

Testimony of Todd O'Donnell
New London City Center District, Shore Line East-One More Stop Coalition
February 16, 2012

Appropriations Committee Co-Chairs Senator Harp and Representative Walker;
Transportation Sub-Committee Co-Chairs Senator Hartley and Representative Fawcett;
Members of the Committee:

My name is Todd O'Donnell. I am here as a Commissioner of the New London City Center District, as a partner in Union Station, and most important this evening, as a member of the Shore Line East (SLE) - One More Stop Coalition. On behalf of the Coalition I want to thank Governor Malloy for including weekend SLE train service to New London in his budget.

In 2007, responding to a request from this legislature, the CTDOT published a document, "Expanding Rail Service on SLE", which laid out obstacles, costs and a timetable of 2009-2010 for implementing full weekday and weekend service to New London. Currently, New London has less than 50% of the scheduled weekday service and zero weekend trains. Governor Malloy's proposed budget would provide some weekend service to New London.

Weekend service is very important to us. Southeastern Connecticut is the tourism capital of the State. With less than 1/10th of the State's population, the region accounts for over 60% of the State's \$10 billion in tourism dollars. That means this tiny little population accounts for more tourism activity than all the other parts of the state combined. And weekends are when tourists tour.

Maritime history museums, the gaming industry, and numerous seasonal vacation communities account for a major component of our region's Gross Domestic Product. These major tourist attractions feed restaurants, car dealers, plumbers, graphic designers and numerous other small businesses which make up the life-blood of our economy. One thing we have to do to keep these major tourist venues attractive to visitors is make them accessible. And, frankly, that means providing alternatives to I-95. Otherwise we will lose visitors to Saratoga or the Jersey shore.

In 2010, the CT DOT spent \$750,000 on a study exploring ways to make the New London Regional Intermodal Transportation Center more effective. The study described Union Station as the 'transportation hub' of the region and said more SLE service is key to an improved travelers' experience. This weekend service would be a good first step toward implementing the study's findings.

We know that increased public transportation is an increasingly popular travel choice for many. In fact, our own ridership numbers for SLE to New London bear that out: Ridership on SLE to New London in 2011 increased by 58% over 2010 numbers. That's a very good trend. We should encourage that. Weekend trains to New London will be a homerun for everyone involved. Compared to other transportation projects across the State, it is a low cost/high yield initiative that will immediately help our economy grow.

On behalf of the SLE Coalition members and our 2000 supporters from all over the region, I hope you will support Gov. Malloy's SLE weekend service budget line item.

Thank you.