

Potential Shore Line East expansion calls for new stations across the region



A passenger leaving New London boards a Shore Line East southbound train to New Haven. (Undated Day file photo)



September 07, 2023 6:34 pm • Last Updated: September 07, 2023 8:13 pm

By **Kimberly Drelich**
Day Staff Writer

✉ k.drelich@theday.com

Despite looming service cuts for Shore Line East this fall and fewer trains running due to construction, a newly released study says there is demand for expanding the commuter rail service in the future.

But questions remain over how the improvements that would cost as much as \$1 billion would be funded, along with permitting and planning, if they were to move forward.

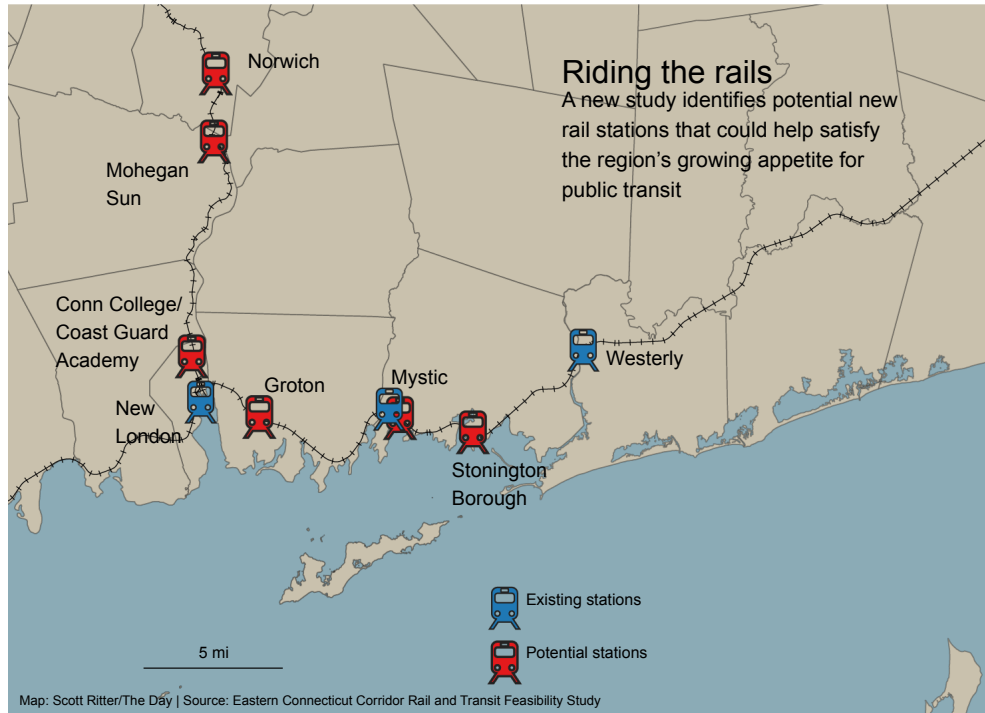
The study says expanding commuter rail service — which the state currently operates between New Haven to New London — to Westerly, R.I., and to Norwich would allow people to better access jobs and recreation. It adds that while the expansion could be possible to implement in the long term, it would require more planning, permitting and costly infrastructure upgrades.

Preliminary cost estimates show the capital costs for the Shore Line East extension to Westerly, R.I., could be \$243 million, while the extension to Norwich could cost \$635.7 million, though costs could fluctuate by more than 30%.



Three new stations heading north would be located at Connecticut College/U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, near the Mohegan Sun in Montville and in Norwich.

Though any sites would require further study, the state has identified potential locations for the proposed stations: 840 Poquonnock Road in Groton, where a car wash is located; a parcel at 16-20 Stonington Road in Mystic that contains vacant land and a closed antique shop, a half-mile southeast of the existing Mystic station; the Stonington Community Center thrift shop at 45 Cutler St. in Stonington Borough; a site off of Farnsworth Street in New London; 236 Fort Shantok Road in Montville; and North Thames Street, between West Main Street and West Side Boulevard, in Norwich.



Even as the state contemplates the future of rail and transit, service reductions for the Shore Line East commuter rail are expected this fall due to cuts in funding.

Appetite for increased rail and transit

The final draft of [the Eastern Connecticut Corridor Rail and Transit Feasibility Study](#) found “an appetite for increased rail and transit service,” particularly “increased frequency and expanded hours of service to regional destinations.” It also points out that the region is adding manufacturing and defense industry jobs, and that the population is growing and aging, which will mean a need for increased and more accessible bus service.

The state legislature had tasked the state Department of Transportation with studying the feasibility of expanding commuter rail from New London to Norwich and to Westerly as well as constructing a train station in Groton and in Stonington Borough and improving links between existing transportation systems.

The DOT specifically studied expanding Shore Line East from New London to Westerly along the Northeast Corridor; adding passenger rail service between New London and Norwich on Genesee and Wyoming’s western Palmer Line or eastern Norwich Branch; and adding service on a rail spur in Groton off the Northeast Corridor.

The DOT found that adding commuter rail from New London to Westerly, and to Norwich along the Palmer Line would serve the most people and jobs. It wouldn’t be possible to both extend SLE to Westerly and add service on the Norwich Branch and Groton spur, due to limitations on the number of trains that can run each hour on the Thames River Bridge.

The expansion of Shore Line East between New London and Westerly and the addition of commuter rail between New London and Norwich “could be possible given further analysis,” but could face “significant challenges,” the report stated.

“The infrastructure improvements needed to run hourly commuter rail service along these lines include upgrades to track, structures, grade crossings, and the construction of new stations/reconstruction of existing stations to be compatible with operating equipment and meet ADA requirements,” which could cost \$1 billion, the report states.

The DOT says expanding bus service, including increasing the frequency of buses between Norwich and New London, adding a new seasonal route to Mystic, and a connection between the submarine base and Electric Boat, and expanding service hours, could help “address travel demand within the region independent of passenger rail service.”

The study is billed as a “first step,” with any future improvements needing funding, permitting and more planning.

Current changes

At the same time the study is being released, the existing Shore Line East service is expected to be curtailed this fall, due to budget **cuts to the service**. The study said “service reductions are anticipated in fall 2023 and they could impact the current frequency of service to this area.”

The state **cited** at the time of the decision last spring that ridership on the commuter rail service had fallen to 30% of its levels before the COVID-19 pandemic, though state legislators advocating for rail said cutting service would only accelerate this trend, while adding more trains would encourage ridership.

In addition, **temporary schedule changes** went into effect Tuesday due to an Amtrak project to improve the tracks.

A group of state legislators who represents the shoreline issued a news release to request that Amtrak offer other options to commuters, as weekday trains between New Haven and New London will be cut from 22 to 14 daily trains, and weekend trains between New Haven and New London will be cut from 16 to 14 daily trains, with more trains stopping in Madison.

“I’m calling on Amtrak – at a bare minimum – to restore peak service and complete this work during off-peak hours or provide a dedicated bus service during on-peak hours,” state Sen. Christine Cohen, D-Guilford, said in a statement.

State Rep. Devin Carney, R-Old Lyme, said in a statement that: “These changes were not only a surprise to Shore Line East riders, but this disruption has caused distress to commuters, students, and others who rely on this service for their livelihoods.”

Norwich, New London and Groton could benefit most

The feasibility report outlines that transit and rail improvements could cut carbon dioxide emissions and spur jobs in the region, which has fewer professional jobs and lower pay than Bridgeport, New Haven, Stamford and Hartford, communities with better transit.

The study found the region’s more densely populated communities of Norwich, New London and Groton, which have disadvantaged areas and which, along with Montville, are considered “distressed municipalities,” could benefit the most from enhanced transportation and transit-oriented development.

The study details proposals and cost estimates for expanding bus service run by Southeast Area Transit District and the rail expansions.

Public input sought

Study Manager Elise Greenberg said in a statement that public comments are “essential to this preliminary study.”

“The Connecticut Public Transportation Council continues to believe that the expansion of rail is a critical component of making our state the best it can be in the area of transportation, the environment, tourism and economic development,” Jim Gildea, the chairman of the independent advisory group that advocates for all forms of public transportation in the state, said by phone Wednesday.

Gildea said transportation in the region, which is home to employers such as Pfizer and Electric Boat with their increasing workforce, is a critical component of connecting employers to employees. He said the study shows that expansion is feasible, realistic and possible and “we just need to find a way to secure the funding necessary to make it work.”

People who wish to comment on the study can send the comments to DOTplanning@ct.gov or (860) 594-2855 by Oct. 20.

The DOT will hold the following public meetings on the feasibility study:

· 6 p.m. Sept. 19 at the Thrive 55+ Active Living Center, 102 Newtown Road, Groton. A meeting recording will be posted later on the DOT’s YouTube channel.

· 1 p.m. Sept. 20 at Otis Library, 261 Main St., Norwich, and streamed live on YouTube.

· 6 p.m. Sept. 20 via Zoom and livestreamed. People can register at <https://portal.ct.gov/eastern-ct-rail>.

Comments are limited to 200 words in length.

Post your comment

We encourage respectful comments but reserve the right to delete anything that does not contribute to an engaging dialogue. Help us moderate this thread by flagging comments that violate our guidelines. [Read the commenting policy.](#)

Comment

Post Comment

Total word count: 0 words. Words left: 200.

READER COMMENTS

Robin Dauda September 8, 2023 at 10:54

[Report](#)

DOTplanning@ct.gov or (860) 594-2855 by Oct. 20.
Fully support it! Great plan!

Evan Andriopolous September 8, 2023 at 05:50

[Report](#)

good idea but as we all know this type of investment is political suicide...

John Drabik September 8, 2023 at 05:47

[Report](#)

Going to need to acquire trackage rights to run on the G&W also.

John Drabik September 8, 2023 at 05:46

[Report](#)

Lame study without actual physical track conditions taken into considerations.
This will require a train swap in NL to go north to Norwich. Its a freight route and not electrified. With lots of grade crossings that will have to be upgraded for passenger service. Not to mention some seriously tight curves not designed for the longer passenger cars. Used to be Budd cars serving NL to Norwich but that was dropped in the early mid sixties for lack of profitability.

Carl Nelson September 7, 2023 at 22:33

[Report](#)

Currently, SEAT Bus service leaves Norwich on the hour and arrives at Union Station in less than an hour. Fares for a month of unlimited rides is \$40. Is this service being fully utilized? If not, why do people think they will ride a train for the same route?

Carl Nelson September 7, 2023 at 22:27

[Report](#)

be used for its maintenance under a turnpike authority.

Gerard Massad September 7, 2023 at 20:25

[Report](#)

According to a May 2018 Final Report on the I-95 Branford to Rhode Island Feasibility Study Update, close to 100,000 cars travel along parts of the highway on a typical summer day. The figures are from 2016, and we know the number of cars keeps increasing, but let's stick with 100K vehicles. Charge 50 cents per toll, and let's put 4 tolls along this area. That's \$200,000 per day, or about \$70M per year. Split the proceeds with the company who installs and maintains the tolls, giving the state \$35M per year. The numbers for the I-395 corridor are about half of I-95, so let's figure about \$15M per year. That's a total of \$50M per year. In 20 years, the state will have paid off the cost of the expansion – just don't let the Port Authority get involved! Increasing the cost of the toll will decrease the amount of time needed to pay for the expansion. In previous years, I would never vote for anyone who favored tolls, as I hated waiting in a two mile backup on a summer day. Now, I will never vote for anyone who opposes tolls!

Gerard Massad September 7, 2023 at 20:09

[Report](#)

Need to raise a billion dollars to fund this expansion? It's simple – tolls! Put tolls along I-95 from New Haven to the Rhode Island border, and from I-395 in East Lyme to the Massachusetts border. Let the drivers from New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island pay their fair share to use our roads. For the past three weekends, I've had to drive to the Boston area, travelling on the Mass Pike. With electronic tolls, I never had to slow down, no cash exchanged hands, no waiting in lines like we had to do 50 years ago. With a transponder on the dash, my credit card was automatically charged the 25 cents each time I passed the toll. Privatize the entire process – let a company come in, install the tolls, collect the money, and then split the proceeds with the state. It's free money! Details with numbers will follow in my next post.

Beryl Fishbone September 7, 2023 at 19:44

[Report](#)

Eastern CT consists of mostly distressed communities who would benefit greatly from all forms of mass transit. Economically, employment, and environmentally. People from Eastern CT do not have mass transit access to the state capital or other major cities, courts and services. Mass transit could begin with busses while the tracks and the trains are being worked on.

Jake Spacer September 7, 2023 at 18:56

[Report](#)

Shoreline east should come to new london , til 3 in the morning,
Work with metro north it will cut down in traffic on 95 and cut down on deaths and accidents
The train service in the New London area sucks, especially with the price they charge for Amtrack.

Dean A Morse September 7, 2023 at 18:55

[Report](#)

Dont hold your breath waiting for this to get off the ground. If ever.

Eric Haddad September 7, 2023 at 18:43

[Report](#)

Should expand all the way into Mansfield with a station in Willimantic. Would be a nice way to get to UConn with bus service from both stations.



Despite looming service cuts for Shore Line East this fall and fewer trains running due to construction, a newly released study says there is demand for expanding the commuter rail service in the futu...



Mystic job fair brings out more than 200 people

Mystic — The Day's Job Fair at the Hilton Mystic attracted an estimated 225 people Thursday, most of whom were serious job hunters looking for work. "It's fantastic. The quality is very good," said S...



Dispute over access to Tantummaheag Landing leads to Old Lyme sign skirmish

Old Lyme — As the swallows begin the first synchronized salvos of their seasonal southern migration from the lower Connecticut River Valley, a prime viewing spot off Tantummaheag Landing remains a bat...



Salutations for New London students

New London — Students at C.B. Jennings International Elementary Magnet School were greeted by local officials and members of the community as they arrived for the second day of the school year. The W...

LATEST NEWS

Judge dismisses lawsuit in CT state police ticketing scandal

The judge ruled the case falls under the purview of the state's Freedom of Information Commission.

Russia holds elections in occupied Ukrainian regions in an effort to tighten its grip there

Lee reaches Category 5 strength with 160 mph winds, expected to remain major hurricane

AI that alters voice, imagery in political ads will require disclosure on Google, YouTube

West Hartford investigating teacher's alleged use of racial slur in classroom



TRENDING

- 1** [UPDATED: State trooper suffers fractured arm in I-95 crash in Groton](#)

- 2** [Navy chief charged with sexual assault of teen girl in Waterford](#)

- 3** [2023 High school football preview capsules](#)

- 4** [Community mourns the loss of a 'princess' who embraced life with open arms](#)

- 5** [Dispute over access to Tantummaheag Landing leads to Old Lyme sign skirmish](#)

PODCASTS

Bee rescuer Patrick Gaudin

Dictionary researcher Joshua Pendragon

'Job Description' explores the world of a professional classical musician



Mapping the ocean floor with Bob Wallace



▲ Back To Top

About The Day

The Day Publishing Company

47 Eugene O'Neill Drive

P.O. Box 1231

New London, CT 06320-1231 USA

Staff Profiles

[President/Publisher](#) [Newsroom](#) [Advertising/Marketing](#)

[FAQs](#) [Jobs at The Day](#) [Contact Us](#)

Connect With Us



Quick Links

[E-Paper](#) [Contests](#) [Horoscopes](#) [Puzzles](#) [TV](#)
[Calendar](#) [Milestones](#) [Newsletters](#)

Advertising

[About Our Ads](#) [Advertise](#) [Place A Classified Ad](#) [Contacts](#)
[Find New London Area Jobs](#) [Business Directory](#)

Services

[Day Media Group](#) [Photo Reprints](#) [Privacy Policy/Terms](#) [RSS](#)
[Text/SMS Alerts](#)