

**E. Zell Steever  
Groton, Connecticut**

**Statement**

Chairman, Representative Lamar, Vice Chairs Senator Cassano and Representative Simms and Ranking Members, Senator Somers and Representative Carney, and distinguished Members of the Transportation Committee: My name is Zell Steever and I am Chairman of the Groton Resiliency and Sustainability Task Force in Groton, Connecticut. I am offering written in support of:

***HOUSE BILL NUMBER 5423 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXPANSION OF PASSENGER TRAIN AND GROUND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES IN EASTERN CONNECTICUT.***

It is my opinion that **House Bill 5423** would significantly benefit eastern Connecticut and public transportation in Connecticut. It will provide the public with an alternative mode of transportation, particularly for commuters who now drive to work in single occupancy vehicles (SOVs). It would promote transit-oriented development, reduce highway traffic congestion, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, and further the state's policy goals for economic development. In addition, it would provide critical support for our industrial base and retain our workforce in southeast Connecticut.

Expanding passenger rail service is particularly important to the Town of Stonington, Town of Groton, City of Groton and the City of New London as Electric Boat's expansion plans already under way will translate into twelve thousand additional employees over the next twenty years to build additional submarines for the U.S. Navy, increasing traffic in already congested road systems and exacerbating existing parking challenges. In Groton for example, nearly 30,000 people today commute to work in their single occupancy vehicle (SOV) every day.

House Bill No. 5423 directs the Commissioner of Transportation to conduct a feasibility study and operational plan to extend passenger

train and ground services in eastern Connecticut and to report back to the Transportation Committee on or before January 1, 2022.

The expansion of passenger rail service in eastern Connecticut will potentially involve two components.

The first proposal is to extend Shore Line East (SLE) passenger service from New London to Groton Center, Mystic, Stonington and Westerly, Rhode Island as part of a larger regional commuter rail system that would connect and enhance service between New York, Providence and Boston in the future.

The second part of the proposal is establishing a new passenger service using existing Providence and Worcester Railroad (P&W) tracks that run north and south along the east bank of the Thames River connecting Pfizer, Electric Boat and the U.S. Navy Submarine Base, door-to-door. The P&W tracks run further to Norwich and north to Massachusetts making possible future expansion of passenger service in Connecticut. Existing rail infrastructure allows P&W freight trains to access Amtrak tracks east and west and is used currently for short haul freight. The two tracks meet and cross in Groton making possible transfer of passengers between trains at a new Groton Center Station.

Presently eighty percent of Electric Boat 's employees live outside of Groton and New London and commute by automobile, most in single occupancy vehicles. While the anticipated addition of twelve thousand new hires bodes well for building submarines to protect our national security interests and for economic growth, unless it is accompanied by a modern commuter rail and local, transit-oriented development, it will increase traffic congestion, have a negative environmental impact and reduce its economic benefit.

This proposal would significantly improve the movement of people from home to work as well as for leisure activities with the benefit of reducing - rather than increasing - traffic congestion on I-95 and other roads, carbon pollution, commuting time and highway maintenance costs. These outcomes are one of the major goals of transit-oriented development and would greatly contribute to the continued economic

growth and success of southeastern Connecticut as a major industrial and tourism center in Connecticut.

In preparing for Proposed Bill No. 5423, I provided Chairman Lamar and Representative Conley earlier with suggested language to be considered in the proposed expansion of passenger train and ground service. I would like to respectfully suggest the Transportation Committee consider adding the following language as the Committee moves forward to fully draft the bill with the language attached below before voting it out of Committee. The key provisions that should be included are as follows:

CT DOT is directed to examine: all steps; regulatory matters; and required resources necessary for both the expansion of SLE and the establishment of the NBL; and for the establishment, building and operations of such stations and platforms; and for necessary equipment, infrastructure needs and services. The study shall include an estimate of the time and funding required for the completion of each such steps and a projected date for beginning full operations.

CT DOT is directed to conduct a feasibility study and undertake a demonstration pilot project for operating battery powered M80s to determine if a self-contained M80 rail car(s) might be used to operate passenger car(s) service (to replace use of the dual powered locomotives) until a full overhead catenary system is installed and becomes operational on the NBL. Further CT DOT is directed to consider the Groton Utilities Electric Division as a provider of green energy for charging the batteries of the battery equipped M80s. A full life-cycle energy, economic, environmental and climate change analysis shall be a part of this study in cooperation with the CT DEEP.

CT DOT is directed to conduct a feasibility study on the NBL for operating the trains using a fully automated modern ticket/entry system without conductors.

The reasons for incorporating in the bill the above three paragraphs is as follows: the first paragraph clarifies issues and elements that a feasibility study needs to address – as many of these issues in the past have ended up as reasons for not moving forward to extend, expand or

begin new passenger service with existing on-the-ground tracks. It is time to get out in front of these issues.

The second paragraph is necessary in order to make passenger trains as energy efficient as possible given that diesel electric cars burn fossil fuel when no overhead catenary is available. If the trains are set up to operate on a battery system using “green energy” (electricity generated from wind, solar, hydro or nuclear and stored in batteries) charging system, then passenger cars on tracks without overhead catenary systems will produce significantly less Green House Gas emissions from the start of service. These passenger train cars could also have diesel engines as a backup emergency drive system. The reduction of GHG is key and important to mitigating future impacts from climate change. Battery powered trains (Battery Electric Multiple Unit) (BEMU) are one of the key ways to reduce emissions of GHG in the transportation sector.

The third paragraph is to modernize how train fares are collected, much like an EZ-pass system on our toll roads, making entry on passenger trains as easy as possible while reducing operation costs. A modern efficient passenger rail system provides an attractive alternative mode for moving people in eastern Connecticut, a long underserved region.

I have attached a letter addressed to the Groton Town Council last year providing additional information and history for your consideration.

Finally, expanded passenger train service will benefit me as I will be able to travel by regular scheduled passenger trains to see family in western Connecticut and in New York City. As I have gotten older, I am less interested in sitting in my POV on I-95 for hours on end in traffic jams and accidents.

I urge passage of House Bill 5423 and expanded passenger rail service for eastern Connecticut. I know this is a detailed proposal and I would be delighted to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Zell Steever  
Chairman, Groton Resiliency and Sustainability Task Force

**E. Zell Steever  
81 Main Street  
Groton, Connecticut. 06340**

March 10, 2020

Re: Statement on Train Service for Groton

Dear Mayor and Town Councilors:

I am Zell Steever and I live at 81 Main Street, Groton, CT. I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you tonight to consider passenger train service. I am here to propose and support new passenger rail service for Groton and southeastern Connecticut.

This proposal has two parts that are interconnected: The **first** part of the proposal is for additional train service going east to Rhode Island. The proposal is for the State of Connecticut to develop a new train stop in **Groton Center** at the intersection of Route 1 and Poquonnock Rd. (SW side of Amtrak RR Bridge), and add **Shore Line East (SLE)** train service to the schedule for **Groton Center, Mystic and Westerly, RI**. The schedule should be revised and extended to serve commuters in the region. In the future, connecting **SLE** train service beyond Westerly to West Kingston and Wickford Junction, and then to Providence and Boston will be important and key to a good **regional commuter train** system for all. This will, of course, require Connecticut to cooperate and partner with Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

This additional **SLE** service expansion would finally link east-west regional rail service connections between **New York** and **Boston** for the general public and specifically for commuters with the new train stops that would make it attractive for people to get out of their cars and onto the train.

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Government's (SCCOG) **2019 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)** calls for **SLE's** "expansion to the east, with more trains, new stops and expanded hours." **SLE expansion is one of eleven regional priority projects of the MTP plan.** (Other specific rail projects are included: a study for a station stop in Niantic; parking/SOGR; various track improvements; and fare collection improvements.) Furthermore, extended SLE service east to R.I. is listed in both **Groton's POCD** and in the **2016 Connecticut State Long-Range Transportation Plan**.

The **second** part of this proposal is to establish a **new commuter rail shuttle service**, referred to hereafter as the **Norwich Branch Line (NBL)** (possibly light rail), as part of the **CT-rail** train service on existing **Providence and Worcester Railroad (P&W)** tracks that run along the east bank of the Thames River. The **P&W** Rail already connects Norwich and points further north to Massachusetts with the

US Navy Submarine Base (Sub Base) and south to Pfizer and Electric Boat Shipyard at the end of the line. The existing **P&W** rails and track infrastructure have been recently upgraded and support regular daily freight train traffic. The existing switching system and track infrastructure currently allow **P&W** freight trains to go either west or east on **Amtrak** rails. **Amtrak** and **P&W** rails run parallel to each other in Groton (three tracks). With a new train stop at **Groton Center**, this would allow passengers to change trains from **SLE** to the new shuttle service of the **Norwich Branch Line**. Initially this new service (three new stops) might run from the south gate of the **Sub Base** with a new platform off-Base to a new **Groton Center Station** platform and then on to a third and final train stop at the intersection of **Pfizer and Electric Boat** gates and Route 349. This would make commuting feasible by train to and from the Sub Base, EB and Pfizer, three of the larger employers in the region. It helps solve one of the “last mile problems” of public mass transit in Southeastern Connecticut, particularly in Groton.

The new **NBL** service would start a new **north-south** commuter rail service with a passenger connection to an expanded **east-west SLE** train service. (See Map 1) Additional new train stations/stops might well be considered in the future for both the **SLE** and the new **Norwich Branch Line**, if the service is successful.

Attached are maps showing the current rail beds and where three new train stations/stops might be located in Groton. (See Map 2) Expanded passenger train service on existing rail beds in the region makes good sense - no new digging required. It is nearly “shovel ready,” utilizing existing railway systems.

### **Current situation:**

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) 2019 to 2045's** principal focus is on roads and highways and on the continued use and growth of automobiles and trucks in our region. The **MTP** cites the fact that the most prominent method of commuting to work in SE CT remains as “drivers alone in a personal vehicle.” In fact, people drive to everything in the region, while walking, biking, buses and trains are the least prevalent modes of transportation. Both air and marine transportation continue to play limited but key roles in the transportation of materials and people in the region today. The **MTP** of 2019 lists 114 highway projects and only 12 bus projects and five train projects -- a \$2.5 billion construction program over the next 25 years with by far the most funding going to roads, bridges and highways.

### **History:**

The focus on highways and roads was not always the case, as rail service dates back to 1834 in our region. This rail service was linked to marine transportation making the region a strong economic and industrial engine in southern New England, particularly along the Thames River and its tributaries in the communities of New London, Groton, and Norwich. By 1900 trains and trolleys connected much of the

region. For example, nearly 500 people regularly commuted to Noank to work in the shipyard by trolley each day in the early 1900s. The region's history shows that the train systems worked well both locally as a commuter system and later, as bridges were built, as a regional transportation link between NYC and Boston. Good train service is not a new mode of transportation for our region.

The introduction of the automobile and later heavy trucks resulted in the development of a network of roads and highways during the last 60 years. The auto/truck system has largely replaced the extensive network of rails, trains, trolleys and ferries that existed. The highway system has resulted in suburban sprawl in our region with new development being located away from our city centers of New London, Groton and Norwich and into farm fields and woodlands. After World War II and construction of the Interstate Highway system, suburban growth dominated the region, generally spreading outward along I-95 and I-395. More roads, bigger roads and wider highways for more and bigger automobiles and trucks have resulted in more traffic, congestion, accidents, reduced air quality, increases in CO2 emissions, and the ills of suburban sprawl development. Cars and trucks turn out to be both expensive and inefficient modes of transportation requiring government subsidies for highways, bridges and roads.

Is it now possible to change the present situation where roads and highways dominate transportation and development? While automobiles and trucks, particularly electric vehicles will continue to play important roles in our region, it is now possible to increase the use of modern train service, particularly for moving people to and from work, while using existing track already in the ground, as a starting point. Just maybe, if we "build it they will come!" but this time, using modern passenger train service and transit technology - happening worldwide.

### **What has recently changed in Southeastern Connecticut?**

The good news was unexpected. It was announced late in 2018 that there will be an estimated **6,000 to 18,000** new jobs at Electric Boat (EB) to build one additional advanced submarine each year for the next 20 years. EB has started the \$850 million addition to the shipyard facilities at the south end of the shipyard. EB now needs more new employees. Currently **80% of all EB employees commute by automobile and live outside of Groton**. This commute is increasingly unpleasant and costly and will only become more difficult as thousands of new commuters are added to the local roads and highways and parking lots. This will turn I-95 into a more congested highway – linear parking lot during rush hour!

With a significant increase to the work force, Groton and the region need to consider if a linked commuter train service will be attractive for employees to travel to and from work? In addition, a number of municipalities support "smart growth," and a few of the larger communities support mixed-use development. This new passenger service will encourage and support **transit oriented development (TOD)** which, to be successful, requires well-connected mass transit systems of trains and buses.

## **Benefits to the Region:**

The connection of these two rail systems at a **Groton Center Train Station** presents great potential for employees, employers and the public, as well as great opportunities for businesses. Improved train service will have many other important benefits: reduced air pollution; reduced auto traffic; reduced congestion; reduced commuting times; reduced need for additional parking at the major employers; reduced road and highway maintenance costs; and reduced CO2 emissions, to mention just few a benefits. The transportation sector contributes 38% of our greenhouse gases (GHG) in Connecticut. The proposed two commuter networks support smart growth policies, mixed-use development and transit-oriented development (TOD). Trains are a component of a modern, efficient, future transportation infrastructure for all, an investment in the future, which will stimulate economic development in Groton and SE Connecticut. It will support the ongoing relationship between shipbuilding and the US Sub Base.

This plan would also reduce the need for Amtrak to provide regional commuter service so it might focus on the high-speed train service along the east coast. It would also reduce the demands for road repair and expensive capital expenditures for expanding the interstate highway and state road system.

I am delighted to work with the Town Council, CTDOT and others to refine and promote the expanded use of mass transit, particularly commuter train service on existing rail beds in the Southeastern Connecticut. I hope this will assist you as you look forward in providing balanced public transportation for Groton and southeastern Connecticut.

I ask you to support this proposal and send a letter to Governor Lamont and the Commissioner of Transportation for Connecticut expressing your support for expanded train service in the region. Thank you.

I can be reached by email: [zsteever@aol.com](mailto:zsteever@aol.com), or by phone at 202-251-2230 (c).

Sincerely,

Zell Steever



