

MEETING MINUTES

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

MEETING DATE: October 7, 2008

TIME: 9:00 – 11:30 AM

LOCATION: Bridgeport City Hall Annex Conference Rooms A and B, Bridgeport, CT

PURPOSE: Study Advisory Committee Meeting #2

ATTENDEES:

Name	Organization	Phone	Email
Mike Bronko	Mayor, Borough of Naugatuck	203-720-7009	mbronko@naugatuck-ct.gov
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Sam Gold	Council of Governments of the Central Naugatuck Valley (COG-CNV)	203-757-0535	sgold@cogcnv.org
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Floyd Lapp	South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA)	203-316-5190	lapp@swrpa.org
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Peter Simmons	CT Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD)	860-270-8149	Peter.simmons@ct.gov
Katharine Zatkowski	Rideworks – Waterbury	203-757-7662	kzatkowski@rideworks.com

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Andrew Davis	Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) – Planning	860-594-2157	Andrew.h.davis@po.state.ct.us
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Peter Smoluchowski	Parsons Transportation Group	212-266-8522	peter.smoluchowski@parsons.com
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Mike Morehouse	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.	860-247-7200	mmorehouse@fhiplan.com
Leslie Black	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.	860-247-7200	lblack@fhiplan.com
Rob Aloise	URS	860-529-8882	Robert_aloise@urscorp.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 explained that the study is a feasibility study to identify the most promising options and weigh the tradeoffs between them. 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 discussed Study Advisory Committee responsibilities, which include attending meetings, reviewing materials, participating in discussions, and disseminating information to constituents. Next, Leslie Black discussed the public outreach activities underway for the study and provided the study website address: www.waterbury-newcanaanrail.org.

Peter Smoluchowski, of Parsons Transportation Group and study team project manager, 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

First, Mr. Smoluchowski described the existing conditions along the Waterbury Branch :

- Diesel
- Single track operations
- Manual block system

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- No signal system (dark territory)
- All stations except Waterbury lack high platform level boarding
- Freight service must be accommodated

The long list of potential improvements that will be considered for the Waterbury Branch include:

- Provide passing sidings
- Provide a cab/no wayside Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) system to enhance operational efficiency, safety, and (possibly) operating speeds
- Double tracking
- Electrify from the New Haven Line to Waterbury
- Electrify from the New Haven Line to Derby-Shelton
- Overnight train storage
- Express bus on Route 8
- Bus rapid transit (BRT) in existing rail right-of-way
- Light rail transit (LRT) in existing rail right-of-way
- Multi-modal transit center at Derby-Shelton or Waterbury
- New Merritt Parkway Station in Milford
- Station facility improvements such as high-level platforms and expanded parking facilities

New Canaan Branch

Next, Mr. Smoluchowski described the existing conditions along the New Canaan Branch:

- Electrified
- Single track operation
- Limited overnight storage capacity at New Canaan Station
- Lack of storage capacity, signal system, automated switches, and second platform at New Canaan Station exacerbates service deficiencies, especially during the evening peak
- Parking at or over capacity
- Station platforms designed for a maximum of 4 train cars (some are shorter), but extending platforms is difficult due to nearby grade crossings and other physical constraints

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The long list of potential improvements that will be considered for the New Canaan Branch include:

- Provide passing sidings
- Extend the cab/no wayside Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) system to the New Canaan Station to enhance operational efficiency, safety, and (possibly) operating speeds
- Increase overnight storage and add second platform at New Canaan Station
- Increase parking capacity
- Add new crossover before Stamford Station
- Station facility improvements
- New station at East Main Street in Stamford

Mr. Smolchowski then opened the discussion for questions and comments.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

- What was the on-board survey response rate? ***On-board commuter survey and telephone survey results will be provided to the Study Advisory Committee when available.***
- Under a no build situation, what expansion of service would be expected for the Waterbury line? ***Because the Waterbury line is limited by single-track service at this time, service expansion would be limited to working with current service schedules to optimize existing track use. A recent example is the addition of an early train departing from Waterbury. This train was moved from Bridgeport up the track to be stored in Waterbury for an early morning departure ahead of the regular first run of the day.***
- Were the on-off counts included in the tech memos taken before or after the addition of the new AM train on the Waterbury Branch? ***Before.***
- The Transportation Strategy Board requested that ConnDOT look at a new Waterbury Branch station south of Derby-Shelton, as well as electrification of the branch. will these alternatives be a part of this study? ***Yes, ConnDOT will evaluate the potential of a new Merritt Parkway Station in Milford, as well as full and partial electrification of the Waterbury Branch.***
- Route 34 east of route 8 is already over capacity for highway traffic; this should be a consideration in evaluating the potential for a multi-modal hub at Derby-Shelton.
- Will you be doing a technology review as part of the study? ***Yes.***
- Waterbury branch line ridership experiences peak travel on Sunday for inter-city travel. The study should provide some consideration of this peak.
- Is it a storage issue or a money issue with regard to adding more trains on the Waterbury line? ***It has to do with the fact that only one train can be on the line at once because there are no sidings and no signalization.***

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- Some trains deadhead back to Stamford before turning around to go back to Waterbury—is there any consideration being given to making stops between Bridgeport and Stamford along the way? **Not at this time; in order to make stops, trains would have to travel on the outer, rather than the middle, tracks, which would have operational implications for existing New Haven Line traffic.**
- Will the old parking structure at the Waterbury station be taken down to make way for improvements? **The structure will be looked at in the parking analysis of the existing parking footprint and requirements for future parking demand. It is recognized that the structure poses a problem for both safety and aesthetics.**
- Waterbury branch ridership is lower than other branch lines. Is marketing and public visibility of service being looked at as part of the study? Regional planning agencies are willing to collaborate with ConnDOT to promote both existing service and any future improvements. **Service improvements will include notification to the public of the changes/improvements. The telephone and on-board passenger surveys will assist with identification of issues and will advertise that the branch line is being studied. Stations and their access/wayfinding issues will also be looked at as part of the study. Wayfinding improvements and promotion of services will be considered as a near-term recommendation.**
- Low cost media releases would provide one avenue for publicizing branch line improvements.
- Surveys may not be the best sources of ideas for improving service on the Waterbury Branch, since data is being collected from those who may not know what service improvements can be available. Data may not predict how service improvements will alter usage/ridership.
- Concerned that the value of the improvements will not be projected high enough in this study. For example, the parking situation at Derby-Shelton demonstrates anecdotally the lengths that passengers will go to for improved service – many riders with valid permits for other stations choose instead to park illegally at Derby-Shelton. There is demand for service that is currently constrained.
- How would a high platform meet the needs of both passenger and freight service? **High platforms would be built with a wider gap to maintain freight clearances. This is purely a design issue, not a cost issue.**
- There is Town-owned land available for parking in Derby-Shelton at this point in time. New parking facility recommendations should take into consideration land availability.
- ConnDOT should be aware that many towns along the Waterbury Branch currently have economic development encroachments that are used by businesses for parking. It will not be received well by the local business community if these encroachments are removed.
- How will study recommendations take into account ADA requirements? **Any new or improved stations must be ADA compliant.**

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- Is ConnDOT considering non-rail improvements to fill service gaps in the near-term? **Yes, bus service improvements will be considered as a potential near-term measure.**
- Are there other rail projects in Connecticut competing for state and federal funding resources? **There are a number of other pending transportation projects in the state, including: New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail Project and Danbury Branch Line Study, which are both in the environmental phase; the unfunded Worcester to New London study, and the proposed New Britain-Hartford Busway.**
- Congestion in the Stamford Station area, which has limited available space to expand station or parking facilities, may divert passengers to nearby New Canaan Branch stations. However, this trend may not be reflected in the onboard and telephone surveys, since people aren't thinking about it yet. This possibility should be taken into consideration during the study.
- The demographic data included in the tech memos is presented by municipality, which doesn't truly reflect the catchment area of the New Canaan Branch, especially at Glenbrook and Springdale stations.
- The Stamford Station needs a sub-area analysis to consider the demand generated by the growing residential population near East Main Street. **The current physical constraints of the area very likely preclude adding an East Main Street station stop in Stamford, but the study team will review and present findings to the stakeholder group from that area.**
- The need for parking improvements along the New Canaan Branch is critical; the city of Stamford does not want to bear all the responsibility for New Canaan Branch parking, especially since parking is a dead use of space for most of the day.
- An Annual Report published in 1978 showed a need for improvements to the Waterbury Branch, but nothing ever came of it. We need to fight for funding for these improvements so that we don't wind up overspending on highway improvements.
- Will there be a cost estimate for double tracking the Waterbury Line? **Yes—cost estimates will be provided for all alternatives considered in the study.**
- Could Stamford and/or SWRPA sponsor a New Canaan Line-specific charrette and would the results be incorporated in the study. **Yes, ConnDOT will organize a meeting once the Long List concepts for the New Canaan Branch are developed.**

ADDITIONAL NOTES

The study team will follow up on the following action items:

- Item 1: On-board commuter survey and telephone survey results will be provided to the Study Advisory Committee when available.
- Item 2: The study team will reach out to East Main Street stakeholder group in Stamford area to present findings.

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- Item 3: Future Study Advisory Committee meetings will be held at the Bridgeport City Hall Annex to provide central location for committee members. The time of meetings will be 9:30 AM to better accommodate train arrival times.