

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5423

AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXPANSION OF PASSENGER TRAIN AND
Title: GROUND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES IN EASTERN CONNECTICUT.

Vote Date: 3/26/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/19/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Christine Conley, 40th Dist.; Sen. Norman Needleman, 33rd Dist.; Sen. Catherine A. Osten, 19th Dist.; Rep. Brian T. Smith, 48th Dist.; Rep. Joe de la Cruz, 41st Dist.; Rep. Susan M. Johnson, 49th Dist.; Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.; Rep. Emmett D. Riley, 46th Dist.; Rep. Kevin Ryan, 139th Dist.; Rep. Travis Simms, 140th Dist.; Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.; Sen. Heather S. Somers, 18th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

To study the expansion of passenger train and ground transportation services in the eastern region of the state.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[State of Connecticut Department of Transportation](#)

The State of Connecticut Department of Transportation presented and submitted testimony on this bill, in which it offered comments on the legislation. Said comments are as follows: "Additional funding would be required for the Department to conduct a feasibility study and operational plan as outlined in the bill. Information on market opportunities, infrastructure capabilities and operating alternatives would need to be obtained and analyzed. The study would further require the Department to work with Amtrak, owner of the Northeast Corridor in eastern Connecticut and Rhode Island, as well as Rhode Island and Massachusetts officials to identify the opportunities associated with expanded rail service."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Suzanne Ellery; Groton Labs Site Affairs Lead, Pfizer Inc.](#)

Suzanne Ellery presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of Pfizer. The testimony states that "train service with a rail stop in the City of Groton in close proximity to our Research and Development site will ease the commute burden on our existing employees," and that "the project would significantly reduce congestion on Interstate 95 and also make travel easier to our sister sites in New Haven and New York." The text concludes with noting the allure expanded train service would have on potential hires.

[Betsy Gara, Executive Director of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns](#)

Betsy Gara presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of COST. The testimony states that "extending Shore Line East to other regions in Eastern Connecticut would be a valuable tool in attracting employees and visitors to the towns in this region," and that rail service has been proven to provide residents and visitors with transportation options while reducing traffic congestion and carbon emissions.

[Charles J. Rothenberger, Climate & Energy Attorney for Save the Sound](#)

Charles J. Rothenberger presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of Save the Sound. The testimony states that "[the bill] recognizes the vital role that eastern Connecticut plays in the state's economy as well as the need for a deliberate and focused plan to improve transportation options in the region," then offers a summary of what the bill would provide. The text concludes by attesting that the bill is critical to combat past under-investment in the region—noting Electric Boats increase in its workforce and the development of the New London State Pier to support the construction of Connecticut's Revolution Wind offshore wind projects—then states that the proposal is proactive solution to the potentially adverse consequences of growing economic development, most notable traffic congestion and the consequential heightening of carbon emissions.

[Susan Adams, Government Liaison for Electric Boat](#)

Susan Adams presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of Electric Boat. The testimony notes that Electric boat "anticipates adding 2000 jobs in the next 5 years," and that extended rail service would offer employees much needed commuting opportunities, as most employees commute in single occupancy vehicles, which causes parking issues and congestion. The text concludes by stating that the bill would also support economic development in the region and provide employees with recreation activities after work.

[Rep. Christine Conley, 40th Assembly District of Connecticut \(Co-Signed by 5 Other Representatives\)](#)

Representative Christine Conley, as well as 5 other representatives, presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony references the issues of traffic congestion and carbon emissions, while noting the opportunities for economic development this bill would bring and the rise in ridership growth our railways experienced before the pandemic. In reference to the M8 locomotives, the text states as follows: "Not only are these railcars more environmentally-friendly than their diesel-powered alternatives, they are quieter, safer, more comfortable, and can accommodate the addition of single cars to adapt to increases in ridership," before adding that "even if it were determined that electric railcars were not feasible for these new lines, reducing the number of cars on the road is always a positive

development." The testimony concludes with a statistical analysis of locomotive carbon emission versus that of automobiles, and by offering a reiteration of their support of this bill.

[Jim Gildea, Chairman of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council](#)

Jim Gildea presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of the CCRC. The testimony references the issues of traffic congestion and carbon emissions, while noting the opportunities for economic development this bill would bring and the impending job increase we will see with Electric Boat. The text describes two potential components to expanded rail service: 1. The extension of the Shore Line East (SLE) passenger service, and 2. The establishment of "a new CT Rail commuter shuttle service using existing Providence and Worcester Railroad (P&W) (now the Genessee and Wyoming Railroad) tracks that run along the east bank of the Thames River connecting Pfizer, Electric Boat and the U.S. Navy Submarine Base." The council concludes by noting that 80% of EB employees live outside of Groton and New London, and reiterating the detriment of carbon emissions as well as their support for the study.

[Nancy Codeanne, Chair for the Town of Groton Housing Authority](#)

Nancy Codeanne presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of the Town of Groton Housing Authority. The testimony notes that "with the creation of new housing complexes in Groton and limited accessibility to public transportation, the extension of the Shore Line East line would not only provide convenient commuter services but would provide the citizens of Groton and other towns east of the Thames River, a vital link to other communities in Connecticut and beyond," then concludes by noting that safe transportation links are vital for the elderly and disabled.

[Zell Steever, Chairman of the Groton Resiliency and Sustainability Task Force](#)

Zell Steever presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of the GRSTF. The first half of the testimony is identical to that of [Jim Gildea's](#). The second half of the testimony offers legislative language for three "key provisions" that the task force recommends be added to the bill, as well as detailed explanations as to the purpose of these provisions.

[Bruce Flax, Interim Director Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce](#)

Bruce Flax presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of the GMCC. The testimony is identical to that of [Jim Gildea's](#).

[Jessica Stratton, Member of the Groton Resiliency and Sustainability Task Force](#)

Jessica Stratton presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill on behalf of the GRSTF. The testimony notes the issue of carbon emissions, traffic congestion, and the impending job increase we will see at Electric Boat—then concludes with the following: "In sum, undertaking a review of the feasibility and desirability of increasing passenger rail service is consistent with the state's environmental and economic goals and I think the outcome of evaluations would make the many benefits of building out this service abundantly clear."

[Michael E. Passero, Mayor of New London](#)

Michael E. Passero presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony begins by stating as follows: "this proposal would provide support for our existing industrial

base, and be attractive for new businesses and employees." The remainder of the text is identical to that of [Jim Gildea's](#).

[Danielle Chesebrough, First Selectman of Stonington](#)

Danielle Chesebrough presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony states that, being located between Boston and New York City, an extended rail line would benefit Stonington in terms of commuting possibilities and tourism. The text concludes by noting the issue of carbon emissions, traffic congestion, and the impending job increase we will see at Electric Boat.

[Captain G. Michael and Lynda Hewitt, USN \(Ret\); Residents of Noank](#)

Captain G. Michael and Lynda Hewitt presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony offers a summary of their experience with traffic congestion over years of living and working in the town of Groton, concluding by noting the importance of reducing carbon emissions.

[John Burt, Town Manager of Groton](#)

John Burt presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony states that rail expansion would increase commuting capabilities and tourism in the region, as well as reduce dangerous carbon emission levels by way of decreasing traffic congestion.

[Kristin Distante, Resident of Mystic](#)

The testimony notes the issue of carbon emissions, traffic congestion, and the impending job increase we will see at Electric Boat—then states as follows: "In a region where we are generally conscious of and proactive in terms of conservation and environmental quality, this project is forward thinking, appropriate in vision and scale, and will improve the quality of life for residents and facilitate visitors."

[Frederic Fischer, Resident of Groton](#)

Frederic Fischer presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony notes that this bill would aid economic development, tourism, commuter opportunities, Electric Boat's impending job increase, and reduce carbon emissions.

[James C. Furlong, Resident of Mystic](#)

James C. Furlong presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony reflects Mr. Furlong's disappointment with local train service and his concern over carbon emissions, then concludes with the following: "You may well be criticized for spending money. However, to my knowledge, most or all of the world's commuter railroads operate at a 2 deficit when that's assessed in narrow terms. However, the trains' economic benefit outweighs any simple counting of beans."

[Larry Thompson, Resident of Fairfield](#)

Larry Thompson presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony notes that extended rail service would help reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality.

[David Sax, Resident of Essex](#)

David Sax presented and submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony notes that this bill would aid economic development, tourism, and commuter opportunities, then concludes with the following: "Anyone who cannot or does not drive, finds existing Amtrak

service inadequate or has simply experienced one too many summer traffic jams on I-95 would welcome an alternative."

[Edward R. Johnson, Resident of Groton](#)

Edward R. Johnson submitted testimony in support of this bill. The testimony begins with Mr. Johnson's experiences living and working in the area—specifically noting the poor quality of passenger rail service, traffic congestion, parking congestion, and increasing carbon emissions. The text then offers two areas requiring attention to rail expansion: 1. "The first is based on using existing RR tracks in order to expand services offered by the Shore Line East operation into more passenger pick-up/drop off facilities from Westerly, Stonington, Mystic, and Groton to New London" and 2. "The second would be to utilize the existing tracks, belonging to Providence/Worcester RR, that presently extend from Groton and the East bank of the Thames River which would initially connect Electric Boat and Pfizer with the Navy Sub Base." The testimony ends with a detailed explanation as to how these would aid the region.

[23 Residents of Various Municipalities](#)

23 Residents of Various Municipalities submitted testimony in support of this bill. It is identical to [Charles J. Rothenberger's](#).

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Alexa Collin, Resident of Newington](#)

Alexa Collin presented and submitted testimony in opposition of this bill. The testimony states that Mrs. Collin's strongly opposes train expansion to Newington, as there are plenty of applicable busses that go unused and Hartford is only a 7-minute Uber ride away. The text concludes with the following: "In the era of Covid and for the years ahead there will be no support in our community for more public transportation like a train station. This is the general feeling of all of my friends as well."

[John Kearns, Resident of Newington](#)

John Kearns presented and submitted testimony in opposition of this bill. The testimony states that he strongly opposes expanded train service in Newington, then concludes with the following: "We wasted money on Fastraks that are used by homeless and drug dealers, I refuse to accept more wasted money on a mode of transportation that since covid is not going to be a viable. Please hear me , do not proceed with train stations in my town."

Reported by: Ian Bond

Date: 4/1/2021