



CT Commuter Rail Council CT Rail Plan 2022-2026 Recommendations

November 16, 2022

To the CT Department of Transportation:

The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council (CCRC) would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Connecticut State Rail Plan for 2022-2026 (Plan). CCRC provided comments on the draft plan last year, and again asks the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) to reconsider and include those recommendations in the final plan.

Current Rail Service in Connecticut

Overall, the transportation issues previously described in CT Rail Plan 2012 -2016 have remained the same. The core issue remains moving people and goods safely and efficiently, at desired times. Highway traffic problems continue to increase with no good solutions in sight. Congestion, accidents, loss of life, air pollution, delays, cost of travel and sprawl all continue.

Consolidation of Public Transportation Services & Experiences

The passenger rail services are operated as three separate and distinct services: New Haven Line with three branch lines, Shore Line East, and the Hartford Line. CCRC suggests that the three passenger rail services be combined into a single CT-oriented service to improve the travel experience. Schedules might be synchronized, a common timetable established, and a universal ticketing system developed for trains, buses, and other public transportation providers. We also encourage better connectivity to all available bus options and carriers, both for last mile needs and to connect with points of interest. A single app for ticketing, real-time service performance, and for trip planning, should be developed.

Intrastate Passenger Rail Service

CCRC recommends the Plan develop new intrastate passenger rail service to all the communities that have existing service and historic rail beds. First, our existing lines can be better programmed to service intrastate travel, instead of prioritizing NYC-bound traffic. In addition, railroad beds remain in the ground and are an under-utilized existing transportation infrastructure resource.

Cost effective options for expanding modern rail service to connect more communities with where people work, shop, play, and travel.

CDOT should consider using all existing railroad beds, both public and private, to provide the public with an alternative to using Connecticut’s highways and roads for transportation in their privately-owned vehicles. It will reduce the need for new expanded highways and bridges, and the costs of maintaining these facilities. Establishing this vision will make Connecticut a more competitive and sustainable place to live, work, and play.

Climate and Environmental Objectives

We recommended that the vision, goals, and objectives for rail service align with the climate and environmental objectives of the State and be specifically stated in the Connecticut State Rail Plan 2022–2026. The Plan needs to discuss how rail service will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector, reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), reduce congestion, improve air quality, and provide the public with an attractive transportation alternative to using private motor vehicles.

Improved Intermodal Connectivity

The 2012-2016 CT Rail Plan states, “intermodal connections to maritime, air, bus transit, and highway modes as well as improved transit and bike/pedestrian links are important elements of an efficient and effective rail transportation system.” The 2022-2026 Plan should provide details about investments in bike, scooter, pedestrian and other intermodal enhancements at rail stations, industrial centers, and nearby transit-oriented development (TOD) zones of municipalities. “Green” vehicles, e-buses, and TOD deserve at least as much attention and detailed analysis as parking has received in the Plan. The goals of this Plan should be to increase the number of passengers arriving car-free, and solve the first and last mile problem, a chronic issue in public transportation. With the recent development of e-bike, e-scooter and e-vehicle sharing, as well as privately owned e-vehicles, these new technologies should be analyzed and included in Connecticut’s transportation system.

Additionally, we encourage better options and service at stations for bicycles, e-bikes, and e-scooters, that offer both security and weatherproof parking, as well as rental and availability options that are flexible and easy to use. We also believe that better communication around what is allowed on trains and buses regarding bicycles, e-bike, e-scooters would be valuable and helpful to those commuters who use them.

Summary

We request that railroad jargon and use of program abbreviations be minimized, and the entire document be carefully edited to reduce the plan’s length. The executive summary should be shortened and designed for policy makers and the general public.