

Representative Lamar, Senator Leone and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee.

My name is Jim Gildea, and I am the Chairman of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council. I am offering written testimony IN SUPPORT OF:

SENATE BILL 155
AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUTER RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS.

In my opinion ***Senate Bill 155*** would potentially address a number of needs regarding rail improvements. While I believe that the all lines and branches are important, for the sake of this testimony, I am focusing on the component that speaks to the Waterbury branch of the New Haven Line as I feel it has been underdeveloped and it has amongst the most substandard coaches and service. This branch runs from Waterbury to Bridgeport, 2 of the 5 largest Cities in the State and includes stops in Waterbury, Naugatuck, Beacon Falls, Seymour, Ansonia and Derby/Shelton.

As daily commuter on the Waterbury branch line. I see the potential of the line on a daily basis. I also see that one of the roadblocks in increasing the ridership base is a lack of consistent commuter friendly service times. There is not a commuter friendly evening commute time. For those who work and live along the branch corridor, there only 2 evening commute options leaving Bridgeport and traveling down through the Waterbury branch. A commuter must either take the 3:25 train leaving Bridgeport or the 6:03 PM train leaving Bridgeport. If you miss the 6:00 PM train, you must then wait until 8:34 PM. There are no commute times in between.

In April 2008 the Connecticut Department of Transportation added an additional morning train on the branch line and the effect was dramatic. In the immediate 18 months following this additional train, there was an increase in ridership almost 40%. This is a clear indication that as service is added on the Waterbury branch, ridership will follow.

The addition of service on the Waterbury branch line is not only impactful to the commuters along the branch, it will also have a dramatic effect on the economies of each City that has a downtown that the branch runs through. Having a viable transportation line with viable service times will be an economic driver and a springboard for transit-oriented development along the branch. This type of economic springboard would be a benefit to the taxpayers who live in those cities along the Waterbury Corridor.

Finally, the Waterbury branch line is nearing completion on a \$70 million passing siding project which is expected to be completed in approximately December 2021. It is important that the state capitalize on this investment and add the additional service that the new sidings will allow. To have spent \$70 million on passing sidings and not couple that with increased service would mean that the \$70 million investment would turn out to be a waste of taxpayer money.

Finally, we would endorse the language as proposed by Mayor Neal O’Leary on behalf of all the Mayor’s and First Selectmen who are responsible for a City or Town that the line runs through.

Specifically they propose,

1. Funds must be committed, above and beyond currently authorized levels, to design and acquire additional dual-powered locomotives and rail cars to operate on the WRL. It is imperative to move this project forward as quickly as possible. Once the necessary bond funds are approved, lead time for the design and manufacturing of the locomotives and rail cars is a four-to-five year timeline from specification, design, and order to delivery, testing and placing into service. The longer the commitment to fund takes, the longer the time to realizing the benefits of improved service. We estimate that eight dual-powered locomotives and 24 new rail cars are required to meet the long term service needs of the WRL.
2. Once the new rail equipment is delivered, it is necessary to have space to store the equipment and facilities to maintain and refuel the equipment. Currently, existing storage yards and maintenance facilities are near or at capacity. Funds must be committed to identifying a location for new facilities, and designing and constructing the new yard and maintenance facility so that it can be completed and available when new rail equipment is delivered. We strongly recommend that such a yard be located along the WRL.
3. Develop a Waterbury Rail Line Improvement Plan that identifies strategic projects and actions necessary to expand service and improve infrastructure.
4. Immediately institute one new morning train, between 7:30 and 8:30 am, in the southbound direction and one new evening train, between 6:30 pm and 7:30 pm, in the northbound direction.
5. By December 31, 2022, institute one additional train in each direction, one serving the morning peak period and one serving the evening peak period.
6. By January 2025, provide 30-minute headway service during the morning and evening peak periods and 60-minute headway service during off-peak periods once the Central Traffic Control Signalization and Positive Train Control systems are commissioned and become fully operational.

For all of the reasons listed above, I urge the passage of this bill.

Jim Gildea
Chairman, Connecticut Commuter Rail Council