

Episode 33 - Podcast Transcript: New Look - New Haven Union Station

00:11.19

Rich Andreski

Hi, I'm Rich Andreski, Bureau Chief for Public Transportation at the Connecticut Department of Transportation. And I'd like to welcome you to Along the Lines, a podcast series where we'll explore our current issues and ideas on Connecticut's public transportation system.

00:27.99

Rich Andreski

Hello and welcome to another episode of Along the Lines. I'm your host, Rich Andreski. New Haven's Union Station has been welcoming travelers with its ornate ceilings, elegant chandeliers, and tall arched windows since it opened in 1920. This architectural gem was designed by noted American architect Cass Gilbert and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Among Gilbert's other works are the U.S. Supreme Court Building, the Woolworth Building in Manhattan, and several state capitols, libraries, and museums.

00:59.08

Rich Andreski

Not only is New Haven Union Station a magnificent building, but it is also vital to our state's transportation infrastructure and economy. Union Station connects the New Haven line running into and out of New York City and points in between, the Hartford line heading north to Hartford and Springfield, and Shoreline East, which goes to New London. It is also a key link on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor from Boston to Washington DC and points beyond.

01:26.21

Rich Andreski

On today's program, we're going to talk about New Haven Union Station and our plan to redevelop the historic structure to make sure it serves its important purpose well into this new century. We'll also discuss the downtown commuter rail station known as State Street Station.

01:45.12

Rich Andreski

With me today are Doug Hausladen, Executive Director of the New Haven Parking Authority, and Karla Lundquist, Deputy Director of Transportation, Traffic and Parking for the City of New Haven. Doug and Karla, welcome to the program. Thanks so much for having us. Thanks very much.

02:03.47

Rich Andreski

So in December 2021, not that long ago, we signed a historic new lease and operating and funding agreement with the city of New Haven. And I was there for that signing ceremony and it was really to launch a new partnership with the city of New Haven for both Union Station and State Street Station. And Doug, you played a significant role in that crafting of that partnership. Can you give our listeners a little background on the partnership and what it means for commuters?

02:32.33**Doug Hausladen**

Sure. Thanks so much, Rich. And thanks again to the Connecticut DOT and the City of New Haven for continuing the work at Union Station and improving the experience for all commuters. The agreement partnership is a new 35-year agreement with 10-year renewals that allows for the City of New Haven and the State of Connecticut to work together towards a new vision for what is going to happen and what is happening surrounding Union Station.

03:01.34**Doug Hausladen**

In addition to the station itself on Union Avenue, it additionally brings into the management of the partnership, the State Street Station for the first time. State Street has a great commuter rail access, while Union Station has all that commuter rail access plus our regional rail.

03:56.19.28**Doug Hausladen**

The new lease and operating agreement really came forth right before the pandemic, when we first met in February of 2020, after newly elected mayor Justin Allaker and his team got together with commissioner Gilletti and his team regarding a soon to expire original agreement from the 1980s.

03:41.39**Doug Hausladen**

As some listeners may remember, Penn Rail goes out of business and the state of Connecticut takes over and receivership Union Station and other assets on the rail system, really launching Connecticut DOT into Connecticut Rail. In the late 70s and early 80s, the community came together led by the Congressman, then Congressman at the time to fully renovate the station, bring it back up to its glory days of the 1920s.

04:08.02**Doug Hausladen**

as well as build additional parking structures to support the rail lines. This new partnership agreement will kick off on July 1st and will have a few key differences from the prior agreement, most notably There's a broad agreement that is being finalized right now in our planning processes to renovate and redevelop Union Station campus. and we When we say redevelop, there are a number of surface parking lots that are owned by the state of Connecticut that surround the station. And these parking lots are gonna be targeted for redevelopment with what's called a P3, public-private partnership efforts.

04:51.96

Doug Hausladen

So inside of this P3 effort on the what we call the west lot and the east lot, there is going to be a new multimodal center, one that handles our ah intercity and intracity bus traffic, as well as ah creating new structured parking to the tune of 600 new spaces.

05:11.11

Doug Hausladen

So every month, the partnership will get together, discuss operations, talk about what's working, talk about what's not working, and most importantly for the commuter, talk about how to fix it.

05:23.00

Rich Andreski

Doug, ah yeah we're excited as much as you are about this this new partnership. um The customer experience is something you mentioned, and that's very important to us. The customer experience is something that our daily and and occasional travelers are looking for while they come to ah catch a train.

05:43.22

Rich Andreski

The ability to pick up a bite to eat, um purchase something for for the train, train ride or, you know, just otherwise relax while they're waiting for their train to come in. It's an important, you know, it's an important facet of what a train station is and does. Karla, you know, I'm interested in your take on the role of the station and this partnership on what that means for the community and the local economy.

06:08.86

Karla Lundquist

Absolutely. I think there's multiple facets too. And I think the first thing is really um a little bit symbolic ah significance. So having sort of an iconic building um and a historic train station as

sort of the welcome mat for the city has a lot of potential to really make that area obviously even richer than it has been in the past.

06:36.98

Karla Lundquist

And so the city is obviously excited about the connectedness that Union Station brings generally but seeing even more traffic through there, more folks coming through, whether that's sort of on the business side or whether that's on the visitor side, that can only mean great things for the New Haven economy.

06:55.00

Karla Lundquist

And we want to see more innovation, more collaboration through that connectedness, making sure that people, when they want to be in New Haven and they need to come to Yale or they need to come to um any of our bioscience companies or they need to come to any of our rich arts and culture events, that they have that opportunity that they can easily access New Haven through through transit.

07:18.61

Rich Andreski

For sure. And what's remarkable about our Union Station, there are many Union Stations around the country that have been ah redeveloped. Washington, D.C., of course, comes to mind. But our station is not only a phenomenal opportunity for development, but really is serving the what is the busiest rail line in the nation. So um it really has a ah transportation purpose and a a strong economic purpose and really rivals anything else that's out there on the national level.

07:48.91

Rich Andreski

Throughout the 200 year history, 102 year history of New Haven Union Station. millions, literally, millions of people have walked through that grand structure. And it's really iconic for the city of New Haven, but it's also but a very sort of iconic landmark for the state. And the partnership, our partnership, we have ambitious plans to redevelop that whole station. um There are many elements. Doug, you touched on you know the retail and architectural improvements.

08:18.00

Rich Andreski

Can either of you, both of you, walk us through a little bit more about that ultimate vision? What is that vision for the campus? And for our listeners, what we mean by campus is the station

building itself, which are all familiar many of you are familiar with, but then all of the land that's sort of attached to that station includes the surface parking lot, parking garage, um additional lot that is available for development.

08:46.27

Rich Andreski

So, Karla or Doug, feel free to jump in on this one. What what can what can we expect in the near and mid term?

08:52.00

Doug Hausladen

Allow me to start, Carla, if I may, and and just take us through a little bit of the the past here in the 102 years. Before this station was was constructed, there were two other Union stations in New Haven, both ah unfortunately um succumbed to fire at the time, and then Cass Gilbert leads a revival to ah rebuild the Union Station on Union Avenue into the structure you see today. And what's totally What's completely exciting about the improvements being planned is we talk about a customer focus, but drilling down into what that means. Tripling the amount of retail, Union Station was experiencing was seeing 4 million passengers annually walking through its doors, making it the 10th busiest Amtrak station in the country.

09:40.63

Doug Hausladen

With the expansion of the Hartford Line, additional traffic is expected to continue to grow and with with improving service on Shoreline East as well as the Northeast Corridor, we anticipate even more traffic coming through New Haven new haven Union Station.

09:56.56

Doug Hausladen

So getting to 30,000 square feet from 10,000 square feet is not the easiest of tasks. And ah there's a strong committee, a group of of dedicated staff from both the city of New Haven and the Connecticut DOT working through our New Haven Parking Authority in order to be able to deliver on these plans that we're all hopeful to to start to construct very soon.

10:19.79

Doug Hausladen

You know One of the largest complaints we receive at the station is the lack or the the need of more restrooms. And what's odd to us and what's been very apparent through this collaborative partnership is that there were a lot more bathrooms in 1920 than there are today.

10:39.72

Doug Hausladen

And so Part of our work is undoing some of the mid-century renovations that took away some of those passenger-focused amenities. And In addition to just unlocking some of these bathrooms and other needed amenities, continuing to improve and enhance the amount of retail available. so trying to work through our existing tenants in the building, those that are on the first floor or in the basement or second floor, places that we could ah return to public use rather than having private offices. It's terribly exciting to to be ah working on a building that is a 100-year-old historic structure made by one of the most ah influential architects of the early 20th century.

11:25.55

Doug Hausladen

So this is going to be a multifaceted, multi-staged approach, one that will be leading to tripling the amount of retail, expansion of existing public restrooms, and ah improving a lot more of the accessibility to the station. And I'll ask Carla to kind of weigh in a little bit here too.

11:45.25

Doug Hausladen

Carla, I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about ah the hill to downtown plan and and the vision for Union Square and and what Columbus Avenue has meant for the neighbors in the hill.

11:57.00

Karla Lindquist

Yes, definitely. And I think that those are very important points here that Union Station's not just sort of an entryway into New Haven and and the state, um it's also part of a neighborhood. And unfortunately, that neighborhood has had times where it was not as well connected to both the station and other parts of the city. And so we're really excited to see um the reopening of Orange Street, which means that we can have better access between the Hill neighborhood um where Union Station is is located and the downtown area.

12:33.02

Karla Lindquist

And Rich, to your to your question about the redevelopment of the campus, the the concept there is really to make sure that whatever additional expansion and renovation and um upgrade of amenities happens at Union Station that there's really follow-on additional development that surrounds the area, right? We want to make sure that there's as much transit-oriented development as possible, whether that means that there's great housing that you don't need a car for, whether that means that there are conference or large-scale event services where people don't need a car to access them. you know, we want to make sure that those follow-on

development components that happen afterwards are really seamless with the work that's going on at Union Station.

13:20.25

Rich Andreski

Carla, I love that you're charting the course. It's not really, as you said so well, it's really not only about the station, but it's about really that ah whole area of the city that's sort of been cut off for so many decades. And I get excited walking around in that area since Columbus Avenue reopened and getting to see the development that's taking a place near near Church Street South already. um it's It's phenomenal and um really looking forward to seeing the changes play out over the next couple of years.

13:55.79

Karla Lindquist

The important thing to remember is that this is about people, right? Like you can't have a great neighborhood or a great a great train station or a great transit system without people to support it and people that it is serving. And so I think we're excited to see what this means for the people that already live in the Hill area, what it means for them in terms of expanding opportunities that they have, but then also, you know, welcoming new folks um to the city as well.

14:23.24

Rich Andreski

Karla, if you could elaborate a little bit more. So um stitching the city back together again is certainly you know a very visible and and intangible goal there. But I know that's coupled with walkability of and and bike and pedestrian improvements. So can you elaborate a little bit more on things to come around Union Station with respect to what we call active transportation?

14:50.77

Karla Lindquist

Sure. and And I think just to um elaborate on and what Doug was mentioning before about mid-century urban renewal, New Haven was really bisected ah sort of multiple times um by the highway system. And I think looking at um projects like um Downtown Crossing, where Orange Street is now reconnected for cyclists and pedestrians to access Union Station from downtown and the Hill neighborhood to access downtown, you see much more potential in terms of folks options to get around their own city and for visitors who are arriving at Union Station to access the rest of New Haven

15:31.90

Karla Lindquist

And that's really important to you know the city as a whole to make sure that we have really solid fabric in terms of our connectedness amongst our neighborhoods. And it also means that we can be um We can continue to build upon the great work that you know other folks have done at the city um in terms of expanding infrastructure and facilities for cycling and improving our pedestrian facilities as well. And so I think one of the things that that's definitely coming up for the city is we're working on our safe routes for all um citywide active transportation plan and we're we're hoping to release the the final um version of that plan any day and and then present it to our board of alders for adoption.

16:21.03**Karla Lindquist**

um But I think the the vision for New Haven is really to make sure that any mode um is supported safely um on our streets and that you can you can walk out your front door and get to union um Union Station no matter which neighborhood you live in. And you can do that by bus, by on foot or on your bike um and and do that safely.

16:45.06**Rich Andreski**

You know, it's I can't help but think, as a frequent user of Union Station, um how close the distances are really. ah So many destinations are a short walk, call it under a mile, from the station. And yet, it can seem both in, ah you know, that that those distances are much greater. um but You know, it's ah Downtown Crossing is so important because you can walk directly to the heart of the downtown.

17:14.14**Rich Andreski**

But um it's really about the feeling of walkability too, right? Isn't it? It's it's about how safe do I feel? How comfortable is the walk? um Are there amenities, um crosswalks and um protected sidewalks and lanes?

17:30.32**Karla Lindquist**

Totally. And and are there opportunities on my walk or my bike ride from point A to point B for me to grab coffee with a friend or run into you know a former coworker or you know whatever it might be? I think we we need to make sure that those kinds of small interactions that sort of knit the urban fabric are and embraced in the type of development that we do and also the type of transportation planning that we do, trying to to center sort of human aspects in our in our daily lives in the way that we do sort of these more technical and built environment planning.

18:14.00

Rich Andreski

so We've talked about the opportunity for the station. Doug, can you elaborate a little bit on the timeline in terms of when some of those improvements might come online?

18:23.00

Doug Hausladen

We're presently in the process of request for information and continually working on a soon to be submitted rezoning. So at the moment, we're looking to wrap up our ah RFI process sometime in the summer of 2022.

18:30.40

Doug Hausladen

With regards to the interior, you'll be able to start seeing work starting early in 2023 on renovations to the inside of the of the station and the concourse, as well as rethinking and and reworking our wayfinding and public amenity spaces on the outside of the station. We're truly excited to work with the Union Station Partnership, Connecticut DOT, and the City of New Haven in rethinking this this customer experience and the passenger experience as they come through the station.

19:10.12

Rich Andreski

Carl and Doug, I know both of you travel a bit, and I'm wondering if both of you could weigh in on sort of a model city or project somewhere outside of New Haven that you look to for inspiration.

19:26.00

Doug Hausladen

That's a great question, Rich. And, you know, one of the stations that we've been really looking at, while it's not a publicly owned union station, ah Denver Union Station has seen ah historic, meteoric rise in development surrounding Union Station Denver. We're starting to see the same kind of development pattern surrounding our State Street Station and to some to a little bit lesser extent Union Station, although it is growing that way.

19:56.79

Doug Hausladen

There's about 3,000 new apartments are under construction and planned within a half mile of State Street Station. And every time a building comes online, um it pushes the boundary of what

we as a community thought was possible and with regards to how quickly ah buildings are leasing up. The future of New Haven is extremely strong, and I believe that the future of Connecticut is just as strong.

20:22.87

Doug Hausladen

We have the St. Raphael campus of the Yale New Haven Health Systems is building a new 1 billion, a 2000 person tower for a neuroscience center, one that will rival ah their existing cancer center at the Smilow Cancer Center.

20:40.50

Doug Hausladen

So when I'm thinking about um what does it take to have ah really welcoming, healthy communities in our built environment, you know I do look at other similar eds and meds and biotech ah communities for inspiration.

20:55.85

Doug Hausladen

Places like Cambridge, Massachusetts, places like Rochester, Minnesota. um I've gotten multiple um design ideas from Rochester, Minnesota, ah and have been very impressed with the Mayo Clinic's built environment and their participation in the surrounding neighborhood, just like ah in Cambridge with multiple partners and, again, multiple biotech companies and centers.

21:21.00

Doug Hausladen

We have a brand new ah ah brand new headquarters being created for Arvinas. And AstraZeneca, which is the formerly known as Alexion, are taking large space in a 500,000 square foot tower that has just under 115 parking spaces. When you think about that parking ratio, you really do get to experience other types of infrastructure that supports the real growth of the density of a city. And so instead of building a tower of parking, 101 College Street is now building a brand new ah public plaza and park called Innovation ah Plaza.

22:00.83

Doug Hausladen

And this to Carla's point about how do you get from Union Station to downtown? Occasionally you have to take a break, occasionally you run into people, but you really do as ah as a government and as a city need to provide those opportunities and those pathways. And so one of the um exciting parts of seeing 101 College Street develop with a public park on its on its below grade parking deck, is this is really just a expression of the 1910 plan for New Haven.

That was a ah civic improvement commission ah over 112 years ago that was written by none other than Cask Albert.

22:40.10

Doug Hausladen

And the big idea back in 1910 was a ah train station that welcomed the region where people could walk off, walk out of the train station into a a grand promenade and concourse that took you up through the Hill, the Medical District, and ah turned right onto Temple Street and brought you to the New Haven green.

23:01.73

Doug Hausladen

And what we've been able to accomplish is really just that with a ring of parks that are roughly a four-minute walk apart. And If you're super familiar with New Haven or I welcome you yeah to look this up, you can go from a Union Station to a soon-to-be created Union Square. um There's also a Trowbridge Square and then Amistad Park. And from Amistad Park, you can go right to this innovation park, to Temple Plaza, and to and of course to Temple Street where the historic New Haven Green is.

23:35.00

Rich Andreski

Karla, where do you look for inspiration?

23:38.62

Karla Lindquist

The thing that's been on my mind lately, and I am a little bit loath to point to to Denmark for cycling just because that's what everyone does. But um the thing that we've been talking about recently is maintenance. And I am looking forward to, as we continue to expand our cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, to be able to properly um you know, maintain all of it in a way that it's accessible year round. I think the biggest thing that we hear from folks who are a little bit skeptical of active transportation is, well, you know, what ah what do people who bike do in December in Connecticut or in January?

24:17.10

Karla Lindquist

And the reality is you know if we're able to to fully maintain everything um to a a very high standard, then we can certainly provide those opportunities for folks all the time. And so I think that's the thing that's been on my mind lately is is just making sure that we can really have these robust facilities year round for folks and making sure that they're really high quality. in that and

you know And to the point that was made earlier around you know walkability and um sort of aesthetics to make sure that people want to spend time um doing those things in New Haven. that They want to walk or cycle or roll if if that's available.

24:58.26

Rich Andreski

Yeah, so you know we've talked about the station, the role it plays for our riders. We've talked about the importance of the station to the local economy, economic development, and of course, quality of life. I'm wondering when you bring all those ideas together and think about 15 years from now, What does success look like in 15 years? And when I ask about success, i'm I'm defining that very broadly, not just for the station, but for really this the city as a whole as it relates to to the station. Karla, why don't you take this one first?

25:34.06

Karla Lindquist

Sure, thanks. I really love the idea that all of our residents will have amazing amenities and access through re Union Station in five or 10 years. um The fact that, you know, we can really make sure that especially our underserved communities have quality transit connections to Union Station. I know we're all working on that through moonu Move New Haven.

26:58.33

Karla Lindquist

um and ah making sure that, again, folks could walk or cycle or roll if they wanted to, um to either get to jobs, go visit family, whatever it is that that takes them through the station. That's my my big vision, is to make sure that folks in New Haven are supported in the way that they need to be to really make their lives easier and and and more pleasant.

26:23.89

Doug Hausladen

Before I give my answer, I'll just invite folks who are listening to follow along on the Union Station project, head to UnionStationNewHaven.com and take a look at some of the prior work and current work that's going on, including a video of our January webinar on station area planning. In 15 years, I'm not going to tell you that we have driverless vehicles saving the day because I'm not sold on that future I'm actually sold on a future that looks a lot like our past. And as as um Carla mentioned, the ability to walk is the definition of freedom. And I believe that our future has um upgraded traffic signals to have leading pedestrian indicators and concurrent crossings to make it easier and better for all users of the road.I think are our Move New Haven a bus rapid transit study is going to be implemented in 15 years and will be an all electric rapid transit bus system, one that ah moves the bus and just makes the bus faster.

27:26.52

Doug Hasladen

And I think the New Haven Parking Authority will be in our future. We hope to be a leader in a shared electric mobility future. And, you know, I think a lot of people are going to be really impressed with ah how densely populated and densely developed New Haven can really become, even while we might be one of the more densely populated downtowns as of now, I really truly believe that we'll be able to double double our population in the downtown and surrounding areas, provided that we continue to build ah for New Haven and for the region, for our visitors, and make it more welcoming.

28:06.81

Rich Andreski

Yeah, very exciting future indeed. You know, we think about disruption in entertainment, education, the information sector, and, you know, everything is on demand. And so the future too, I agree with both of you, you know, it's about ease of mobility, being able to get around when you want to go. Um, not having to own a vehicle and just being able to you know participate in life ah with friends, neighbors, and family. So very exciting future.

29:33.85

Rich Andreski

I really appreciate your time. Doug Hasladen and Karla Lindquist, thank you for making the time and to join us on the program. And with that, I'm Rich Andreski. Join us next time for another episode of Along the Lines.

28:46.73

Rich Andreski

Thanks for listening to this episode of Along the Lines. This is your host, Rich Andreski. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please remember to subscribe and share.