



MEMBERS

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	Mike Mahoney	Westport
	Sue Prosi	Stratford
	Edwin Schroeder	Clinton
	Lisa Slinksy	Waterbury

2020 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.

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

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 Section 13b--212c of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2013*):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

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 2020

[Minutes: Connecticut Commuter Rail Council 2020](#)

[Agendas: Connecticut Commuter Rail Council 2020](#)

Council:

This year the CCRC began the year in 2020 with a very successful meeting in Hartford where we met with both the Governor's office as well as the Transportation Committee. It was perhaps one of the most well attended Transportation Committee meetings in recent years with over 15 legislators in attendance.

The coronavirus would soon hit, and rail transportation would be impacted in a way that none of us had for-seen or had experienced. The Council quickly transformed and without missing a meeting, began meeting virtually. We did our best to stay relevant, engaged, informed and a resource for those commuters who were still using real transportation but also for those who would do so in the future.

We continued to meet and hold mainline and branch line meetings. For instance, we held Waterbury Branch, Hartford Line, Danbury Branch and New York City themed meetings.

With vaccinations beginning to occur, we do believe that ridership will come back. When and to what degree are the big unknowns. The Council will continue to serve as an advocate for rail commuters in this changing world.

As of this writing, the Council has three vacant positions. One position is designated as an appointee of the Governor and is the chief elected official of a municipality located on an operating or proposed new rail line, another is

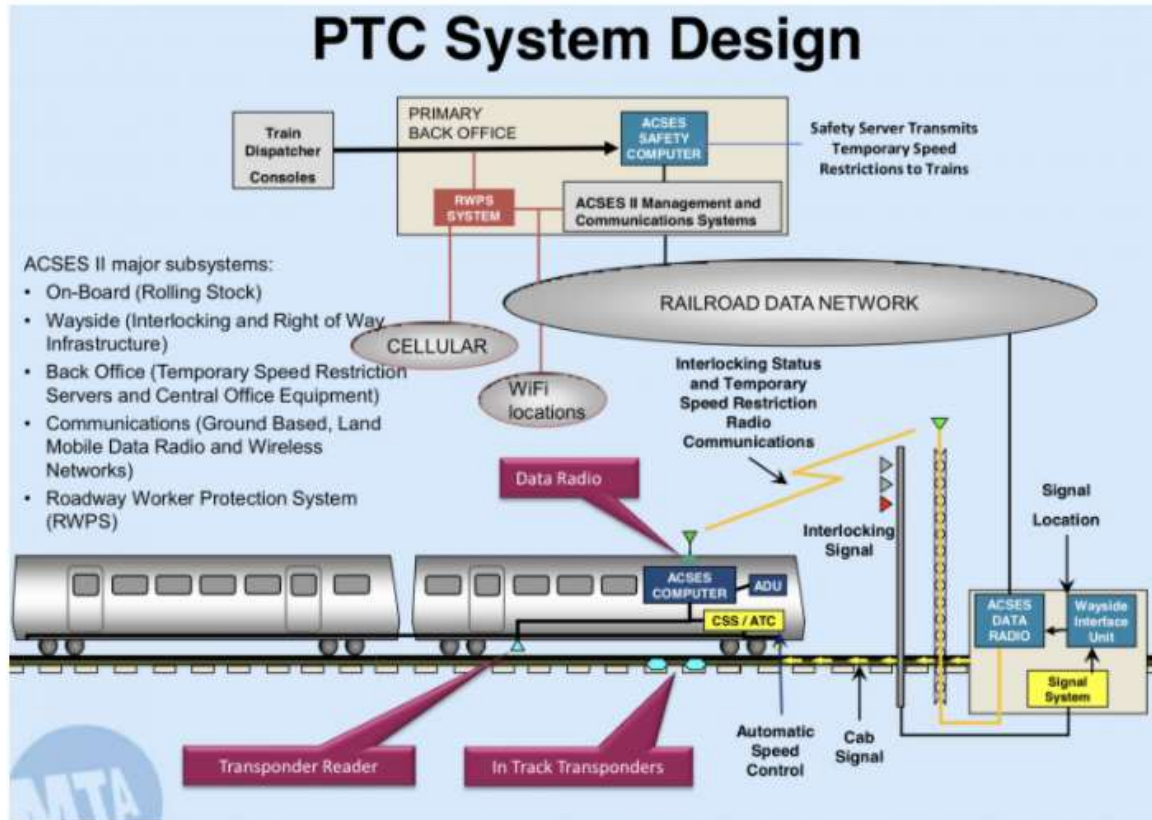
appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate, and the third is by the Speaker of the House and is a representative of either the Danbury or Waterbury Branch.

Safety / Security:

At the end of 2020, Metro North had completed the installation of the Positive Train Control (PTC) commuter rail safety technology in all trains running on the Metro-North Railroad (except for the Waterbury branch where they were given an extensions and completion was targeted for December 2020). This completion was just prior to the federal deadline December 31, 2020.

With the utilization of Positive Train Control technology, trains can now automatically communicate in real-time with central dispatching offices, exchanging information on train location, speed and the actions of the locomotive engineer. The system can assume control of the train if the train is traveling too fast while at the same time, alerting the engineer.

PTC has long been touted as having the ability to reduce the potential for human error that causes collisions and rail accidents.



Social Media:

The CCRC's website continues to serve as a resource for commuter rail passengers and advocates. 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 2020, the Council website attracted over 6,000 visitors.

The CCRC's Twitter feed continues to attract new followers. The CCRC uses Twitter to update followers on Council business and 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 as well as 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. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of multiple forms of communication.



Legislative:

In January, the Council held its 6th annual Hartford based meeting. The Connecticut Department of Transportation provided an update on the Transportation and Climate Initiative Program. Program details include the fact that CT will see a 26% reduction in carbon emissions and generate annual revenue of \$89 million in 2023, increasing to \$117 million in 2032. Savings will be re-invested in cleaner transportation options.

In addition to the meeting in Hartford, the Council took a much more active role in sharing their opinions on a wide range of legislative topics and participating in legislative events:

- The Council is represented on the Rail Car Procurement Stakeholder Advisory Committee.
- The Council 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 used its social media and website to support important legislative initiatives.
- The Council endorsed and supported a study to expand the Shore Line East beyond New London.

Testimony can be read on the Council website: <http://ctcommuterrailcouncil.org/>

Finally, the Council thanks the following legislators for appearing at Council meetings in 2020:

State Senator	Paul Formica	20th
State Senator	Tony Hwang	28th
State Senator	Henri Martin	31st
State Representative	Bill Buckbee	67th
State Representative	Lucy Dathan	142nd
State Representative	Bob Godfrey	110th
State Representative	Anne Hughes	135th
State Representative	Noreen Kokoruda	101st
State Representative	Cristin McCarthy Vahey	133rd
State Representative	Stephen Meskers	150th
State Representative	Tom O'Dea	125th
State Representative	Kara Rochelle	104th
State Representative	Kevin Ryan	139th
State Representative	Jonathan Steinberg	136th
State Representative	Phil Young	120th

**New Haven Line****2019 total ridership – 40,234,513****2019 YTD on-time performance – 97.0%****2020 total ridership – 11,545,691 (-68.7%)****2020 YTD on-time performance – 97.8%**

The New Haven Line experienced a significant drop in ridership due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the end of the calendar year, ridership was still averaging less than 30% of pre-pandemic numbers. Ridership into NYC remains particularly low due to businesses in Manhattan continuing to work from home, the closure of arts and culture activities, and a general reluctance to take public transportation. Ridership had started to increase in the fall but fell again when the next wave of the pandemic hit in November. Interestingly average daily ridership on the weekend is now higher than weekday ridership.

As a result of the ridership decline, train service was reduced to hourly offpeak from New Haven and slightly more frequent service during peak periods.

As with each of the branches, when it will make sense to increase service frequency will depend on when ridership begins to increase. There remains concerns about how to keep capacity numbers at a safe level.

Funding by the state and federal governments will be crucial to maintaining existing service and eventually expanding service levels. On the other hand, reduced ridership provides an opportunity for the State and Metro North to experiment with different types of service.

With reduced train service, Metro North has continued capital projects that will improve service in the long-term. In addition to the PTC project, work continued on the catenary upgrades and track maintenance. Planning for the replacement of the Walk Bridge over the Norwalk River continues, with an expected start of construction to begin in 2021 (

<https://www.walkbridget.com/projects/norwalk.aspx>)

The Council appreciates everything that Metro North and its employees have done during the pandemic to maintain service and keep its passengers safe.

New Canaan Branch:

2019 total ridership – 1,515,710

2019 YTD on-time performance – 94.4%

2020 total ridership – 443,617 (- 68.2%)

2020 YTD on-time performance – 97.6%

The major story for all of Metro North for 2020 has been the Covid pandemic and its negative impact on ridership and revenues for the majority of 2020 beginning in late March. It was the same story on the New Canaan Branch line.

For 2020, ridership on the New Canaan Branch line was down by approximately 68% cumulatively. The reasons for the significant drop on the NC line is most likely attributed to:

- 1) Much of the normal weekday rush ridership have jobs that can be performed remotely.
- 2) The train schedule has been reduced to hourly service / change trains in Stamford which is not conducive to commuting. It is easier to either drive into Manhattan or take a train out of Stamford or Noroton Heights where the service is a bit more frequent.

On January 27, 2020, there was a public meeting in the Ferguson Library coordinated by several legislators including Matt Blumenthal regarding the chronic blowing of horns issue that has continued to plague residents along the New Canaan Branch line for years. There was a good turnout from the public as well as several legislators, The CT Department of Transportation Commissioner (Joe Giulietti), other members of CDOT, Metro North personnel, and two members of the CT Commuter Rail Council (Peter Garneau and Jeff Maron). The response from Metro North was more of an explanation of why and how often the horns need to be blown as the trains arrive / depart the stations along the line. The horn-blowing is no different now than it was back in January.

During the pandemic there were some renovations and improvements that were implemented at the Talmadge Hill station. Several new inclement weather shelters were installed on the platform to protect the commuters against the elements (photos below):





Also of interest are differences in parking regulations at the stations along the branch line during the pandemic. The cities of New Canaan, Darien (Talmadge Hill) and Stamford (Springdale/Glenbrook) took different positions regarding station parking. Since last March, New Canaan has extended all parking permits that had expired on 6/30/20 through the end of 2020 and will likely extend them

again through the Spring of 2021 at this point. Additionally, they are not charging for daily parking at the New Canaan station or at the Talmadge Hill station. At the Springdale and Glenbrook stations on the other hand, daily parking fees are being collected and monthly permits must continue to be renewed monthly.

2021 is going to be a pivotal year for the branch lines and for all of Metro North Railroad because of the continuing impact of the Covid pandemic. It will be interesting to see what happens to the fares and service because of the significant loss of revenue the railroad continues to experience, particularly as we move forward into the 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2021.

Waterbury Branch:

2019 total ridership – 336,534

2019 YTD on-time performance – 90.2%

2020 total ridership – 127,635 (-58.7%)

2020 YTD on-time performance – 97.9%

The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council held a Waterbury Branch based meeting on August 19, 2020 via Zoom. It was a well-attended meeting with Waterbury Branch commuters as well as local leaders and state legislators.

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 project is expected to be completed by June 2021 with the hope that additional service will commence in January 2022.

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 is indicating 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.

As with most lines and branches, it was an interesting year for the Waterbury Branch filled with highs and lows. On a positive note, at 41.3% the Waterbury Branch ended the year with the highest rate of returning ridership when

compared to the previous year. Metro North has also bolstered existing train service with bus service during some of the p.m. peak gaps. This has proven to be successful and the buses are being utilized. This bodes well for future real service.

Unfortunately, there was bad news for the Waterbury Branch this past year. Originally the purchase of a new rail cars had been part of the April 2020 bond commission agenda. Without any notice to commuters or legislators this bonding money was pulled from the bond commission agenda and at the last moment the cars originally slated for the Waterbury Branch were taken away ([Red light for new rail cars on Waterbury, Danbury branches | Republican-American \(rep-am.com\)](#)). Most felt that this was more of a political decision than a financial decision, which further frustrated commuters. The Waterbury branch commuters currently travel each day on some of the oldest cars in the fleet. The Council hopes that the decision makers will reconsider and move forward with the new car purchase for the Waterbury Branch.



Danbury Branch:

2019 total ridership - 724,630

2019 YTD on-time performance – 91.0%

2020 total ridership – 197,701 (-70.4%)

2020 YTD on-time performance – 93.9%

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

This year brought positive train control to all trains on the Danbury Branch. Also, the Danbury Branch along with the New Canaan Branch saw a \$400,000 federal grant that could lead to improving the Danbury Branch and even extend rail service to Brookfield and New Milford

(<https://www.newstimes.com/local/article/Study-to-improve-Danbury-New-Canaan-rail-lines-15571619.php>). There has long been discussion of returning rail service to New Milford, which last had a passenger train in 1971. There is currently a study looking into opening an old rail line by the Danbury Fair Mall to connect the Danbury Line to the Harlem Line, creating a faster ride to New York City.

Like the Waterbury Branch and Shore Line East, the Danbury Branch also needs new coaches and locomotives. While numerous commuters had the option of working remotely this year, there are still many workers that do not have that option. Many essential workers also rely on the Danbury Branch as their only means of transportation. If the Branch could provide a reliable, frequent service to Grand Central; Connecticut would more than likely have less traffic congestion and better air quality.



Shore Line East:

2019 total ridership – 609,028

2019 YTD on-time performance – 93.3%

2020 total ridership – 151,648 (-75.1%)

2020 YTD on-time performance – 96.5%

As with all sections of commuter rail, ridership has plummeted since the COVID pandemic arrived in March. As noted above, total ridership for the year is down 75% and daily ridership at the end of the year was down 95%. This is primarily due to the trend of regular riders working from home or driving to work. Many riders who work in New Haven at Yale University, Yale-New Haven Hospital or in Stamford are working from home. Although there was a gradual increase in ridership during the fall, ridership collapsed again in early November with increased travel restrictions.

The Amtrak onboard staff have been extremely professional during the challenging past year. They have ensured that riders are safe, as everyone became accustomed to the new norm.

As a result of decreased ridership, the State and Amtrak reduced service to 8 round trips a day, providing service every 2 hours. It is hopeful that with the vaccine rolling out and an overall decline in the pandemic that SLE will see a

gradual increase in ridership over the course of 2021. Expanded rush hour service will also help ridership, but it is difficult to justify right now.

Despite the pandemic, several capital projects continued that will benefit SLE when ridership increases. Expansion of the station at Clinton is well underway with completion scheduled for summer of 2021. This includes the addition of the north side and elevators to connect the platforms. The station at Old Saybrook underwent a renovation that was completed at the end of 2019.

It may be worth noting that due to the work done in 2020 this has resulted in the introduction of House Bill No. 5423. If this bill is passed, it directs the CT DOT to conduct a feasibility study and develop an operational plan to extend SLE to Rhode Island and create a new branch line called the Norwich Branch Line with both lines connecting at a new station in Groton. This could help spur economic development as well, as Electric Boat has hired 2,000 employees in 2020 and expects to hire another 2,200 in 2021 with more growth planned.

In past years one of the Commuter Council's meetings met at one of the SLE towns. We were scheduled to meet in Guilford in April when COVID shut us down. We will look to having a virtual meeting dedicated to SLE as well as the other branches over the course of 2021.

Concerns raised by riders still apply, but obviously they are a lower immediate priority. Hopefully we can return to these in the future.

- How will CDOT rebuild ridership
- Possible use of M-8's on SLE
- Improved integration of SLE service with Hartford and New Haven Line trains
- How to better integrate SLE and New Haven Line service
- Communication of delays and other problems (much less of a concern now, but still important)

Clinton Station groundbreaking:



Hartford Line:

2019 total ridership – 665,471

2019 YTD on-time performance – 90.7%

2020 total ridership – 264,192 (-60.3%)

2020 YTD on-time performance – 92.2%

At 29.3%% the Hartford Line ended the year with the 2nd highest rate of returning ridership when compared to the previous year. During 2020, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) announced the launch of CTrail eTix, a smartphone-based mobile ticketing application, for CTrail Hartford Line customers.

With CTrail eTix, passengers can now purchase CTrail Hartford Line tickets, with optional connecting service on New Haven Line (Metro-North) trains, using a single device in one transaction with a credit or debit card.

One of the consequences of the pandemic was that Amtrak stopped accepting CTrail Hartford Line tickets on their Northeast Regional Hartford Line trains. They also initially stopped accepting cash payments on all Hartford Line trains. However, in July, Amtrak once again began accepting cash payments on all

Hartford Line trains and in October, they resumed accepting CT Rail Hartford Line tickets on their Northeast Regional Hartford Line trains.

Finally, about Springfield service, Amtrak has suspended its Vermonter train north of New Haven during the pandemic. Based upon this, the train no longer serves Springfield. The Connecticut Department of Transportation says it remains committed to New Haven- Hartford - Springfield service. Amtrak says it will start bringing service back but has no timeline.



New Haven Union Station Transportation Center:

UNION STATION 100TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATED

The year 2020 was the 100th anniversary of Union Station Transportation Center. A celebration was held, and dignitaries were invited to the extent that was possible due to Covid restraints.



UNION STATION PARTNERSHIP

In September, the culmination of the partnership between the State of Connecticut and City of New Haven with the renewal of the Lease and Funding Agreement for Union Station took place and now includes the State Street Station as well. This Agreement will allow the City, through Park New Haven, to lease and operate Union Station. The draft of the new Agreement that will be in place for 35 years, with two ten-year extensions, is currently being collaborated on.

This partnership will present exciting opportunities and growth for the City and Union Station including:

- Possibilities for development
- Retail enhancements
- Additional amenities that will improve the patrons' experience
- Additional parking

COVID 19 PANDEMIC

Unique to 2020 were the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID 19 Pandemic. It created an environment that had and continues to have a significant impact on train ridership numbers that greatly diminished; and this correlated to the number of parkers and most notably the revenue for Union Station. As of December 2020, only a slight increase in ridership and number of parkers has returned.

Our goal was to create a safe environment for our patrons that included professional sanitization of the Station every six weeks along with day-to-day maintenance, following CDC guidelines, and promoting the use of masks by staff and patrons.

CAPITAL

Last year, NHPA successfully accomplished some waterproofing improvements in the underground pedestrian passageway at New Haven Union Station, below the train tracks. This area is below the water table. The work mainly involved injecting waterproofing grout into seeping joints and cracks in the floor slab and enhancing a drainage path behind the walls at four platform stairs. Those repairs continue to perform well but additional waterproofing improvements are needed on the track area above.

This year some behind-the-scenes work was accomplished to upgrade electrical, heating, ventilation and air conditioning infrastructure for this important historic structure. Additionally, 12 new state-of-the-art electric vehicle charging stations were installed at Union Station Garage, providing economical and convenient service for rail patrons, and enhancing the environmental benefits to the community. Of the twelve, two ADA vehicle charging parking spaces were included.

Please call 203-946-8930 or e-mail fhoude@nhparking.com with any issues you may have or if you would like a tour of the Station.

ONGOING ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR THE COUNCIL IN 2020 AND BEYOND

Returning Ridership

- As rail advocates, the CCRC remains concerned with returning ridership and the impact on service. We recognize that service levels are being adjusted based upon ridership levels, but we also hear from surveys and the commuting base that one of the main contributors for a return to riding is ensuring that there are commuter friendly service times. MTA projected returning ridership estimates: (<https://ctcommuterrailcouncil.org/mta-returning-ridership-projections/>).

Financial Commitment for Ongoing Service

- The Connecticut Department of Transportation has indicated that they will need significant resources to bring the line up to a point of good working order. The signal systems from Norwalk to New Haven and on the New Canaan Line are designed for replacement and are just awaiting track time and construction funding. As a background, each year Metro North installs tens of thousands of ties, miles of replacement rail, thousands of bridge timbers, and surfaces about 50 miles of track.
- 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 shorter, and CP 243 will aid in the construction rerouting here as well, so this bridge could be \$500M. To replace just the remaining moveable bridges would cost approximately \$3.5B.
- Ensuring that the CDOT has enough funding to maintain service levels will be critical.

Last Mile Connectivity and Bus/Shuttle Service Connections

- Planning for the rebound means planning for more ways to get to the main line for both everyday commutes and trips involving recreation or life. Connecticut will bounce back due to its quality of life and education, and our location in the Northeast Corridor cannot be understated. In addition to

access for parked vehicles, the council continues to prioritize last mile connectivity of our states' rail stations including public bus service, private employer shuttles, taxi/TNC pick up/drop off, biking, and walkability surrounding our train stations. This means we need to continually improve our transit systems to magnify each other and serve our residents seven days a week with strong spans of service and narrow headways to support density and growth along the transit system corridors.

CTrail eTix

- As noted earlier, the State expanded options for purchasing tickets through its CTrail eTix app. The app expanded options for purchasing tickets and during the pandemic has provided an important “no touch” option. CTrail eTix is available on the Hartford Line and Shore Line East as well as for trips connecting with the New Haven Line of Metro North. Metro North continues to offer the MTA eTix app for travel on just Metro North. For more information on CTrail eTix see <https://portal.ct.gov/DOT/Publictrans/Bureau-of-Public-Transportation/CTrail-eTix>

UPass Expansion and Open Payment Systems

- Continuing the trend in digital payment expansion for the overall transit picture moving forward needs continued work of simplification of various types of fare collections between transit modes and transit lines, including the main line and branches. The success of UPass with public universities can be expanded to create transit passes for private universities and larger corporations or cooperatives (like a business or property association or Transportation Demand Management).

Branch line 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 struggle with significant gaps of service between available train times and both branches have bills at the Legislature looking to expand service levels.

- 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. While Shoreline East is currently scheduled to receive new rail cars, the bonding package for Waterbury rail cars was pulled at the last-minute from the Bond Commission meetings (see Waterbury Branch Report) and there are no plans to upgrade the Waterbury or Danbury branch fleets.
- Service to Springfield has been suspended on the Hartford line with no real plans to reinstate.

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 lines.

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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