



SUMMARY OF MEETING ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Project: **I-95 Branford to Rhode Island Feasibility Study
Connecticut Department of Transportation**

Location of Meeting: **Waterford Town Hall**

Date of Meeting: **September 18, 2003**

Subject of Meeting: **Transit Workshop**

In Attendance:

Duncan Allen – Parsons Transportation Group (PTG)
Rod Bascom – Clough, Harbour & Associates LLP (CHA)
Jim Andrini – Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT)
Bill Peace – Town of Old Saybrook
Michael Chong – Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
Jill Barrett – Fitzgerald & Halliday Inc. (FHI)
T. Gerald Dyar – I-91 TIA (Transportation Investment Area)
Jim Butler – Southeast CT Council of Governments (SCCOG)
Dennis Popp - City of Groton
Ed Dombroskas – CT Dept. of Community and Economic Development. (DECD)
Linda Krause - CT River Estuary Regional Planning Association (CRERPA)
Judy Gott – So. Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG)
Jean Stimolo - Rideworks
Fred Riese – Ct Department of Environmental Protection (ConnDEP)
Paul B. Eccard – Town of Waterford
John Markowicz – Transportation Strategy Board (TSB)
Jason Vincent – Town of Stonington
Nicholas Mullane – North Stonington
Joe Varneke – SEAT
Dan Morley – CT Office of Policy and Management (OPM)
Sgt. William Krauss – CT State Police

Summary of Discussions:

The purpose of this Advisory Committee (AC) meeting was to review the draft findings of the Transit Report with the committee members.

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting commenced with introductions of Advisory Committee members and representatives from ConnDOT and the consultant team.

II. Overview of Transit Report

Duncan Allen began the meeting with a slide show corresponding to the integral points in the draft Transit Service Enhancement Analysis report previously submitted to the AC members.

The following items were discussed:

A. Diversion Estimate Overview

The method to estimate the number of diverted trips (from vehicles to transit) was discussed. The first step was to define the proposed transit enhancements from both a regional and local perspective. These transit enhancements included both bus and rail systems. The next step was to utilize the statewide multi-modal model with the enhanced transit services to determine the increased ridership by commuters and permanent residents. Additional diversions were estimated considering weekenders, vacationers, and summer residents.

B. Summary of Results

The diversion estimate methodology discussed above resulted in a total of 2,012 new transit trips during the summer Friday evening peak hour. This represents an overall volume reduction on I-95 of 0.7%.

The capital cost associated with the transit enhancements is \$35 million. Operating costs would be \$3 million per year with \$1 million per year revenue for a net operating deficit of \$2 million per year.

The results indicate that enhancements to existing transit systems would not be a sufficient stand-alone solution in lieu of carrying out significant improvements along I-95 and its interchanges.

III. AC Member Questions and Comments

At the conclusion of the transit presentation there was extensive discussion and questions about the report which are summarized below. Responses to questions by the study team are in italics.

This option may not be effective because local improvements could not possibly help an interstate problem.

Why was Friday Peak the time of day used to generate the diversion figures? Often residents drive off-peak and traffic is still bad due to accidents, etc. Using Friday Peak time as the study interval is like worrying about ‘parking for the mall using the Friday after Thanksgiving.’ Are we asking the right questions?

The 30th highest hourly volume is used for all analyses. The 30th highest hourly volume is exceeded 29 times during the year and is therefore, not the worst case scenario on I-95 but is indicative of typical congestion. This is a standard approach in studies of this type.

In the scope of work, the study was done to see if transit enhancements would eliminate the need for widening I-95, which it does not. This was what was meant by transit's inability to be a stand-alone solution.

The transit study seemed a little negative. Because the transit solution should not be a stand-alone option does not mean it should be counted out completely. Something inexpensive should be done along the way throughout the project. *The Introduction and Executive Summary in the transit study will be revised to better explain this.*

Why were European models used in the transit study? Were there any American models that could be used to express the goals of the study, or was this European model a best case scenario? *This European model was used because it provided the most data and captured a market that was already inclined to use transit thereby providing a good comparison.*

Jim Butler spoke of a new project, an Intermodal Connections Study for Southeastern Connecticut, which his organization is working on is related to this project. He has access to a new market survey for an enhanced transit system whose preliminary findings show a more optimistic preliminary projection of transit use. He will relay this information to the consultant team when available. This new project gives new information about issues affecting the corridor. Should the transit study be conducted again with this new information? *Any information would be very helpful but due to the study's operating budget and schedule, and scope of services, a second model run with this information as input will not be possible.*

One member commented that the study itself was extremely well done, as an idealistic model. What was missing was consideration of the important dynamics and societal trends throughout the next 22 years. The base figures need to be documented, the change in ridership cannot merely be shown, it is misleading and some information should be specially noted. Assumptions need to be stated. *Everything in the transit study is projected to year 2025, based on terms and statistics as we understand them now. It is impossible to predict things that may happen in the future beyond that which is already planned. This is why conservative assumptions were used to estimate diversions such as enhanced rail service not being limited by bridge openings or availability of parking at the stations.*

Fifteen years of construction and hold-ups throughout the construction are not accounted for. How long will people wait before they seek alternative routes? *It has been found that people are willing to accept a large delay before getting out of their cars to utilize transit alternatives.*

Buses will be ineffective considering they use the same roads as cars and trucks. Buses will simply get stuck in the same traffic as the cars and trucks are. *The model was done assuming the buses would divert riders and the congestion would therefore decrease. What is important to understand throughout this study is that the analysis assumes no change on I-95.*

How is the unit 'VMT' (vehicle miles traveled) converted to actual number of cars on the highway? Don't we care less about the miles traveled and more about how many cars are on the road?

44,000 VMT = 750 vehicles per day driving the 60 mile corridor length

Have parking limitations been taken into account? One member works near a train station. They built a new 200-space parking garage and it was filled up in two weeks. Is it a matter of ‘if we build it, they will come?’ If we build not only more but more convenient parking will people be more apt to leave their cars, getting them all off the road? *Parking availability was not considered as a constraint in the diversion model.*

Possibly building a casino in Bridgeport may keep some people a little more west, making the need for those people taking I-95 to the east much lesser. Could we use Metro North, expanding it up here as opposed to improving Shoreline East?

Another member took the approach that we can’t build ourselves out of this problem. There would be problems waiting for construction of the garage, casino as well.

The constraints (resources, etc.) are understandable but the dynamics are integral to the conclusions. One member strongly feels the more people have to wait, the more they will use transit.

The conclusions state that this option cannot be used as a stand-alone solution to current and projected congestion on I-95. However, this is a draft and the study team will make sure that the conclusion is revised so that it is clear the study is not saying transit facilities should not be further developed as a transportation alternative.

The transit study needs to take into account the cost. For a single person to take the train, it is not extremely expensive. However, for a whole family to travel via train, it becomes very costly. Could someone speak with Amtrak and possibly create family deals, or subsidize transit to make group rates – something that would create no capital costs at all?

Another problem seems to be the fractured destinations in eastern Connecticut. In NYC, when commuters get off the train, many attractions, destinations are within walking distance, if not right there. In eastern Connecticut things are much more spread out. People show very little patience when they are on their way to work, but people are even less patient during their precious free time.

If Shore Line East were electrified would that help increase effectiveness of this option? *Yes it would.*

The trains are too infrequent; no one wants to wait for an hour to change trains. The Boston Trolley system runs very quickly and frequently. We should model something after that system. The AC Members agreed that when saying transit cannot be a stand-alone alternative, that nothing can be a stand-alone alternative. The study team needs to be more specific when making their conclusions and be a little more careful with terminology so as not to be misleading. The study team agreed that this will be taken into account as the study progresses and final recommendations are made.