

MEETING MINUTES

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

MEETING DATE: Friday, May 9, 2008

TIME: 1:30 PM

LOCATION: South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA)
Stamford, CT

PURPOSE: Regional and Local Officials Outreach Meeting

ATTENDEES:

Name	Organization	Phone
Jeb Walker	First Selectman, Town of New Canaan	203-594-3007
Floyd Lapp	Executive Director, SWRPA	203-316-5190
Sue Prosi	SWRPA	203-315-5190 x16
Josh LeCar	Transportation Planner, City of Stamford	203-977-5398
Steve Kleppin	Town Planner, Town of New Canaan	203-594-3044
Andrew Davis	CT Department of Transportation	860-594-2157
Carmine Trotta	CT Department of Transportation	860-597-2134
Peter Smoluchowski	Parsons	212-266-8522
Ruth Fitzgerald	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.	860-247-7200
Leslie Black	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.	860-256-4911

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
- 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 alternative 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.

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New Canaan Branch

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

- Capacity Issues:
 - Single track operation on the New Canaan Branch
 - Station platforms designed for a maximum of 4 train cars (some are shorter)
 - Parking facilities are limited
 - New Canaan overnight storage capacity is limited
 - Traction power system may require upgrades to support longer trains and/or more frequent service (including “meets” at passing sidings on the line)
- 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 Waterbury Branch service expansions may compete with New Canaan 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 into two (to two New York terminals) and further preclude additional services from the branches

The opportunities for improved service on the New Canaan Branch include:

- Facility Enhancement Options:
 - *New Canaan Station*
 - Remove old freight track
 - Extend the existing platform to length of 860'
 - Construct a second 860' platform
 - Provide a passing siding south of Richmond Road
 - *Talmadge Hill Station*
 - Expand parking capacity
 - *Springdale Station*
 - Extend Springdale Station platform
 - Provide a passing siding
- Operational Improvements:
 - Run more frequent service including more direct service to New York.

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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?

- Sue Prosi discussed that facility needs were omitted from the Danbury study. Mr. Davis responded that ConnDOT will be looking at maintenance and storage facilities. For example, overnight storage is being considered in New Canaan.
- Josh LeCar commented that the New Canaan Branch is a short branch and that exploring opportunities for transit-oriented development (TOD) along the corridor may be a better idea than finding adding more rail car storage.
- Ms. Prosi indicated there may be union issues with not having a central depot to report to in Bridgeport/Stamford. Carmine Trotta responded that all alternatives are being looked at now, but the range of alternatives will narrow as fatal flaws are identified.
- Mr. LeCar noted that he would really like to see the study explore the feasibility of a new station at East Main in Stamford to serve the community there with transit access.
- Steve Kleppin said that a real issue for New Canaan residents is that of excessive train horn blowing early on Saturday mornings. Are “quiet zones” a consideration in the study? Mr. Davis responded that horns are sounded at at-grade crossings and that ConnDOT is trying to move away from “quiet zones” due to accident rates. Providing overnight storage at New Canaan would eliminate the earliest set of horns, as trains would no longer be coming up from Stamford first run.
- When asked about whether this study is looking at the issue of TOD like the Danbury study, Mr. Davis confirmed that identification of TOD opportunities is included in the Waterbury-New Canaan study. He explained that the Danbury study is a phase ahead of this study; Waterbury-New Canaan is at the feasibility stage, while Danbury is in the more detailed environmental documentation stage.
- When asked if new stations would be added, Mr. Davis responded that new station locations will be evaluated as part the analysis of potential service improvements on both branch lines.
- Jeb Walker indicated that the issue of adding a passing siding south of Ridge Road would never pass in the community. ConnDOT responded that the passing siding would be in the railroad right-of-way and property takings would not be involved.
- 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.

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- It is important to be open about trade-offs and constraints when looking at potential service improvement options.

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

- Improved station facilities with expanded weather protection and information kiosks.
- Think “one seat” – better through service on the branch lines so that passengers do not have to transfer trains.
- Create a quiet zone near New Canaan village.
- Floyd Lapp hopes that TOD is looked at objectively and that this type of development is encouraged. He is pleased to see other transit modes are being looked at with a mix of rail, express bus, and BRT. Implementation of a multi-modal approach with appropriate land use density should increase ridership on the branch lines.
- Ms. Prosi would like to see ITS implemented to improve efficiency at the stations through real-time information and wireless technology. (The White Plains, NY station was noted as a successful example.) ITS is critical for operations and safety and could also have great use for multimodal connectivity to coordinate transition from rail to bus transit.
- Better quality of speaker systems to hear announcements.
- Mr. LeCar would like to see enhanced service on the Waterbury Branch line so that more commuter trips are diverted from roadways to rail.
- Mr. Walker envisions more through service to New York City from New Canaan at peak hours. Way-finding is poor in Stamford, so people do not like to change trains there.
- New Canaan residents would be happier with enhancements to service rather than major construction.
- Clean amenities.

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

- Ms. Prosi informed the study team that SWRPA has a copy of the CT Rail Commuter Council Map that may be a relevant tool for use in the study, as well as SWRPA GIS census data maps. SWRPA has 2006 “ons and offs” data.
- SWRPA is in the process of taking an inventory of rail station amenities and will share this information with ConnDOT.
- Ms. Prosi and Mr. LeCar would like a copy of the 2030 report from Mr. Davis.
- Mr. Kleppin suggested that the study team look at the New Canaan parking study completed recently by FHI. The study looked at parking issues in the area and the use of a multiple level parking garage. FHI will get a copy of the study to the team.
- Mr. Kleppin informed the study team that 49 spaces are being added at the Talmadge Hill Station.

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- Mr. LeCar would like the Stamford East Side Partnership to be considered as a stakeholder group in the study. He strongly encouraged market data collection in this area; ConnDOT would like Stamford to coordinate data collection and provide results to them.
- Study team will be conducting zip code and commuter passenger surveys. SWRPA suggested including commuters who travel from Lewisboro and Pound Ridge, NY to commute into New York City on the New Canaan Branch in the survey.
- Mr. Lapp suggested that new station opportunities concept does not jump out in the presentation booklet.
- A suggestion was made that ConnDOT attend a Norwalk Transit District MPO meeting, held fourth Monday of each month at 8:15 AM, to inform MPO of the study. Their next meeting will be on June 23.
- Mr. Walker offered to provide a link to the study website on the Town of New Canaan website.