

## Testimony of Jeffrey Maron – Connecticut Commuter Rail Council - April 1, 2014

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Thank you for nominating me to the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council.

I appreciate the opportunity to serve the citizens of the State of Connecticut and the broader constituency of rail commuters to and from Connecticut. I proudly served on the predecessor Metro North New Haven Rail Commuter Council from 2000 to 2013.

The Council represents riders from New London and New Haven down to Stamford and Greenwich, many of whom frequently travel on into New York City. We also represent the growing number of intra-state riders within our borders, and reverse commuters coming into Connecticut from New York.

We meet monthly as a full Council, either in person or via conference calls, which suits the growing geographic region that the Council represents. The monthly meetings are attended by representatives of the Connecticut Department of Transportation and Metro North (and previously by both Metro North Police Department and Amtrak). The meetings are open to the public and are also attended by local or state elected officials, the press, and most importantly, by individual riders.

We receive no funding from the state but rather contribute our own time and resources in order to make the Council as effective as it can be. I ride Metro North by choice. I commute to New York City on a daily basis. I go in relatively early (6:30am train) and I return home late so it's often faster for me to drive. But the train allows me to get my work done, or socialize (on those rapidly diminishing occasions when there is a bar car), or sometimes just sleep. Many other riders enjoy the opportunity to do the same - especially when they can get a seat.

However, traditional commuters like me are not the future of Metro North. As I mentioned above, it is imperative that we facilitate the continued growth of riders within our state (for example, those who are commuting from New Haven to Stamford) or those from New York who either are now working in Connecticut or want to work here but can't because of the difficulty of their commute. We're diminishing our pool of applicants for jobs in our state by not allowing people to commute to potential opportunities.

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Our current "marketing campaign" is driven by word of mouth. Perhaps our best advertising is by drivers sitting in traffic on I-95 watching the trains fly by. Unfortunately, the trains are going slower than they had historically, and commuting times have extended significantly. But we still need to do more to advertise our rail services in order to promote job growth in Connecticut and attract residents to stay here, or for new families to move into Connecticut. Moreover, while we need to reach out to our current customers to re-build their trust in the rail system the current communication methodologies are not succeeding.

We are now at an inflection point in the public's trust of our rail system and its administrators, both Metro North and our Department of Transportation. We believed that they had both done a reasonably good job of working with the resources that they had been given. But we have now discovered that they did not invest the required amount in infrastructure and training. We can discuss what led to this underinvestment, but the results have become increasingly apparent and can no longer be denied.

I fear that the continuing fare increases that the Department of Transportation has implemented will result in more commuters driving resulting in more traffic on I95, more traffic on the Merritt and our inability to meet our targets for getting traffic off of I-95.

We hear of reductions in available monies within the state from the transportation "lock box" but we need to invest in our state's future. We need to invest in refurbishing the train cars that aren't being replaced by M8s and to invest in safety and staff training. To get more people on to the train we need to rebuild the rider's lost sense of confidence and we need to reduce the travel times, or at least be honest about how long a given trip will take. To effect this change we need to instill a culture of increased communication and honesty – when it's 10 degrees and snowing, we can't tell riders waiting on the freezing platform that the train is "on time" when it is really almost six minutes late. It is insulting to have a trackside sign saying "good service" when the only train due to arrive within the next half hour was just cancelled. If we want riders to trust us when we tell them that the service is safe, then they need to believe that we are

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straight with them in all of our other communications, and we haven't met that standard.

The Council has committed their time to help the Department of Transportation succeed in their mission and I look forward to re-joining the team and helping to make that effort achievable.

Thank you.