

Members of the Transportation Committee,

My name is Jim Gildea, I am a member of the Connecticut Commuter Council and daily Waterbury Branch commuter. I am writing in favor of S.B. 492. I am in favor of this bill because as a daily commuter on the Waterbury Branch line, I see the potential of the line on a daily basis and realize that one of the key roadblocks in increasing the ridership base is a consistent lack of commuter friendly service lines.

The line has seen its ridership increase dramatically through the years. In 2004, the Waterbury Branch line had a ridership level at 178,170 riders and in 2011 the ridership level was at 393,596. The line would most likely have broken the 400,000 rider mark in 2012 but was hampered by Hurricane Sandy and 7 weeks of summer busing for almost a 2 month loss of rail service and yet ridership still came in at 384,480 riders.

Ridership in both 2013 and 2014 were slightly off of the 2011 level mostly due to the operational struggles, poor OTP and busing substitution rate.

Perhaps the greatest single roadblock at this point in increasing the rider base is the fact that there is not a commuter friendly early evening commute time. On the trip home, there are only 2 evening commute options leaving Bridgeport and traveling the Waterbury branch. One must either take the 3:41 p.m. train or 6:00 p.m. train. It is just not appealing to many commuters to have to leave Bridgeport for Waterbury at either 3:38 p.m. or 5:58 p.m. There needs to be something in between.

In April of 2008, the Connecticut Department of Transportation and Metro North added an additional morning train on the branch line and its effects were dramatic. In the immediate 18 months following this additional train, there was an increase in ridership of almost 40% (140,000 riders) in those 18 months following the added train. One can argue you would see a similar impact (or more) especially since an evening train is a much greater enhancement based upon the fact there are no trains between the 3:38 p.m. and 5:58 train and they would be reducing a 140 minute gap whereas at least in the morning prior to the 5:57 a.m., from Waterbury there was the 6:42 a.m. train so the added train only improved upon a 45 minute gap.

Much has been made of the fact that the Waterbury Branch line track is a single track and that this is in fact the impediment to increased service on the Waterbury Branch line. I recognize from a long term perspective, the state has begun the \$7 million design of a signalization system for the Waterbury rail line. This involves signals, passing sidings and positive train control which will allow for increased service and more daily trips. The project could cost up to \$70 million, according to previous estimates. I remain hopeful that the state will commit to that work however we are still a few years away.

For the short term, I believe it is important that legislature advocate and push for the capital funding to provide two more diesel engines for the line. At last month's forum, Metro North indicated that they simply do not have enough equipment to properly maintain the diesel engines that are used on this branch and it is this lack of equipment that prevents appropriate back up relief and critical maintenance time to consistently meet day to day on time percentage and busing reduction rates. Metro North currently employs 3 diesels that are shared between Waterbury and Danbury and they run on average 20 hours a day, every day.

I am hopeful that this Committee will consider Senate Bill 492 and champion this underdog of a branch line and the almost 400,000 trips (with potentially many more) it make annually.

Thank you,
Jim Gildea

James Gildea
Plant Manager - Fairfield