



February 26, 2021

Statement of Neil M. O'Leary, Mayor City of Waterbury and Chairman of the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments, and Rick Dunne, Executive Director, the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments, on Governor Lamont's Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Biennial Budget Proposal for Transportation Agencies.

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for accepting our written statement in favor of Governor Lamont's Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Biennial Budget Proposal into the record.

The Governor's budget proposal includes \$1.2 million to increase the number of trains servicing the Waterbury line from 15 to 22 across weekday morning and evening peak as well as off-peak services. It represents a crucial start toward the region's long-term goal of achieving 30-minute service during peak travel periods.

Throughout the past several years, improving service the Waterbury Rail Line has been among the highest priorities for communities in the Naugatuck Valley. A designated group of Mayors and First Selectman representing the region personally advocated for improving frequency and quality of rail service during a 2020 Transportation Committee Public Hearing as the single most important infrastructure project impacting the Naugatuck Valley Region and in their opinion, one of the most important to the state of Connecticut. Their commitment to these upgrades remains steadfast.

Several points to note regarding needed upgrades to the WRL:

- The State has already invested nearly \$120 million for a new traffic control signal system, Positive Train Control (PTC) and passing sidings, but has not committed to equipment and service increases to take advantage of that investment. We need to finish the work started by the CTDOT and take full advantage of that already invested \$90 million.
- The economic and quality of life benefits they will bring to our region are immense. This will revitalize downtown areas and spur private development. The stations areas are in compact, historic downtowns with infrastructure available to support higher density land uses. Every community on this rail line features former industrial economic bases with numerous vacant or underutilized parcels available for reuse and redevelopment.

An on-going TOD study being conducted by AECOM and CDM Smith for NVCOG illustrates the potential increase in commercial development, housing units and population:

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- About 276 acres of available land is located in and around the WRL stations.
- Full Development = 6,245 new residential units and more than 16,000 new residents could occur if rail service is increased.

For value comparison, about \$375 million has been invested near CTfastrak line stations and about \$400 million has been invested along the Hartford Line. In addition, current economic trends indicate that younger professionals and workforce wants to live in vibrant, walkable areas where convenient transit available and they don't have to rely on driving. Investing in the WRL will help the state retain and attract young professionals.

- Increasing WRL service and the resulting increase in ridership will also help address major traffic problems in the lower Naugatuck Valley, a bottleneck known to every commuter who uses Route 8. Approximately 80,000 vehicles travel through the lower valley each day on a highway designed to handle half that volume. Long back-ups occur southbound in the morning and northbound in the evening. Much of this traffic flows onto I-95, contributing to that highway's congestion problems.

The \$1.2 million allocation in the Governor's budget proposal represents the initial investment toward a larger commitment needed to realize the benefits from a nearly \$120 million investment already obligated to a project that will serve as an powerful catalyst for regional economic development and reducing longstanding traffic congestion that will have a transformative impact on the greater Naugatuck Valley. We strongly urge your support.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact us at your convenience with any questions you may have.