SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

Connecticut Chapter
645 Farmington Ave.
Hartford, Connecticut 06105
www.connecticut.sierraclub.org

Transportation Committee
February 24, 2009
Testimony of Molly McKay, CT Sierra Transportation Committee Chair
Martin Mador, CT Sierra Legislative Chair
In Favor of
SB 425 An Act Concerning the Improvement of the Norwalk/Danbury Train Line
SB 440 An Act Requiring Automated Ticket Machines on the Danbury Train Line
SB 556 An Act Concerning the Development of a Shuttle System in Norwalk, Stamford and Greenwich
HB 5646 An Act Requiring the State of Connecticut to Take Necessary Steps to Establish the New England, New York and New Jersey Interstate Passenger Rail Commission
HB 5657 An Act Concerning the Restoration of Freight Rail Service
HB 6072 An Act Permitting Passengers Boarding Trains to Take Bicycles onto Such Trains
HB 6210 An Act Establishing Commuter Rail Service Between New Haven, Hartford and Springfield and to Restructure the Department of Transportation

We are Molly McKay, 8 Riverbend Dr., Mystic, CT. and Martin Mador, 130 Highland Ave., Hamden, CT 06518. We are here today representing our 10,000 Connecticut members concerned about the health of our environment, our economic well-being, and the quality of life in Connecticut.

Transportation needs to be planned as a system, not separate, competing modes. We have over invested in roads for so many decades that in order to integrate highways, rail, buses, bicycles, air travel, and walking we need to greatly expand our funding for rail and transit and use highway money to fix what we have built, because it is crumbling.

The first three bills SB 425, 440 and 556 are great because they show system-related thinking. When you improve a rail line, you need to plan all the ways to make it successful automated ticketing, shuttles to get to the train station, good pedestrian and bicycle access and more. Norwalk already has great TOD (transit-oriented development). Huge office buildings and downtown shops are right near the station so there's your ridership – instantly. I urge you to get that line double tracked right away which will allow greatly expanded service.

RE HB 6210 In 1995, then freshman State Representative Chris Donovan testified for commuter service New Haven, Htford, Sprfld. Fourteen years to restart commuter rail in an existing corridor and it's still not done?! And they say maybe by 2015! I thought this was America! That we are a CAN DO society. You don't need the Environmental Assessment. That was delay tactic. Just get that service going now.

Environmental benefits of rail touch almost every issue we are concerned about open space, cleaner air, cleaner water, lower CO2 emissions, dense mixed use development in town and city centers which helps revitalize those centers and attract people to move back to our cities. Trains are at least six times more efficient than single occupancy vehicle. A freight train carries ONE TON of cargo 423 miles on ONE GALLON of fuel. (CSX ad which I'm sure you have heard.)

Economic benefits should REALLY get your attention these days. You get much more bang for your buck investing in rail. Compare the rebuilding of the Q Bridge in New Haven ONE BRIDGE on I-95, which will cost close to $3 billion. It was $1.5 billion two years ago and they are a long ways from completion. Compare that to $2.7 billion for Amtrak to electrify the railroad from New Haven to Boston. Travel time has almost been cut in half and the service carries over 40% of the traveling public from DC to Boston when it used to serve from 10 to 15%.

Opportunities abound. There are thousands of miles of existing freight rail corridors where second and third tracks were ripped up during the last thirty years. Those tracks could be put back starting now. Freight railroads would be open to agreements allowing passenger rail back on their corridors if they had the capital infusion to greatly expand their infrastructure. See attached statement by Ed Hamburger, President of the Association of American Railroads (AAR).

Profits are possible, too, when investing in rail. See the attached article about the Hong Kong Subway which profits from real estate investments in their rail corridor.

Jim RePass, President and CEO of the National Corridors Iniative, has a slightly different idea of how to use real estate growth in rail corridors to pay for operating and maintenance of the railroad. He calls this TIZZE's !! Transportation Infrastructure Investment Zones. He will send you his proposal on this.

THANK YOU. Molly McKay molly mckay@nationalcorridors.org

See attached:

Hong Kong Subway's Net Profit Up 44 Percent

By Alexander Lew ✉March 20, 2008 | 7:00:00 AMCategories: Mass Transit

The MTR subway of Hong Kong is completely the opposite of transit systems in the United States: it actually makes a profit. The subway's underlying net profit, which excludes any changes in valuation of real estate properties, rose to 8.57 billion Hong Kong dollars (1.1 billion U.S. dollars) for 2007. A large chunk of MTR's profits comes from the developing and selling of real estate properties. MTR has built residential real estate surrounding train stations, selling 7 billion dollars worth of units last year. The construction of these flats, however, were accounted for in 2006 books, so the profits in 2008 are suspected to be less than the previous year. Ridership remains to be at a high for Hong Kong's subway. About 948 million rides (an increase of 8 percent) were taken last year. Now, the newest figures show that 3.5 million took the subway in February 2008, an increase of almost a million from last year's February count. This is truly amazing for a transit system, where gaining a profit is difficult.

AAR's CEO Offers Help Growing Commuter Rail

If Freight Rail Capacity Is Included In The Plan

By DF Staff And From The American Association Of Railroads

WASHINGTON, DC --- AAR's Hamberger this past week had a positive message for the Surface Transportation Board (STB), which rules on issues of national rail importance: Passenger-rail expansion shouldn't impede freight-rail growth.

"Freight railroads support efforts to expand passenger-rail service where needed, but such expansion should preserve and provide for freight-rail growth," was the message Association of American RailroadsPresident and Chief Executive Officer Ed Hamberger delivered to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) last week.

During the board's Feb. 11 hearing on the implementation of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008, Hamberger urged the STB to take into account the operational realities of the freight-rail system when designing passenger-rail on-time performance metrics.

"There are many constraints on the U.S. freight system that need to be factored when deciding what does or does not constitute a delay," said Hamberger. "Many segments of the nation's freight-rail network are today congested due to high volumes of traffic, and such congestion is only going to worsen as future demand for freight transportation skyrockets."

Any performance measure should identify and separate "avoidable" from "unavoidable" delays, and all delays should be attributed to the responsible party, Hamberger believes.

"When something goes wrong somewhere on the rail network, it often has a cascading effect leading to train delays elsewhere," he said.

"Hamberger is one of the most widely respected lobbyists in Washington," said NCI President & CEO James P. RePass. "and I hope that this dialogue will continue and grow as the Obama Stimulus Package is implemented, because freight rail systems need to gain the capacity required for new passenger service, but can not afford to bankroll it. Certainly, NCI, which has been asked to help lead the rail effort of the new Transportation For America Initiative rolling out in the Capitol this Thursday (see separate story) will foster that work."

Hamberger also urged the STB to establish principles used in track or right-of-way mediation proceedings between passenger and freight rail that further the preservation and expansion of freight-rail service.

He suggested that arrangements be voluntary; freight railroads be fully compensated; commuter authorities provide the additional capacity they need for their operations; freight railroads be protected from liability from passenger operations; and all operating issues be addressed.

Gail Lavielle
109 Hickory Hill Road
Wilton, CT 06897

Testimony before the Transportation Committee in support of SB-425, an act concerning the improvement of the Norwalk/Danbury train line
Tuesday, February 24, 2009
1:00 PM, Room 2E, LOB

Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrera, distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of proposed SB-425, an act concerning the improvement of the Norwalk/Danbury train line.

My name is Gail Lavielle. I am a Wilton resident and a former frequent commuter. I am also a member of the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission. I am not testifying today on behalf of the Commission, but I will note that its Annual Report this year includes a strong recommendation for continued progress on improving this branch line.

The Norwalk/Danbury branch is a lifeline for one of western Connecticut's busiest transportation corridors. It has a wonderful historic past, dating back more than 150 years. The problem is that, until recently, it was still living in it.

Over the last few months, however, a sweeping change in focus at the state level has brought a series of new developments that have augured well for the branch line's advancement and the communities that depend on it. Service was increased with two new midday trains, Wilton's two stations received new amenities, and, most important, initial funding was authorized for a new centralized traffic control signaling system.

This system is the absolute prerequisite to more frequent service, which, I believe, is the most pressing urgency. Weekday service on the Norwalk/Danbury branch line still consists of only 11 round trips per day. By contrast, there are 20 round trips on the New Canaan branch. With this service, some commuters can't get to work early enough. Others can get to work, but there is no train at a suitable hour to get them back to the station where they parked.

The result is that many commuters from Wilton and Ridgefield drive to mainline stations like Norwalk, Westport, and Stamford. This means overcrowded parking at those stations, and more congestion and pollution on both the north-south and the east-west roads. For many commuters from farther north, in Redding, Bethel, and Danbury, making this kind of two-stage trip every day is just not feasible, and they may have almost no choice but to drive all the way to their final destinations.

Even so, the line still carries more than 700,000 passengers per year, according to the Transportation Strategy Board's January 2007 report. More frequent service could raise that number substantially.

The new signaling system, scheduled for installation within three years, will make more frequent service possible. It is urgent to complete it. But we can't stop there. The DOT's feasibility study on further improvements must move ahead. An important next step under evaluation is re-electrification of the line, which could mean more through trains and reduced travel times. And then there is the extension of service to New Milford, which could increase the line's ridership by a third. Along the way, we must look, as well, at adding important amenities like parking and ticket machines, to the existing stations on the line.

We are all aware of the budget issues we're facing, and of the need for tough choices. In this context, I would argue that it is more important than ever to sustain the momentum we now have. Western Connecticut is one of our state's key economic engines, and mass transit is necessary to keep it going. Businesses can't run and families can't survive if people can't get to work. Connecticut needs its people in this part of the state to stay in Connecticut and to contribute to its economy. But they must have conditions that allow them to thrive: efficient mass transit, less congested roadways, and property values that are enhanced by easy access to major metropolitan areas.

So I ask you respectfully, for Wilton, for Ridgefield, for Redding, for Bethel, and for Danbury and the towns beyond, as well as for Norwalk, Westport, Stamford, and all their mainline neighbors – and for the economic future of our state – to create the conditions for speedy progress on the improvement of the Norwalk/Danbury branch line, and to enable it to provide the kind of convenient, frequent, and reliable mass transit service that the people and businesses of western Connecticut have awaited, and expected, for so long. Thank you.

Gail Lavielle
Wilton
Member, Connecticut Public Transportation Commission