

**Testimony before the Transportation Committee  
February 24, 2009**

Senator Donald DeFronzo, Co-Chairman  
Representative Antonio Guerrero, Co-Chairman

My name is Tim Beeble, and I live in Bethel and work in Stamford. I have commuted to Stamford by both train and automobile for 27 years. I commend the Transportation Committee for considering a dozen bills related to train service. About 8 years ago the Danbury Line of Metro North was proposed for elimination. The legislature rejected that proposal. Today, the Danbury Branch Metro North trains are packed with commuters who travel to jobs in Norwalk, Stamford and New York. We regularly experience standing-room-only conditions. Ridership exploded in the face of last summer's \$4.00 a gallon gasoline prices. Despite the drop in gasoline prices, many of those new riders have decided to continue to commute by train.

Commuter trains provide economic development. Metro North should be known as the "money train" that brings residents to jobs in New York and each night they return to Connecticut with money they earned in New York.

As much as everyone complains about traffic congestion, imagine the gridlock that we would face if the trains were eliminated. At the Bethel station, there are 250 parking-pass holders. This represents 250 fewer cars on Route 7 each morning and evening. This experience is repeated at the other train stations: Danbury, Redding, Branchville, Cannons Crossing, Wilton and Merritt 7, which together are providing a public transit alternative to more than 1,500 commuters.

I would like to comment on a few of the bills under consideration:

Please support **Senate Bill 425** directing the Department of Transportation to implement the recommendations of the Norwalk/Danbury Branch Line Improvement Plan including electrification. Currently diesel locomotives pull the trains up and down the line. Electrification would reduce air and noise pollution, as well as substantially increase the speed of the trains. Currently, train travel from Bethel to Stamford takes about 60 minutes which represents about 30 miles per hour. Due to traffic congestion, that commute cannot be achieved any faster by car. Electrification would provide a clear time-advantage to taking the train, and it would eliminate the frequent mechanical breakdowns experienced by diesel engines in winter.

Please support **Senate Bill 440** which would require Metro North to install ticket vending machines at the unmanned stations along the Danbury Branch.

Currently train riders have to buy their tickets on board. This increases the work load of the conductors, perhaps requiring more train personnel.

Please support **Senate Bill 556** to create a bus shuttle system that would connect the train stations with job centers in Norwalk, Stamford and Greenwich. I am fortunate to have office being just a 10 minute walk from the Stamford station. While some corporate employers are providing shuttle vans for their train-commuting employees, this is an inefficient and incomplete means of connecting public transit to work places. Connecticut needs a comprehensive public shuttle system to make Metro North part of a multi modal transit system.

Please support **House Bill 6085** to improve commuter train schedules. Over the past 25 years the Metro North schedule has shifted from being oriented solely to the NYC commuter to a system that serves the intrastate commuter on an equal footing. There is reasonably spaced train service for the Danbury line, running every half hour from 5:30 AM to 8:00 AM and from 5:15 PM to 7:40 PM. Two new mid day trains have been added. The worst gap is after 8:50 PM when commuters have to wait for more than two hours to depart Stamford at 11:00 PM. When I have a night meeting in Stamford that begins at 7:30 PM, it is unlikely that the meeting will be concluded by 8:30 PM so I can catch the 8:50 PM train. I then, have to wait for the 11:00 PM train. These late night trains are truly packed with commuters. There is a demand for a 10:00 PM train.

Please support **House Bill 6210** which would establish commuter rail service between New Haven, Hartford and Springfield. We need to extend the proven advantages of Metro North's commuter rail service to the Connecticut River Valley.

Please support **Senate Bill 429**. This is the only bonding bill before the Transportation Committee today related to the trains. It would provide benches on the train platform. The train stations are a target for vandals. Any benches must be secured to the platform, or they may be tossed onto the tracks as a dangerous prank.