



Representative Lamar, Senator Cassano and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee.

My name is Jim Gildea, and I am the Chairman of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council. I am offering written testimony IN SUPPORT OF:

PROPOSED BILL 5839

AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR OPERATIONAL GROWTH AND EXPENSES OF THE NAUGATUCK VALLEY WATERBURY BRANCH LINE OF THE METRO-NORTH COMMUTER RAILROAD.

In my opinion ***Proposed Bill 5839*** would impact not only rail commuting but also the economic development of the entire Waterbury corridor. The Waterbury branch of the New Haven Line has long been underdeveloped and it has amongst the most substandard coaches and service. This branch runs from Waterbury to Bridgeport, 2 of the 5 largest Cities in the State and includes stops in Waterbury, Naugatuck, Beacon Falls, Seymour, Ansonia and Derby/Shelton.

As daily commuter on the Waterbury branch line. I see the potential of the line on a daily basis. I also see that one of the roadblocks in increasing the ridership base is a lack of consistent commuter friendly service times. There is not a commuter friendly evening commute time. For those who work and live along the branch corridor, there only 2 evening commute options leaving Bridgeport and traveling down through the Waterbury branch. A commuter must either take the 5:48 train leaving Bridgeport or the 8:10 PM train leaving Bridgeport. If you miss the 5:48 PM train, you must then wait until 8:10 PM. There are no commute times in between.

This budget would potentially increase the number of trains servicing the Waterbury line from 15 to 22 beginning in fiscal year 2023. Per the Governor's office, the seven additional trains include two in the morning, one midday, two in the evening, and two at a time yet to be determined.

In April 2008 the Connecticut Department of Transportation added an additional morning train on the branch line and the effect was dramatic. In the immediate 18 months following this

additional train, there was an increase in ridership almost 40%. This is a clear indication that as service is added on the Waterbury branch, ridership will follow.

The addition of service on the Waterbury branch line is not only impactful to the commuters along the branch, but it will also have a dramatic effect on the economies of each City that has a downtown that the branch runs through. Having a viable transportation line with viable service times will be an economic driver and a springboard for transit-oriented development along the branch. This type of economic springboard would be a benefit to the taxpayers who live in those cities along the Waterbury Corridor.

Finally, the Waterbury branch line is nearing completion on a \$120 million passing siding project which is expected to be completed in approximately December 2021. It is important that the state capitalize on this investment and add the additional service that the new sidings will allow. To have spent \$120 million on passing sidings and not couple that with increased service would mean that the \$120 million investment would turn out to be a waste of taxpayer money.

The Rail Council urges passage of House Bill 5839 and the expansion of commuter rail service on the Waterbury Branch.

Jim Gildea
Chairman, Connecticut Commuter Rail Council