Alternatives for stations – new and existing
8. Other modes - transit, bicycle/pedestrian access