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	Laura Cordes	West Hartford
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	Mike Mahoney	Westport
	Sue Prosi	Stratford
	Stephen Prostor	New Canaan
	Edwin Schroeder	Clinton
	Lisa Slinksy	Waterbury

2018 Annual Report

The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council (CCRC) is an independent board which acts as the advocate on behalf of commuters on railroad lines throughout the state, including the New Haven line, New Canaan, Danbury and Waterbury branches, Shore Line East, and the recently opened New Haven---Hartford---Springfield line.

The CCRC was created by an act of the Connecticut Legislature, Sec. 15.

Section 13b---212c. *Effective July 1, 2013 it was updated to:*

The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council shall study and investigate all aspects of the daily operation of commuter rail lines in the state, monitor their performance and recommend changes to improve the efficiency and the quality of service of the operation of such lines. The council may request and shall receive from any department, division, board, bureau, commission, agency, public authority of the state or any political subdivision thereof such assistance and data as it requests and will enable it to properly carry out its activities for the purposes set forth in this section. The council shall also work with the Department of Transportation to advocate for customers of all commuter lines in the state and shall make recommendations for improvements to such lines.

[CT General Statute - CCRC Powers & Duties](#)

The Governor and senior leaders of the General Assembly appoint council members in order to make certain that a broad range of perspectives are included in all meetings. We work with both the Department of Transportation and Metro North Railroad to bring forth the experiences of rail commuters and ensure their voices are heard. We are committed to improving the commuting experience for everyone.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONNECTICUT COMMUTER RAIL COUNCIL ADVOCACY FOR COMMUTERS IN 2018

[Minutes | Connecticut Commuter Rail Council 2018](#)

[Agendas | Connecticut Commuter Rail Council 2018](#)

Council:

During 2018 the CCRC met in cities across the state and Grand Central Terminal in order to support the inclusion of a broad variety of voices among the public and our elected representatives. Meetings were held in: Bridgeport, Stamford, Hartford, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Westport, Derby and in New York City at Grand Central Terminal. The Council will be further increasing its commuter advocacy efforts throughout 2019 and have plans to continue to hold their meetings along the main line and branches throughout the upcoming year.

The CCRC had an influx of new members in 2018 with five new members joining the Council. Peter Garneau, Douglas Haslauden, Stephen Prostor, Edwin Schroder and Lisa Slinksy all joined the Council in 2018. As of this writing, the Council has 2 vacant positions. One position is designated as an appointee of the Governor and shall be the chief elected official of a municipality located on an operating or proposed new rail line and the other vacancy is to be appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate.

Safety / Security:

Safety and security remain a top priority for the Council.

Positive Train Control, an advanced system designed to automatically stop a train before certain accidents occur, is a lingering issue for Metro-North.

PTC remains on the National Transportation Safety Board's updated list of Most Wanted transportation safety improvements

(<https://www.nts.gov/safety/mwl/Pages/mwlfs-19-20/mwl4.aspx>).

Congress originally mandated the full implementation of PTC technology nationwide by the end of 2015, but when it became clear that no railroads

including MNRR would meet the deadline, it was extended until the end of 2018 by the Positive Train Control Enforcement and Implementation Act of 2015 (PTCEI Act). Metro-North in 2015 received a federal loan of nearly \$1 billion to implement PTC.

In last year's Council annual report, we noted that Metro-North continued to insist that PTC would be installed by the deadline, but in 2019, the railroad announced that it would seek a two year extension, the criteria for which was established in the PTCEI act. Metro-North's application for extension drew heavy criticism from Senators Blumenthal and Schumer. It should be noted that all 41 subject railroads were granted extensions and no fines were levied against them.

The most recent (Q4 2018) Federal Railroad Administration PTC progress report for the railroad is found at <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FRA-2010-0032-0032>. Notable in the report:

- Metro-North was required to have one segment of track in Revenue Service Demonstration by the end of 2018. MNR is currently performing RSD on Hudson Line from Tarrytown to Croton-Harmon. On the other lines including the New Haven, the remaining Wayside Interface Units, Transponders, Antenna Poles, and Radio Base Stations have been installed and testing continues.
- All railroad employees are trained.
- Interoperability testing is ongoing with Amtrak and CSX (which runs on Metro-North tracks in the overnight hours).

The current most-likely time frame for full implementation is 2020.

From October 22 through November 1 2018, 16 pipe bombs were mailed to US addresses including in New York City, Chappaqua and Katonah. Metro-North riders noticed more visible security measures, including police dogs, at stations.

In January 2019, New York Governor Cuomo released the recommendations of the NY State Counterterrorism Advisory Panel (https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/NYS_Counterterrorism_Advisory_Panel_Recommendations.pdf). The panel's proposals include enhancing counterterrorism coordination at major transportation hubs.

Since 9/11, New York has substantially increased the counterterrorism assets deployed to protect airports, train and bus stations, bridges, tunnels, and critical infrastructure sites. After a focused review of the known targets— airports, major bridges and tunnels, and transit hubs downstate—we found that while each hub has tremendous state, federal, and local security assets in place, many have been added ad hoc, over time. Nowhere is there a greater need for coordination than Penn Station. It's the most heavily used train station in the Western Hemisphere: Serving 630,000 daily weekday travelers, more than LaGuardia, JFK, and Newark airports combined, its last major security overhaul was in the late 1960s. Given the separate chains of command at each agency, a holistic review is necessary to ensure that personnel and other assets at each location are deployed and coordinated as effectively as possible. In addition to considering staffing issues, the review should evaluate how to streamline inter-agency coordination and communication. We recommend taking steps to enhance coordination and communication among these agencies, including but not limited to ensuring each location has a joint 24/7 command center; enhancing coordinated crisis plans; maintaining interoperable communications; training all employees on emergency protocols; and prioritizing real-time mapping to assist first responders. As New York implements these recommendations at Penn, we recommend also doing so at other transportation hubs, like JFK, Grand Central, LaGuardia, Port Authority Bus Terminal, and others across the state. We understand that some of this work has already begun or has been completed across these various hubs.

The Council will continue to monitor Metro-North's safety and security initiatives.

New Canaan Branch:

2018 total ridership – 1,525,427 (0.8%)

2018 YTD on-time performance – 88.7%

Looking ahead into 2019, there is a great deal of renewed interest among the local business community, local realtors, town officials, legislators, and the CCRC in enhancing several aspects of the New Canaan Branch Line as it relates to:

- Customer Experience
- Service Enhancements
- Infrastructure investments

The group above including residents, town officials, local realtors, and legislators will be referenced as the “New Canaan Study Team.”

In early 2019, the objective is to escalate the conversation around this critical branch line that was almost ruined as a result of the State of Connecticut’s budget deficit in 2018 when local residents almost lost all weekend service and midday, weekday service on the line. The intention moving forward is to work toward a more effective partnership between the New Canaan Study Team, CTDOT, Metro North, and the CCRC. The New Canaan Study team was assembled to understand the significance of the role the New Canaan branch line plays in local commerce from a public transportation perspective. The effect of these proposed improvements should also positively impact the confidence of the business community that there exists a viable means of public transportation to transport their workforce to and from the worksite which should also result in continued future business development.

A list of priorities / enhancements was recently drafted up to improve the viability of the New Canaan branch line as a reliable source of transportation between New Canaan and NYC. This is also in keeping with the new Governor’s commitment on investing in transportation initiatives and enhancements to infrastructure throughout the state. This list includes opportunities involving capital investments as well as scheduling adjustments that would allow the community even more options from a commuting perspective.

This list includes but is not limited to:

- Schedule enhancements
- Station improvements
- Infrastructure improvements that will allow for more frequent service
- Improved parking at the stations
- Added rolling stock

Moving forward into 2019, the New Canaan Study team would be interested in attending the CCRC’s monthly meetings as a forum to help promote this agenda. Through these enhanced partnerships, we hope to

see some significant progress improvements made on this critical mass transit opportunity impacting all of the communities located along the branch line.

In January 2020, we hope to be in a position to reflect back on 2019 to review the progress on the priorities that have been established and executed in 2019.

[New Canaan Study Team Enhancement Report](#)

[New Canaan Enhancements Next Steps](#)

Waterbury Branch:

2018 total ridership – 342,660 (0.1%)

2018 YTD on-time performance – 81.2%

The projects contained in the initial five (5) year ramp up as part of Governor's thirty (30) year transportation plan have been funded. This will affect the Branch as the plan calls for a brand new fleet program to include locomotives and coaches. In addition, the plan calls for the installation of four (4) passing sidings and a signal system on the Branch. Passing sidings will be installed in Derby, Beacon Falls, Milford and Waterbury. Metro North has indicated that they are on schedule and will be completed prior to December 2020.

Currently, the Derby siding is complete but not yet active. The Beacon Falls siding is scheduled for installation in the Fall 2019. It is the hope of the Council that once the passing sidings are completed, the seventy (70) million dollar investment will be utilized and additional service will be added to the Branch.

At the Council meeting in Derby, the Department of Transportation indicated that they will be moving forward with the plans to upgrade the coaches and locomotives. They indicated they are working with a designer and will including commuters in the way of a Rail Procurement Advisory Committee.

The Council held their August meeting on the Waterbury Branch in Derby in an effort to connect with commuters and get a chance to hear about the progress on the line. We plan to meet again in 2019 on the Branch.

Main issues on the Branch include:

- Replacement buses, and the time that it takes for them to arrive, continues to be the biggest frustration among the passengers. Passengers having to stand on a curb in excess of an hour waiting for the promised buses causes a great deal of frustration among passengers trying to get to work in the morning, or home in the evening. We have been promised on multiple occasions, for many years, that contracts were in place or being addressed, to get replacement buses in under an hour. Many passengers have left the line, in favor of driving to Bridgeport, because their jobs have been threatened because of patterns of tardiness caused entirely by the railroad.
- The condition of the parking lot in Waterbury is deplorable. There is a plan for future improvements, including full paving of the lot and restoration of the station, but meanwhile, the potholes in the dirt make navigation on the property difficult at best. The narrow pavement strip along the drive entrance is passable by only one car, and the drop off to the dirt portion is significant. Navigating the entrance and exit down the single wide strip of pavement has created a secondary entrance and exit where cars are hopping the sidewalk near the Rep-Am building, through the bus stop area.
- The condition of the Waterbury parking lot is also of concern as Waterbury is the only handicap accessible station on the Branch.
- Thankfully, the crime that has plagued the Waterbury parking area has been addressed by the Waterbury PD, and we are currently not seeing daily piles of glass next to multiple cars. That said, vandalism has been an issue that affects commuters.
- The condition of our engines is being addressed, which will hopefully alleviate some of the late trains due to mechanical breakdowns. It is hoped that while the line is down for construction this summer, that the engines currently in service can be given some attention while they are not needed for daily service on the branch. The condition of the coaches is also poor, in large part due to their advanced years.
- Communication on late or canceled trains is still not consistent and at times, not provided.
- The 2018 on time percentage of 81.2% is simply substandard and stunts any potential growth on the line. There was a 4 month period (June – September) where the OT was below 70% all 4 months with a low of 64.4%. There are not numbers that promote growth.

Shore Line East:

2018 YTD on-time performance – 81.9% (-11.2%)

2018 average weekday ridership - 1,344 (-28.6%)

2018 average weekend ridership – 779 (-4.8%)

The past year was a disaster for Shore Line East in terms of on-time performance and ridership. The combination of ongoing track work, which involved significant single track operation, use of replacement of buses, and a miserable winter season with multiple cancelled and trains caused ridership to crater, losing nearly half of its ridership. These numbers did not significantly improve in the fall once track work ended. Further compounding the challenges was a pattern of poor communication between CDOT, Amtrak and riders with a complete lack of confidence by riders in operation.

In response to the lack of communication, an ad hoc Shore Line East Riders Association formed last spring with a focus on working with CDOT to improve communication, service and hopefully ridership. They held a series of meetings with CDOT, which a member of the Commuter Council attended. The result was implementation of a more aggressive and planned use of coach buses as opposed to CT Transit buses helped stabilize service in late spring.

The Rail Council had its April meeting in New London to hear from riders. Although we heard from some riders about the poor service, riders closer to New Haven were mostly unable to attend. There was discussion about how to make further improvements, mostly noted above. In particular there was discussion of the rebuilding on the diesel engines and the ongoing saga of the implementation of M-8's on SLE. According to CDOT there are issues around power, which tracks were wired, and fleet availability.

Questions for 2019 that the Commuter Council should pursue with CDOT and Amtrak include:

- Ongoing reliability of Shore Line East of service
- How is CDOT going to rebuild ridership
- Track work impact
- Communication; content and timeliness
- Expansion of use of M8's to SLE; other equipment issues
- Improved integration of Connecticut commuter rail

Hartford Line:

2018 total ridership – weekday average 1,489

2018 total ridership – weekend average 744

2018 YTD on-time performance – awaiting from CDOT

Council members both attended and welcomed the launch of the Hartford Line www.hartfordline.com in June of 2018 and continued to connect with riders in the greater Hartford area to solicit questions and concerns about the new line. Council members discussed concerns with DOT regarding the transport of bikes on the line, the honoring of Amtrak tickets on scheduled trains, and the lack of usable bathrooms. Members will continue to reach out to prospective riders along the line and invite residents to learn more at the Council's Hartford meeting which will be held at Union Station on February 20, 2019 and will attend the Connecticut Association for Community Transportation and the Women's Transportation Seminar on Feb. 20 as well.

Social Media:

The CCRC's website continues to attract additional commuter membership which demonstrates both the public's desire for additional information and the CCRC's success at providing it. To increase transparency, the CCRC posts all relevant meeting information to the website (members, contact information, meeting agendas, minutes, operations reports, etc.).

The website also serves as a vehicle for commuters (and less frequent users of rail services within the state) to communicate with the CCRC on relevant issues. In 2018, the Council website attracted over 6,000 visitors.

The CCRC's Twitter feed continues to attract new followers. After having not had a Twitter presence for years, the Twitter feed is nearing 1,600 followers (almost 400 new followers in the last 12 months). The CCRC uses the feed to update followers on Council business, provide a glimpse into the work of the council. The feed is also used to share updates that are provided to the CCRC by the Connecticut Department of Transportation and Metro North Railroad and on other news items of interest.

The CCRC will continue to use all available methods to connect and reach out to the commuters we advocate for in the coming year.

The CCRC does not receive a budget from the State of Connecticut. All costs required to support this public outreach is borne by the members themselves from their own funds.

Legislative:

In February 2018, for the fourth consecutive year, the Council held an annual meeting in Hartford. The Connecticut Department of Transportation provided an update on the progress of Hartford rail line. The Council used this meeting to determine their legislative strategy for the upcoming year.

In addition to the meeting in Hartford, the Council took a much more active role in articulating their opinions on a wide range of legislative topics: The Council was one of a number of groups participating in the following:

- The upcoming Rail Car Procurement Stakeholder Advisory Committee
- Transportation Coalition opposing the proposed fare hikes and service reduction plans
- Transportation Coalition Supporting Lock Box and transportation budget

In the area of the legislative initiatives:

- We played an active role in opposing the proposed fare hikes and service reduction by appearing on podcast, partnering with other transportation advocates, writing editorials and using our social media platform
- We provided testimony on the HB 5391 (proposed fare hikes and service reduction plan to offset the original CDOT budget) to the CT CGA
- We aggressively worked with the various legislative appointing authorities to fill all Council member appointments
- We played an active role in supporting the lockbox constitutional initiative by appearing on radio broadcasts, partnering with other transportation advocates, writing press releases and using our social media platform

Testimony can be read on the Council website:

<http://ctcommuterrailcouncil.org/>

Metro North Customer Satisfaction Survey

In July, the Metro North 2017 Customer Service Satisfaction Survey was released. Key findings included:

- Prior research has demonstrated a strong connection between customer satisfaction and on-time performance (OTP). In the six week period leading up to the 2017 survey, several incidents negatively impacted OTP, particularly affecting the New Haven Line.
- As a result, by the end of June, New Haven Line OTP had fallen just below its yearly goal.
- A six percent Connecticut fare increase went into effect in December 2016. Historically, fare increases have had a negative effect on satisfaction ratings.
- After increasing by 17 points between 2014 and 2017, satisfaction with Metro-North overall among customers of the 3 East of Hudson lines stabilized in 2017. The 89% of customers who were satisfied with the railroad in 2017 was a single point below the 2016 level.
- Customer satisfaction with the railroad among New Haven Line customers jumped 28 points between 2014 and 2016, from 59% to 87%. In 2017, however, satisfaction fell 2 points to 85% satisfied, predominantly due to the factors previously discussed.
- Six of the 7 major service categories declined on the New Haven Line, led by OTP, which just 68% of the line's customers were satisfied with. This represented a 7 point drop from the previous year. No other category fell by more than 4 points.
- The courtesy and responsiveness of our employees was the only category which matched its 2016 satisfaction level (94%).
- New Haven Line Reverse Peak customer satisfaction was 7 points lower than in 2016 (85% vs. 92%).

[Metro North Survey Results](#)

Stamford Garage:



<https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/local/article/State-DOT-shuts-Stamford-train-station-garage-6197423.php>

The parking facility at the Stamford Rail Station is managed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) and serves one of the busiest stations on the New Haven line. As illustrated in the photograph above, in 2015 the older portion of the garage was closed when a hole in the 3rd floor roadway (and 2nd floor ceiling) revealed an unsafe condition in the garage. Work was done that year to shore up parts of the older portion of the garage and a portion of that building was reopened with a limited number of parking spaces (though the sections of the facility with the hole were never re-opened).

\$35 million was appropriated in 2007 for the replacement of this facility but nothing has been built in the dozen years since then. There have been several attempts, including a public/private Transit Oriented Development effort that never materialized (and which plan was never made public). In 2018 the state once again proposed to build a replacement for the oldest portion of the existing garage, this time on State owned land both over South State Street and between that street and I-95, a considerable distance from the ticket office and access to all four tracks. The DoT held a

public meeting (<https://www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?a=3403&Q=606094>) and the CCRC provided a forum, at the station, at a time convenient for commuters (<https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/local/article/DOT-reveals-early-plan-for-Stamford-train-station-13318758.php>) to review the plans.

The CCRC has reiterated our offer to work with the DoT and other stakeholders on these plans and we continue to reflect the strong and loud request by commuters for the replacement parking structure to remain immediately adjacent to the ticket office and all tracks which especially impacts those among us who are disabled, have children in strollers, or are carrying luggage for travel on MN or Amtrak. And, while this planning goes on, we continue to identify areas of concern within the existing structures where maintenance has not been performed, where stairs are deteriorating, where water cascades down walls and between expansion joints, and where the roadway continues to deteriorate.

With a new administration in Hartford, and a new Commissioner at the DoT, we are hopeful for a new chapter in this ongoing saga, and the opportunity to all work together to build a suitable parking structure where customers want it located.

ONGOING ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR THE COUNCIL IN 2019

SAFETY

- The CCRC will continue to make it a priority to advocate for the safety of the commuter. We have had countless discussions with Metro North on PTC and will continue to advocate to ensure it is completed as quickly as possible.

FINANCIAL COMMITMENT FOR ONGOING SERVICE

- With the current budget in place, the Connecticut Department of Transportation has indicated that they were not given enough money to maintain the same level of service in upcoming years.
- The Connecticut Department of Transportation has indicated that they will need significant resources to bring the lineup to a point of good working order. The signal systems from Norwalk to New Haven and on the New Canaan are designed for replacement and just awaiting track time and construction funding. As a

background Metro North install tens of thousands of ties, miles of replacement rail, thousands of bridge timbers and surface about 50 miles of track each year.

- While the WALK Bridge is expected to begin construction, Both Cos Cob and Devon can be expected to cost about \$1B as they each have extensive approach spans making them much longer than WALK but there is likely less peripheral construction. Saga Bridge in Westport is pretty short and CP 243 will aid in the construction rerouting here as well, so this bridge could be half a billion. To replace just the remaining moveable bridges would cost approximately \$3.5 billion dollars.
- Ensuring that the CDOT has enough funding to maintain service levels will be critical.

BRANCHLINE RIDERS

- Shoreline East customers continue to have to deal with a lack of trains and are resigned to having to be transported via buses.
- While Amtrak is indicating that M8 trains can run on the SLE, it does appear as if due to fleet availability, there is no real plan by CDOT to ever run M8's on the SLE. The customers of the SLE deserve a clear answer one way or the other.
- Shoreline East and Waterbury Branch customers have struggled with subpar OTP all year and this creates stress and anxiety of not knowing if you will get to work on time.
- Shoreline East and Waterbury Branch customers struggle with significant gaps of service between available train times.
- Hartford Line customers continue to wonder if they will be allowed on Amtrak trains or if they will be removed and asked to take a following CT Rails train
- Danbury, Waterbury, Shoreline East customers all are subjected to the oldest cars of the fleet that often have mechanical difficulties or amenities not working properly within the coaches.

PARKING

- Most stations in southwest Connecticut have waiting lists of up to eight years. Creating more parking should be a priority to enable more commuters on the rail.

- A shortage of parking at the Stamford rail station remains an issue of significant concern for both residents and business in Stamford. In January 2019 the CCRC hosted a meeting at the Stamford station attended by CDoT, Metro North, members of the public, and Stamford elected officials and their staff (including the co-chairman of the Transportation Committee of the Stamford Board of Representatives). This meeting was preceded by a tour of the garage – see <https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/local/article/Stamford-commuters-seek-answers-to-decrepit-13545838.php> for additional information.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE

[Operations Reports from CDoT | Connecticut Commuter Rail Council](#)

[Past Annual Reports | Connecticut Commuter Rail Council](#)

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