

## MEETING MINUTES

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

**MEETING DATE:** June 19, 2008

**TIME:** 1:00 – 2:00 PM

**LOCATION:** Aldermanic Chambers, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Derby City Hall, Derby, CT

**PURPOSE:** Regional and Local Officials Outreach Meeting – including Greater Bridgeport & Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization and officials from Valley Council of Governments (VCOG) and Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency (GBRPA)

**ATTENDEES:**

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## 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 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 provided to the audience:

- 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 will exceed 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

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- 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
  - 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](http://www.waterbury-newcanaanrail.org). He then opened the discussion for questions and comments.

## QUESTIONS

### **What opportunities and issues do you see in the corridors?**

- Mark Lauretti asked whether demographics in the study area are being considered with respect to impacts on future service needs. Mr. Davis responded that demographics are being incorporated into the modeling analysis for the study.
- Mr. Lauretti asked whether there would be another Housatonic River crossing considered as part of the study. Mr. Davis responded that only existing branch lines are the subjects of the study analysis and recommendations.
- Rick Dunne noted that the Valley Council of Governments sent a letter to the Transportation Strategy Board in 2006 at the initiation of the study to record that the COG is concerned with certain alternatives under consideration that remain in the scope of work to date. VCOG is concerned with Task 8b-7, Bus Rapid Transit Analysis, studying abandonment of existing rail and replacing it with a dedicated BRT lane within the rail right-of-way, which may not be in the best interest of the corridor as track removal forecloses freight service in the future. Mr. Davis responded that all options need to be looked at when identifying a long list of alternatives, but that study input such as the noted VCOG concerns will be taken into account when determining the options that will move forward to the short list of alternatives suitable for further analysis.
- Mr. Dunne asked that the BRT option be considered for the Route 8 corridor rather than the existing rail right-of-way, to alleviate congestion on Route 8 without negatively impacting existing rail.
- Mr. Dunne also noted that traffic counts taken during summer months do not accurately reflect typical traffic load on Route 8 and Route 34. He asked that Task 9,

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“Modeling” use accurate traffic counts and future rail ridership forecasts that are realistic based on actual experience on other improved branch lines, to account for current trends. Mr. Davis responded that the Metro-North 2030 Rail Operations Plan would be used for ridership forecasts. Carmine Trotta added that the Danbury Study is ongoing currently with on-board counts, and the studies for the three branch lines will be conducting ridership/commuter surveys in September 2008 to obtain additional information.

- Mr. Dunne asked about parking and station operations improvements for the corridor. Mr. Trotta responded that as part of the study all rail stations will be looked at for operations improvements including parking, facilities, and TOD.
- When asked about the length of the study, Mr. Davis responded that it would take approximately 2 years.
- Doug Hokum from Bridgeport Transit asked that bus access to stations be considered with respect to pick up and drop off. Mr. Davis responded that transit access will be looked at for station operations improvements.

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

- Study the ability to place a light rail system along the Route 8 corridor from Derby to Bridgeport via Shelton and Trumbull to offset traffic congestion on Route 8. Establishment of a light rail directly between Derby and Bridgeport would still allow for commuters to gain access to Stratford and Milford via Bridgeport.
- Improve parking and station operations from the Derby-Shelton station north to Waterbury to accommodate more commuters, including sufficient, reasonably-priced parking from Derby north.
- Service level improvements on the Waterbury branch line including a return train at evening peak to accommodate commuters using the recently added direct service train from Waterbury to Stamford at morning peak.
- Improve TOD opportunities along the Naugatuck Valley Corridor for downtowns and adjoining residential/commercial developments

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

Mr. Dunne shared a memorandum for study team reference, outlining VCOG concerns regarding the types of analyses/underlying assumptions that may be used in the study.