

HOUSATONIC RAILROAD

TESTIMONY Regarding

Proposed Bill No 6350 An Act Concerning an Expansion of Commuter Rail Lines to the Town of New Milford.

Proposed Bill No 5228 An Act Concerning an Expansion of the Commuter Rail Lines to Kent

Before the
Committee on Transportation

February 11, 2015

Chairman Maynard, Chairman Guerra and members of the Committee. The Housatonic Railroad appreciates having the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Proposed Bill No 6350 and Proposed Bill No 5228.

The Housatonic Railroad operates a rail freight service between Danbury and Derby and between Danbury and Pittsfield, MA. If commuter rail service were extended from Danbury to New Milford or Kent, the extended operation would be over Housatonic Railroad's freight lines (the line from a point north of New Milford station to Kent is owned by the Connecticut Department of Transportation and used by Housatonic Railroad for freight service).

As more fully set forth below, Housatonic Railroad supports Proposed Bill No 6350 and the expansion of commuter passenger rail service to New Milford and Proposed Bill No 5228 and the expansion of commuter passenger rail service to Kent.

Also pending before the Committee is Proposed Bill No 6343 Concerning the Restoration of the Housatonic Railroad Line. That bill involves the restoration of intercity passenger service from Pittsfield, Massachusetts to New York City. Housatonic Railroad also supports that bill and has submitted separate detailed written testimony in support thereof. While there are considerations common to commuter and intercity passenger rail service, these comments will focus on commuter service.

New Milford Service

Over the course of many years, Connecticut DOT has commissioned numerous studies of this extension and there is wide public support for it in the region.

Also, for a number of years, Housatonic has studied the feasibility both of extending the commuter passenger service to New Milford and also of restoring passenger service between New York City and Litchfield County and Berkshire County, Massachusetts (to Pittsfield, MA). The extension of commuter service to New Milford is a free standing component of Housatonic's

larger plans and while providing many public and community benefits on its own would also reduce the cost of future intercity service without any present commitment to such service.

There have been various ridership studies throughout the years. The Danbury Passenger Improvement Project conducted by URS for Conn DOT in 2009-2010 had a preliminary 2010 forecast of 524 daily net new boardings as a result of the New Milford Extension, and up to 775 daily net new boardings with certain track improvements. On a five day a week basis, that is approximately 273,000 (400,000 after the track improvements) new one way riders. There have been other estimates which were lower but, in any case, the additional ridership would be substantial and would contribute significantly to Danbury Branch revenues.

To the best of Housatonic's knowledge, there have been no studies which have taken account of the new ridership between Stamford and New Milford that could be created as a result of the ability of Stamford employers to attract employees from the lower cost housing market in the New Milford region. It is to be noted that UBS in Stamford cited scarcity of affordable housing in the Stamford area as a primary reason for its probable inability to honor its commitment to the state to keep 2000 jobs in Stamford.

Extending passenger rail service to New Milford would reduce highway traffic thereby reducing highway congestion and air emissions and also foster economic development in the New Milford area.

In the spring of 2012, Housatonic Railroad submitted a proposal to the Connecticut Department of Transportation to extend Metro North service from Danbury to New Milford. Housatonic estimated that new cash flow to Metro North from the incremental ridership generated by the commuter extension would be sufficient to fund the state payments for the infrastructure improvements to institute the service (at private sector costs) if financed or amortized over a reasonable term.

Housatonic Railroad's review of the existing Danbury service schedules and operating personnel suggests that with very few adjustments there is time in the schedule and available crew time to extend the commuter service to New Milford without adding crews or equipment beyond that required for existing service to Danbury, except to the extent that an increase in passengers requires additional passenger cars.

HB
5228

Kent Service -

Many of the benefits and considerations that apply to the extension of service to New Milford also apply to the extension of service to Kent. Clearly, there is extensive public interest in passenger rail service to Kent, and such service would attract passengers not only from Kent but from the surrounding region.

Unlike the extension of service to New Milford, serving Kent would likely require additional train sets and crew starts because of the additional time required to travel beyond New Milford. In order to generate a greater revenue base, this service should be incorporated into a package which also serves stations north of Kent.

The new commuter service would connect the greater New Milford region with areas such as S. Norwalk and Stamford as well as New York City, generating intrastate benefits as well as access to New York.

Litchfield County and the Litchfield Hills has been an area of the state that has been long neglected in terms of public transportation and especially passenger rail service.

The proposed bills would enhance the transportation system in Northwest Connecticut, benefit the regional economy and reduce traffic on the road system, which consists primarily of two lane secondary roads, and enhance the goal of a regionally equitable distribution of public transportation resources.