



Representative Lamar, Senator Haskell, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee.

My name is Jim Gildea, and I am the Chairman of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council. I am offering written testimony IN SUPPORT OF:

RAISED BILL 216

AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXPANSION OF RAIL SERVICE WATERBURY BRANCH LINE.

In our opinion ***Raised Bill 216*** would not only impact rail commuting, but also the economic development of the entire Waterbury corridor. The Waterbury branch of the New Haven Line has long been underdeveloped and has substandard coaches and service. This branch runs from Waterbury to Bridgeport, 2 of the 5 largest cities in the State and includes stops in Waterbury, Naugatuck, Beacon Falls, Seymour, Ansonia, and Derby/Shelton.

With two Councilmembers as regular commuters on the Waterbury branch line, we see the potential of the line daily. One of the roadblocks in increasing the ridership base is a lack of consistent commuter-friendly service times. Importantly, there is no commuter-friendly evening service. For those who work and live along the branch corridor, there are only 2 evening commute options leaving Bridgeport and traveling to the Waterbury branch: the 5:48 train leaving or the 8:10 PM train. If a commuter misses the 5:48 PM train, they must wait until 8:10 PM. There are no commute options in between.

The current proposal to expand service would potentially increase the number of trains servicing the Waterbury line from 15 to 22, beginning in fiscal year 2023. Per the Governor's office, the seven additional trains include two in the morning, one midday, two in the evening, and two at a time yet to be determined.

In April 2008, the Connecticut Department of Transportation added an additional morning train on the branch line and the effect was dramatic. In the immediate 18 months following this

additional train, there was an increase in ridership by almost 40%. This clearly indicates that as service is added on the Waterbury branch, ridership will follow.

Post-Covid, the Waterbury Branch has also seen the greatest increase in returning ridership out of any rail branch or line in the State of Connecticut.

The addition of service on the Waterbury branch line will also have a dramatic effect on the economies of each city with a downtown along the line. Having a viable transportation line with viable service times will be an economic driver for transit-oriented development along the branch. This type of economic springboard would benefit taxpayers who live in cities along the Waterbury Corridor.

Finally, a \$120 million passing siding project was completed on the Waterbury branch line in December 2021. The State should capitalize on this investment and add the additional service that the new sidings allow. Without increased service, the \$120 million investment would become a waste of taxpayer money.

The Rail Council urges passage of Raised Bill 216 and the expansion of commuter rail service on the Waterbury Branch.

Jim Gildea
Chairman, Connecticut Commuter Rail Council