



February 24, 2020

Statement of Neil M. O’Leary, Mayor, City of Waterbury, and N. Warren “Pete” Hess, Mayor of Naugatuck on behalf of Mark Lauretti, Mayor, City of Shelton, Richard Dziekan, Mayor, City of Derby, David Cassetti, Mayor, City of Ansonia, Kurt Miller, First Selectman, Town of Seymour, Gerard Smith, First Selectman, Town of Beacon Falls, Ed Mone, First Selectman, Town of Thomaston, and the entire Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments in support of Senate Bill 155, AN ACT CONCERNING RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS.

Senator Leone, Representative Lemar and members of the Transportation Committee:

Thank you for accepting our statement in favor of Senate Bill 155, AN ACT CONCERNING RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS.

We are attaching suggested language to this testimony to be incorporated into the bill that will appropriately reflect the goals and discussions for the Waterbury Rail Line (WRL) between our communities, the Department of Transportation and Governor Lamont’s Administration.

While we understand that Senate Bill 155 calls for a study of rail needs in Connecticut, with respect to the Waterbury Rail Line these studies are already completed, \$90 million has already been invested in the rail infrastructure, and the authorization to purchase rail coaches and locomotives needed to increase service on this line must be made now if our state is to prosper. Therefore, on behalf of our Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) and the eight chief elected officials that comprise the NVCOG Rail Committee, we respectfully request that the committee include the attached language in the final bill.

The proposed WRL improvement program is the single most important infrastructure project impacting the Naugatuck Valley Region. The economic and quality of life benefits that expanding service and providing new, modern rail equipment on the Waterbury Rail Line will bring to our region are immense. The State has already invested about \$90 million to install a Central Traffic Control signal system, implement Positive Train Control and construct passing sidings on the WRL. Without the commitment to provide frequent and reliable train service and new, state-of-the-art locomotives and rail cars to operate that expanded service, that \$90 million investment will have been wasted.

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The capital and operating actions we are proposing are imperative to finish the work started by the CTDOT and take full advantage of the investments already made. Once the signal system becomes operational, multiple trains will be able to operate on the line at the same time, with a capacity of up to 10 trains per hour. Without the requisite replacement and upgrade of existing rail equipment, acquisition of new, modern rail equipment, expansion of service to meet passenger needs, and development of adequate rail storage and maintenance facilities, the previously allocated \$90 million for WRL improvements will not deliver a positive return. It is only by continuing and completing the WRL improvement project will the state realize the full potential in improving the WRL.

In the past 10-to-15 years, the State has made substantial investments in rail infrastructure throughout Connecticut. These actions include rehabilitation of the New Haven main line, upgrading the Hartford Line and instituting commuter rail service, building the CT*fastrak* busway, service enhancements on the Danbury and New Canaan branch lines, and constructing new rail stations and high level platforms along the Shoreline East line. Over that same period of time, travel within the Route 8 and WRL corridors through the Naugatuck Valley has been sorely neglected. Traffic continues to grow on Route 8, causing daily back-ups from the Commodore Hull Bridge at the Derby-Shelton town line, six miles to Seymour in the morning and corresponding evening back-ups to Stratford near the Merritt Parkway. And, the WRL provides only limited service that fails to adequately meet the needs of most commuters, and continues to be operated with old, unreliable equipment that suffers frequent breakdowns. The time to focus on the Route 8 and WRL is long overdue.

While we are supporting improvements to the WRL to provide better and more reliable travel options for our residents, the more critical imperative is the potential economic impact investments in the WRL will have. The cities and towns along the WRL all have small, compact, historic downtowns with infrastructure available to support higher density land uses. Our former industrial base has been replaced by vacant lots and under-used former factory buildings. However, our downtowns also feature historic buildings, unique architecture and walkable streets. In other words, the Naugatuck Valley Region has “good bones” and, with targeted public investment, offers a singular opportunity in Connecticut for transformational revitalization and economic growth.

We believe converting the WRL into a reliable, convenient and modern commuter rail line will revitalize downtown areas, spur private development and be the catalyst for a tremendous infusion of private investment in housing and commercial development to take advantage of proximity to attractive train service.

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The State is already seeing the rewards from investing in modern transit. Along the Hartford Line about \$400 million in private investment has been made in and around stations; and about \$350 million has been spent for new housing and commercial space along the CTfastrak busway. The potential exists for similar economic activity in the Naugatuck Valley. An on-going Alternative Transportation Modes and Transit Oriented Development (TOD) study being conducted by AECOM and CDM Smith for the NVCOG assessed the potential increase in commercial development, housing units and population that could accrue from improvements to the WRL. There are about 275 acres of land available for new or in-fill development. If fully used, nearly 5.2 million square feet of new commercial space, 6,245 new residential units and more than 16,000 new residents could result.

In addition, the investment in commuter rail service will help the State retain and attract young professionals. Recent trends indicate that corporations and businesses are changing how they decide where to locate. In the 1970s and 1980s, many corporations relocated from large urban centers to suburban office parks; Fairfield County greatly benefited from this migration. Now, however, the suburban office park model has ended and corporations want to locate in cities with good mass transit, walkable downtowns, and numerous attractions. This trend has been influenced by the desire of younger professionals and workforce to live in vibrant, walkable areas where convenient transit is available and where they don't have to rely on driving. This is documented by the tremendous amount of new, high density residential units built in downtown Stamford near the Stamford rail station.

Much of the congestion that occurs each day on Route 8 and I-95 can be traced to development trends that created large suburban office parks in Fairfield County. The traditionally lower housing costs in the Naugatuck Valley resulted in many mid-level employees working in these office parks to seek affordable housing in the Naugatuck Valley; they couldn't afford the higher housing costs found in many Fairfield County towns. Their only viable and reliable way to get to work is to drive down Route 8 and onto I-95. About 80,000 vehicles cross the Commodore Hull Bridge each day and about 14,000 residents of towns along the WRL travel to Bridgeport, New Haven and Stamford, translating into 28,000 trips. The WRL improvement program will provide these commuters an alternative way to get to work and help reduce congestion and maybe avoid expensive highway projects needed to address congestion.

Those who live in the greater Naugatuck Valley region and work in lower Fairfield County are well aware of the longstanding problems with the WRL. Currently, there are insufficient number of trains in morning and evening time periods; riders are concerned that should they miss a connection, they will have to wait more than two hours for the next train and arrive late to work. On time performance is poor, and existing equipment is old, unreliable, in poor condition and not clean.

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When bus service is substituted for train service, passengers experience excessive delays waiting for the buses to arrive. These conditions do not instill confidence that you can complete your trip on-time or at all. If you have another travel option, you are likely to use it. Hence, the congestion on Route 8 and the excess traffic that flows onto I-95.

In addition to the economic benefits, it is likely that ridership will increase as service is improved. In 2007, one new southbound trip was instituted in the morning peak period. The affect was a one year increase of 34%; from an annual total of 231,800 passengers to 310,250 riders. A similar or larger boost in ridership can be reasonably expected. Today, annual ridership totals about 345,000 passengers.

Understanding the benefits that will ensue from a strategic investment in the WRL, we recommend that the following actions be included in Senate Bill 155:

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.

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In following through with the investment needed to realize the benefits from a \$90 million investment already committed, this project will serve as a powerful catalyst for regional economic development and revitalization. It will provide convenient and attractive rail service for the residents of the Naugatuck Valley region, help reduce longstanding traffic congestion on Route 8 and I-95, and have transformative impact on the greater Naugatuck Valley. We strongly urge your support of the Waterbury Rail Line improvement program and respectfully request inclusion of the proposed language appended to the end of this document.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact us with any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Neil M. O’Leary
Mayor, City of Waterbury

N. Warren “Pete” Hess
Mayor, Borough of Naugatuck

Mark Lauretti
Mayor, City of Shelton

Richard Dziekan
Mayor, City of Derby

David Casseti
Mayor, City of Ansonia

Kurt Miller
First Selectman, Town of Seymour

Gerard Smith
First Selectman, Town of Beacon Falls

Ed Mone
First Selectman, Town of Thomaston



PROPOSED LANGUAGE FOR SB 155

TO EXPAND SERVICE ON THE WATERBURY RAIL LINE.

1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly
2 convened:

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4 That section 13b-79p of the general statutes be amended to require
5 the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation to develop a strategic
6 transportation plan and projects to be known as the Waterbury Rail Line
7 Improvement Plan, and implement such plan to modernize the equipment operated
8 on the Waterbury Rail Line, hereinafter referred to as the WRL, expand commuter
9 rail services, and construct a new rail storage and maintenance facility to be located
10 along the WRL for equipment operated on the WRL in order to reach the goal of
11 providing 30-minute headway service during the morning and evening peak
12 periods and 60-minute headway service during off-peak periods by January 2025.
13 This strategic transportation plan shall include the following specific projects and
14 initiatives:

15 (1) Develop a Waterbury Rail Line Improvement Plan that identifies strategic
16 projects and actions required to transform the WRL and make it a catalyst for
17 economic revitalization within the corridor. The Plan shall include, but shall not be
18 limited to, the following:

19 (a) Prepare an operations simulation model to determine operating density
20 on the WRL.

21 (b) Identify options for equipment, service and infrastructure enhancements.

22 (c) Examine rail storage and maintenance requirements and evaluate possible
23 sites along the WRL.

24 (d) Assess existing station areas and develop site plan concepts for new
25 passenger station areas, high level platforms, full accessibility, real-time
26 information, and passenger amenities.

27 (e) Identify and assess long term WRL equipment, service infrastructure
28 needs, including actions to maximize the potential service capacity resulting
29 from the implementation of Traffic Control Signalization and Positive Train
30 Control.

31 (f) Assess feasibility of developing a permanent transfer station at the Devon
32 wye

- 33 (2) Institute one (1) new morning peak hour train serving WRL stations
34 between 7:30 am and 8:30 am in the inbound (toward New York City) by
35 December 31, 2020.
- 36 (3) Institute one (1) new evening peak hour train serving WRL stations between
37 6:30 pm and 7:30 pm in the outbound direction (from New York City) by
38 December 31, 2020.
- 39 (4) Institute one (1) additional train in each direction during the morning and
40 evening peak periods, at appropriate times by December 31, 2022.
- 41 (5) Develop specifications, design, have built and acquire dual-powered
42 locomotives and rail cars dedicated for operation on the WRL, not to exceed
43 \$150 million. This action shall be integrated with the rail equipment
44 procurement previously authorized by the General Assembly and currently
45 underway. A minimum of twenty-four (24) rail cars and eight (8) dual-
46 powered locomotives shall be acquired and dedicated for primary operation on
47 the WRL.
- 48 (6) Construct a new rail storage and maintenance yard and facility along the
49 WRL.
- 50 (7) Provide 30-minute headway service during the morning and evening peak
51 periods and 60-minute headway service during off-peak periods once Traffic
52 Control Signalization and Positive Train Control are commissioned and
53 become fully operational. Anticipated by January 2025.
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55 ***Statement of Purpose***

56 To improve transportation options, support economic development
57 and relieve highway congestion in Connecticut by increasing
58 commuter rail service along the Waterbury Rail Line.