



MEMBERS

Chair	Jim Gildea	Derby
Co---Vice Chair	Jeffrey Maron	Stamford
Secretary	Roger Cirella	Ansonia
	Terry Borjeson	Newington
	Laura Cordes	West Hartford
	Mitch Fuchs	Fairfield
	Peter Garneau	Stamford
	Douglas Hausladen	New Haven
	Melissa Kane	Westport
	Mike Mahoney	Westport
	Sue Prosi	Stratford
	Edwin Schroeder	Clinton
	Lisa Slinksy	Waterbury

2019 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 Hartford Line.

Sec. 15. Section 13b---212c of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2013*):

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 Power & 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 2019

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

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

Council:

This year 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. 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 2020 and have plans to continue to hold their meetings along the main line and branches throughout the upcoming year.

The CCRC welcomed new member Melissa Kane in 2019. Departing members were Laura Cordes and Stephen Prostor. 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:

For the last several years, passenger and freight railroads have been required to implement Positive Train Control (PTC), a technology to automatically enforce speed restrictions or halt a train completely when conditions warrant. Congress's latest, and apparently final, deadline is the end of 2020.

In October, an independent engineering consultant told members of the MTA board that there was a 35% to 40% chance that Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road would not meet the deadline. One potential failure point is the fleet of new M8 cars being added to the New Haven Line. MNRR President Catherine Rinaldi said the M8s had PTC when they were delivered but needed upgrades before they could be put into service. She

expressed high confidence that Metro-North and its contractors Bombardier and Siemens would complete the installation by year end.

We note that Senators Blumenthal and Schumer have been outspoken advocates for rail safety.

The public can find PTC status updates at:
https://new.mta.info/system_modernization/PTC.

New Canaan Branch:

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

2018 YTD on-time performance – 88.7%

2019 total ridership – 1,515,710 (- 0.6%)

2019 YTD on-time performance – 94.4%

Although there had been some discussion and renewed interest in late 2018/ start of 2019 by the “New Canaan Study Team” consisting of the local business community, local realtors, town officials, legislators, and the CCRC in enhancing several aspects of the New Canaan branch line surrounding: Customer Experience, Schedule Improvements, and Infrastructure Investments, there has been complete inaction on the part of Metro North and CDOT regarding all of the proposed enhancements due to a continued lack of funding by CDOT which has been pretty much the same outcome for the last few years. This proposal had included:

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

Until the state legislature determines a viable and dependable revenue stream to fund CDOT, there is not much likelihood that we will see any of these proposals materialize with the exception of the additional M8 rail cars that are on order.

This is one of the primary reasons why the CCRC supports some version of “tolling” so that the above enhancements /improvements can be realized without having to pass the expenses of the above along to all Connecticut residents through increased taxes which would continue to further erode

the economic recovery in the state and drive residents out of the state. The third option is continuing to do nothing which is also extremely detrimental to the economy of the state.

The economic growth and recovery of the state will continue to be handicapped vs. the rest of the nation until we can champion some cutting edge transportation improvements similar to what has been proposed in Governor Lamont's 2030 Transportation Program. This must include a strategy around new and sustainable revenue streams which more likely than not would come from "tolling" everyone who uses our highways and roads. We also wonder if there is an opportunity for CDOT to work with the business community, especially in Fairfield County, regarding the provision of private funding which would only help employers ensure they have access to a viable talent market here in the state.

Waterbury Branch:

2018 total ridership – 342,660 (0.1%)

2018 YTD on-time performance – 81.2%

2019 total ridership – 336,534 (-1.8%)

2019 YTD on-time performance – 90.2%

The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council met on the Waterbury branch on August 28, 2019 at the offices of the Derby Valley Transit District. It was a well-attended meeting with a room full of approximately 40 Waterbury branch commuters as well as local leaders and state legislators. The Waterbury branch meetings are amongst the most heavily attended Council meetings along the various branches.

During this meeting, representatives from Metro North and the Connecticut Department of Transportation presented an outline and update on the passing siding and signalization project currently under construction on the Waterbury branch line.

This work calls for 4 fully signalized passing sidings along the branch that would allow for a potential increase in service along the branch. Currently, the Connecticut Department of Transportation indicated that once this project is complete, they would like to add at minimum two additional peak trains in the morning and two additional peak trains for the evening commute thereby doubling branch peak service.

This project, which had a previous completion date of December 2020, now has been pushed out to be completed by June 2021 with the hope that additional service would commence in January 2022. The Connecticut Department of Transportation indicated that over the next 24 months, they would be working to secure the additional train sets needed to run additional service.

At this same meeting, the Connecticut Department of Transportation gave an overview on the branch fleet upgrade project. Rich Andreski, Public Bureau Chief told commuters that the department feels 110 train cars would be needed to operate service on the 4 New Haven Line branches as well as to provide for an increase in ridership. These 110 cars would service Shoreline East, Hartford line, Danbury branch and the Waterbury branch line. There is an initial order for 60 cars, which are funded. At this time, it did not appear as if these 60 cars would be slated for the Waterbury branch. The additional 50 cars that would make up the 110 needed, currently do not have funding and the department was uncertain of their status at this time.

Commuters present this meeting also had an opportunity to talk to Metro North and the Department Transportation. They expressed concerns with the cleanliness of the train cars, restrooms and overall level of service on the Waterbury branch including communication. They further expressed frustration with the timing of the passing siding project and how long it was taking since it has been previously communicated to have a completion date of December 2020.

Danbury Branch:

2018 total ridership – Danbury: 739,625 (-0.1%)

2018 YTD on-time performance – 88.7%

2019 total ridership – Danbury: 724,630 (-2.0%)

2019 YTD on-time performance – 91.0%

The Council did not hold any meetings on the Danbury Branch this year and there is currently no representation on the Council. However, there is still demand for more service to Grand Central.

The Mayor of Danbury, Mark Boughton made a pitch last April for a spur from Danbury to the Southeast, N.Y. Harlem Line when the DOT

Commissioner, Joe Giuiletti and the president of Metronorth, Catherine Rinaldi rode the Danbury Line from Danbury to South Norwalk. Grand Central Station is prohibiting more trains leaving the Danbury Branch. The issue is the bottleneck at Grand Central. Once an East Side Access involving the Bronx is completed, tracks will be freed up for additional trains.

Last November, a section of the Danbury Branch was taken out of service for tie and surface track installation. Rail joints were welded and mud spots remediated. This work was completed to maintain safe and reliable service.

Similar to the Waterbury Branch and Shoreline East, the Danbury Branch needs new coaches and locomotives.

Shore Line East:

2018 on-time performance – 91.6% (0.3%)

2018 average weekday ridership – 1,327 (-29.0%)

2019 average weekend ridership – 779 (-5.6%)

2019 on-time performance – 93.3% (13.9%)

2019 average weekday ridership – 1,473 (+33.8%)

2019 average weekend ridership – 760 (-3.9%)

With improved weather and the completion of track work, Shore Line East on-time performance and ridership showed improvement compared to 2018. Although on-time performance improved back over 90%, which was comparable to levels before construction, ridership was slower to return to previous levels. Communication continues to be a focus for improvement. The use of buses to cover certain trains, helped stabilize ridership and on-time performance.

In addition to track work, there were other capital projects undertaken that will improve Shore Line East in the future. At the end of 2018, construction began on an expanded Clinton station, which will include a new north-side platform with elevators/stairs connecting to the south-side platform. This will allow a future increase of service to Clinton. Station renovations and improvements were also undertaken in Old Saybrook and at State St. in

New Haven. Finally, work is underway to add a siding in Clinton, which will provide service flexibility during future construction projects.

The Rail Council held its April meeting in Guilford to hear from riders. This was the first time that the Council held a meeting between New Haven and Old Saybrook. There were more than 30 attendees including the first selectmen from Branford, Clinton, Guilford and Madison as well multiple state representatives. There were multiple updates regarding SLE service, which had deteriorated in 2018 due to winter storms and track work.

Riders' concerns heard over the course of the year included

- On-time performance (although it did improve)
- Replacement of equipment
- Communication of delays and other problems
- How will CDOT rebuild ridership with the completion of track work.
- Possible use of M-8's on SLE
- Improved integration of SLE service with Hartford and New Haven Line trains

Hartford Line:

2018 total ridership – weekday average 1,489

2018 total ridership – weekend average 744

2018 YTD on-time performance – 89.8%

2019 total ridership – weekday average 2,230 (42.5%)

2019 total ridership – weekend average 1,115 (42.5%)

2018 YTD on-time performance – 91.5 (1.9%)

The Hartford Line has reached over 1 million riders since opening in June of 2018. The Council worked closely with the Center for Latino Progress to get the bathrooms opened and ready to be used on the trains as well as to get more trains running on the line. As train ridership exceeded all expectations, there were issues initially ensuring all Hartford Line customers were able to secure a seat on the trains that best fit their schedule. At our Hartford meeting in February, the Council met with Amtrak and TransitAmerica Services (service provider) and advocated for increased capacity.

The Council was represented at a conference sponsored by the Center on Transportation Needs and the impact on the environment of the congestion created by automobiles in the Hartford area. The intersection of 84 and 91 is the 16th most congested area in the country.

The Council will once again hold a Hartford Line meeting in 2020 and will look to increase getting out to the Hartford Line by holding 2 meetings in Hartford in 2021.

Social Media:

The CCRC's website continues to attract additional commuter membership. 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 to communicate with the CCRC on commuting issues. In 2019, 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 continues to gain followers. 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 continued to use all available methods to connect and reach out to the commuters we advocate for including taking live Twitter questions and live streaming meetings. We will continue to do so in the upcoming year.

Legislative:

In February, the Council held its 5th consecutive 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 or participating in legislative events:

- The Council is represented on the Rail Car Procurement Stakeholder Advisory Committee We played an active role in supporting tolls and unanimously endorsed tolling and sent in testimony.
- The Council aggressively worked with the various legislative appointing authorities to fill all Council member appointments
- The Council met with representatives of the Governor's office to discuss their legislative priorities.
- The Council participated in a press conference with Senator Blumenthal pushing for PTC completion
- The Council participated in a press conference with Governor Lamont regarding 5G and the influence it may have with Wifi on trains

Testimony can be read on the Council website:

<http://ctcommuterrailcouncil.org/>

Finally, the Council thanks the following legislators for appearing at Council meetings in 2019:

- State Senator George Logan 17th
- State Representative Ron Napoli 73rd
- State Representative Kara Rochelle 104th
- State Representative Jonathan Steinberg 136th
- State Representative Caroline Simmons 144th
- State Representative Matt Blumenthal 147th
- Madison First Selectman Tom Banisch
- Branford First Selectman James Cosgrove
- Guilford First Selectman Matt Hoey
- Ansonia Mayor Dave Cassetti
- Derby Mayor Rich Dziekan
- New London Mayor Michael Passero

Metro North Customer Satisfaction Survey

In July, the Metro North 2018 Customer Service Satisfaction Survey was released. Key findings included:

- The Overall Rating of Metro-North for all three East of Hudson Lines in 2018 is close, with only 3 percentage points differentiating the

lowest score from the highest, this represents the narrowest margin ever among the 3 lines. The scores were: New Haven 85%, Harlem 87% and Hudson 88%

- Various characteristics of Metro-North service which are included on the survey are divided in to 7 major categories. Overall satisfaction with each of those categories decreased, but four (Home Boarding Station, Employees, Schedules and Grand Central Terminal) of the seven categories only fell by a percentage point or two.
- Prior research has demonstrated a strong connection between customer satisfaction and on-time performance. Although Metro-North's OTP through the first half of 2018 was only slightly below goal at 92.3%, the six week period just prior to the onboard distribution of the survey, OTP was adversely impacted due to some weather-related incidents as well as an increased amount of infrastructure work which resulted in reduced track capacity and longer running times.
- Customer satisfaction with the railroad among New Haven Line customers had increased from 2014 to 2016, climbing 28 points from 59% to 87%. In 2017, satisfaction fell 2 points to 85% satisfied, and has remained at that level (85%) for 2018.
- There were minimal changes in satisfaction levels for all of the major service categories among New Haven Line customers, where no category differed from 2017 levels by more than 2 percentage points.
- In fact, a larger percentage of New Haven Line riders were more satisfied with 3 of the 7 categories (Overall Train Service, Overall Communications, and On-Time Performance) than they had been in 2017.
- Overall Communications had the largest increase of the major service categories, moving from 81% to 83%.

[2018 Metro North Survey Results](#)

Stamford Rail Station and Garage:



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

The rail station in Connecticut with the greatest numbers of passengers and trains (both Metro North and Amtrak) is the Stamford Rail Station. The station serves Metro North customers - both daily commuters (to New York City and intra-state) as well as occasional riders who benefit from the ease of travel compared to I-95. The station is also frequently used by interstate travelers on Amtrak.

The station itself has a number of issues including escalators that are frequently out of service, an increasing homeless population seeking refuge from cold winter nights, and poor signage. However, the largest issue is the condition of the attached parking facility and the resulting lack of parking. The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) has embarked on multiple attempts to build an additional parking structure in the vicinity of the station and, most importantly, proximity to the ticket office. The parking facility at the Stamford Rail Station is managed by the CDOT. 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, along with other portions of the garage, remain closed to vehicular traffic to this day).

\$35 million was appropriated in 2007 for the replacement of this facility but nothing has been built in the thirteen 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 land owned by the State of Connecticut 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. Final architectural plans have still not been set and the \$100,000,000 all-in cost estimate of this project remains a concern (details on this project, and its history are available from the DoT on <https://portal.ct.gov/DOT/Projects/Stamford-Station-Parking-Garage> and <https://portal.ct.gov/DOT/Business/General/Project-Desc-of-Replacement-of-Stamford-Parking-Garage>).

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 of the tracks which especially impacts those among us who are disabled, have children in strollers, or are carrying luggage for travel on Metro North 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 – for example where water cascades down walls and between expansion joints, and where the roadway continues to deteriorate.

To the DoT's credit, in 2019 work was completed on two major projects at the station. First, the DoT completed a \$10,000,000 project to add an escalator and an elevator which serves track 5 and the north side of the station. This effort had been in process for five years but was ultimately completed in 2019 (see <https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/local/article/Escalator-project-still-unfinished-after-5-years-13723603.php>). Work was also initiated in 2019,

and completed ahead of schedule, within the newer portions of the garage repairing deteriorating stairwells and the expansion/contraction joints on the exposed roof portions that permitted water intrusion into the many levels below. Sample press coverage is available on <https://patch.com/connecticut/stamford/major-repairs-announced-stamford-train-station-garage-dot> and <https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/local/article/Repairs-to-begin-at-Stamford-Train-Station-13814849.php>). CDoT's 2019 efforts are greatly appreciated but much more work remains to be done.

New Haven Union Station:

New Haven Union Station is turning 100 years old this upcoming spring. Designed by nationally renowned architect Cass Gilbert, this historic gateway to New Haven first opened its doors to the public on April 5, 1920. This beautiful and functional train station serves over 3.7 million rail passengers annually.

The State of Connecticut owns New Haven Union Station and leases it to the New Haven Parking Authority to operate it and the adjacent parking facilities. Even though the building has been in service for multiple generations, NHPA continues to not only keep it well maintained but also to enhance services to the public.

This past year a number of important capital projects were accomplished. While sight unseen, a new boiler and chiller were both installed to keep the building cool in the summer and warm in the winter. New energy efficient lighting was installed throughout the building. Water seepage in the underground passageway presented a potential slipping concern and a nuisance. A repair program was successfully implemented to control the water seeping into this tunnel which is several feet below the water table. In another project, 12 new state-of-the-art electric vehicle charging stations were installed in the parking garage to accommodate this growing and environmentally significant segment of transportation.

A number of capital repair projects are planned for next year and beyond to keep the facilities in top condition and continue to enhance services. These include a revamped retail experience, and a number of architectural and general repairs and improvements.

The next 100 years of service are shaping up to ensuring that this important asset continues to serve the public well.

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

- 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

- After numerous discussions with CDOT and Amtrak, it does not appear that M8's will ever make it to the SLE. The Council believes CDOT should just communicate that.
- 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.
- 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.

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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