

MEETING MINUTES

SUBJECT: Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study
(Project 170-2562)

MEETING DATE: May 16, 2008

TIME: 1:30 – 3:00 PM

LOCATION: Council of Governments Central Naugatuck Valley (COG-CNV)
Waterbury, CT

PURPOSE: Regional and Local Officials Outreach Meeting

ATTENDEES:

Name	Organization	Phone	Email
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Leo Frank	Waterbury Development Corporation	203-346-2607 x108	frank@wnonline.org
Sam Gold	COG-CNV	203-757-0535	sgold@cogcnv.org
Tony SanAngelo	Beacon Falls EDC	203-735-1823	tsanangelo@aps-insurance.com
Jim Sequin	City of Waterbury - Planning	203-574-6819	jsequin@waterburyct.org
Andrew Davis	ConnDOT – Planning	860-594-2157	Andrew.h.davis@po.state.ct.us
Carmine Trotta	ConnDOT – Planning	860-594-2134	Carmine.trotta@po.state.ct.us
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Leslie Black	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.	860-247-7200	lblack@fhiplan.com

MEETING SUMMARY

Andrew Davis of the Connecticut Department of Transportation introduced the study team and reviewed the study area, schedule, scope, and status. He outlined the project goals, which are to:

- Encourage integrated transportation improvements that foster safety, efficiency, and mobility in the study corridors;
- Enhance transit opportunities along the Waterbury Branch Corridor;
- Improve service on the New Canaan Branch Corridor; and

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- Positively impact environmental quality and land use planning in the corridor.

Mr. Davis then discussed the constraints and opportunities for the two branch lines and identified the alternatives that are currently under consideration. The Waterbury Branch will include an alternatives analysis that will look at different transportation modes in the corridor. The New Canaan Branch will focus on improvements to the existing commuter rail service.

Waterbury Branch

The following capacity and operational service constraints along the Waterbury Branch were discussed:

- Capacity Issues:
 - Single track limits operational flexibility
- Operational Issues:
 - New Haven Line between Stamford and New York has planned Amtrak and Metro-North service that exceeds capacity by 2030
 - Potential Shore Line East, Danbury Branch and New Canaan Branch service expansions may compete with Waterbury Branch service expansion in terms of available slots on the New Haven mainline
 - Penn Station access, if advanced, may require existing peak trips to be split between two New York terminals, further precluding additional services from the branches
 - The track and signal configuration at Stamford limits the ability to “turn” westbound trains terminating at the station

The opportunities for improved service on the Waterbury Branch include:

- Facility/Systems Enhancement Options:
 - Construct transfer/intermodal station at Derby-Shelton
 - Provide a cab/no wayside Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) system to enhance operational efficiency, safety, and (possibly) operating speeds
 - Provide passing sidings
 - Extend station platforms
 - Expand parking facilities
 - Construct intermodal station at Waterbury with secure parking and convenient access to and from Route 8/Interstate 84
 - Electrify from the New Haven Line to Derby-Shelton
 - Electrify from the New Haven Line to Waterbury
- Operational Enhancement Options:
 - More frequent service

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- Direct service to Stamford and/or NYC
- Reverse commute service to New Haven
- Run non-revenue trains between the Waterbury Branch and New Haven maintenance facilities

Mr. Davis then discussed the public outreach activities underway for the study and provided the study website address: www.waterbury-newcanaanrail.org. He then opened the discussion for questions and comments.

QUESTIONS

What opportunities and issues do you see in the corridors?

- Peter Dorpalen asked for clarification regarding the Milford station addition possibility. Mr. Davis responded that adding a new Waterbury Branch station in Milford is one possible solution to improving connectivity with Wilbur Cross Parkway. All station locations will be looked at to optimize locations throughout the corridor.
- The Metro-North and Amtrak 2030 service plans are a major constraint to adding more through service to New York City. Operational issues on the New Haven Line will be an issue in planning service improvements, and the 2030 service plans will guide decision-making process, as ConnDOT will need to fit branch line service enhancements with New Haven Line traffic.
- It is important to be open about trade-offs and constraints when looking at potential service improvement options.
- Sam Gold asked about the study survey and when on-off counts were conducted. Mr. Davis responded that the study survey would be conducted in the fall of 2008. Metro-North has not yet released its most recent on-off counts, which were taken in 2007. (The last counts prior to that were taken in 2001.) The study team is looking at ConnDOT 2030 modeling data.
- It was asked if upward spikes in ridership have occurred recently correlated to increased gasoline prices. Mark Foran responded that ConnDOT has monitored ticket sales and has noted a trend in ridership increases by 3% last year, and, in recent months, ticket sales have increased approximately by 5-6%.
- Mr. Gold asked about the geographic coverage of the zip code survey being conducted and if the survey would include Torrington, where many leisure trips to New York originate. Ms. Fitzgerald responded that the survey will target commuters for work trips in zip codes along the study corridor. Because of this focus on the commute trip, Torrington is not anticipated to be part of the survey.
- Mr. Gold noted that when rail lines are down, buses are used. Has the study team looked at buses? Mr. Davis responded that the study team is considering two bus options between Waterbury and Bridgeport: express buses operating on Route 8 and BRT (bus-rapid transit) operating on the existing rail corridor.

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- Light rail will be looked at during the study to ensure that all alternatives will be considered from the outset of the study process to avoid having to add new alternatives during later phases of the project. Mr. Trotta noted that the disadvantage of light rail is that it cannot go on the mainline.
- Mr. Davis commented that storage facilities will be required to store rail cars. Testing of the new M-8 rail cars will occur in 2009, and 350 rail cars will begin to come on line in 2010. It was suggested that storage could be found on the Connecticut section of the Maybrook line, but Mr. Davis responded that the Maybrook line is owned by Housatonic Railroad Company, who would have to upgrade the line.
- Currently there is not enough equipment to provide additional service on the Waterbury line. However, diesel equipment may become available for the Waterbury line in 2010 when the new M-8 rail cars begin service on the New Haven Line.

What is your vision for the study area in the future?

- Improved ridership services on the Waterbury line will bring people up from Fairfield County to live. More trains would be good for the economy – but what comes first, the people or the service?
- Creating a passing siding is more economically feasible and a better use of land than creating double tracks for the length of the corridor. Adding a passing siding would permit two trains to be on the branch at the same time.
- Exit 12 is currently congested, with many commuters choosing to live in northern communities where housing costs are lower and drive south to catch the train in Shelton. Improving transit linkages with bus routes to the train station would help relieve congestion.
- Mr. Gold is working on a grant for a study of the Naugatuck Valley greenway. He commented that the Waterbury line may draw tourist traffic if local attractions are promoted, specifically greenways such as the Naugatuck River, Derby to Torrington, and Ansonia Greenways. Other local areas are anticipating adding greenways in the future. Another tourist draw is a “Day out with Thomas” the Train in Thomaston, CT held in August of each year.
- Better marketing of the line and its services – 511 traveler info with cell access, current free parking – would help improve ridership.

What information can you share that might be relevant to the study?

- Public outreach efforts for the Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines study could be coordinated with the Seymour-Beacon Falls Area Transportation Study Project (“67/42 Transportation Study”) currently being conducted by the Valley Council of Governments (VCOG). The goal of the 67/42 study is to develop a solution to the transportation needs in the Seymour-Beacon Falls area and to address congestion and safety concerns along Routes 67 and 42.

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- Waterbury Development Corporation is in the midst of creating Intermodal Facility renderings and will share that information with the study team. They are anxious to see the development of rail services to optimize the use of the intermodal facility.
- Mr. Dorpalen noted that the study team should examine how increasing commuter trips between the route 8 corridor and Fairfield County could be offset with better rail services. Mr. Foran responded that a second early train has been recently added to provide enhanced service for commuters.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

The study team was made aware of material available for review as the study process moves forward:

- Item 1: Greenway report for Naugatuck Valley
- Item 2: Census 2000 and Route 8 traffic counts
- Item 3: VCOG's Seymour-Beacon Falls Area Transportation Study Project and other studies in the area
- Item 4: Waterbury Development Corporation-Waterbury Intermodal Facility renderings