

# Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-1078

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING RAIL SERVICE.

**Vote Date:** 3/17/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/27/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Transportation Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Shore Line East rail has seen a reduced amount of service and now needs restoration. Along with restoring the rail line, expansion of these rails can allow more people within the state of Connecticut to use, thus also creating a positive effect on various environmental threats to the state. Not only that but being proactive and studying the relationship between the state and its railroads can lead to more possible improvements.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **Garrett Eucalitto, Commissioner of the Department of Transportation**

The department made no objections to the aims of section 1 of the bill but expressed concern that the funding for implementing such changes is not in the governor's proposed FY 24-25 biennial budget. On section 2 of the bill, they say they are hesitant to carry out additional studies which would require funding not in the governor's budget and would divert staff time from working on the major rail modernization program currently underway. They testified in support of section 3 of the bill and said that the same has done in the past for the Hartford Line and it resulted in a very cost-effective rail operation.

### **Senator Kevin Kelly, Senate Republic Leader, 21<sup>st</sup> District**

In his written testimony, he testified in support of the bill saying that it would improve quality of life in the Naugatuck Valley and increase job creation and future business and housing development. He said that Connecticut residents are struggling under the burdens of taxation and inflation and this bill would increase economic growth and thus make the impacted communities more attractive and affordable.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Jim Gildea, Chairman, CT Commuter Rail Council**

His written testimony supported the bill. He said that ridership is being unfairly cited as the reason why the Shore Line East line has not been brought back to pre-COVID service levels, especially since others were brought back to 100% without returning to pre-COVID ridership levels. He also took issue with the claim that the subsidy level is the reason why the line should not receive its full schedule attainment. He argued that the best way to lower the subsidy level is to increase service and thus increase ridership. He further argued that the government subsidizes many other things such as education, police and fire protection, Medicare, Medicaid, etc. for the benefit of the people and therefore public transportation should be no different.

### **Kate Rozen, Member, Connecticut Commuter Rail Council**

In her written testimony, she argued that the bill is needed to decrease emissions and fight climate change on the local level. She also says that the bill, which would increase service on the line, would improve the economic mobility of lower income residents — who may not own cars — by increasing their access to important job centers like New Haven, New London, and Groton. She also mentioned that given the federal money on the way to upgrade stations and raise platforms, it makes fiscal sense to support new train cars for the Waterbury Line.

### **Daryl Johnson, Legislative Director, Association of Commuter Rail Employees (ACRE)**

In his written testimony, he expressed ACRE's support for putting the management of the Shoreline East Rail Line to a competitive bid. They also supported the upgrades to the rail cars for the Waterbury and Danbury branches and the additional stops and stations proposed in several towns. They argued that demand for service in those areas continue to increase and more stations will result in more riders, but they acknowledge that the upgrades will cost money and understand these needs will need to be reconciled with other budget demands.

- Ed Valente, Director and General Chairman for ARCE, submitted identical testimony.

### **Francis Pickering, Executive Director, Western Connecticut Council of Governments (West COG)**

In his written testimony, he wrote that West COG supported two provisions of the bill:

- 1) extending the Danbury branch line to New Milford because they believe it will reduce traffic congestion on Route 7 in Litchfield County, increase travel to northwestern Connecticut by day and weekend trippers from the New York City metro area, help complete the transformation of Brookfield's Four Corners area, provide rail access to one of the busiest commercial areas in the state (Federal Road in Danbury), and alleviate traffic congestion in the Route 7/Interstate 84 interchange area in Danbury.

the purchase and installation of new rail cars for the Danbury branch to replace outdated ones and ensure the future of the line.

### **Jack Dobson, Law Student, Resident of Madison, CT**

In his written testimony, he testified in support of the bill. He said that the Shore Line East (SLE) has long been overlooked and that the SLE schedules are not well synchronized with other rail lines such as the Hartford Line and this deters people from utilizing public transportation, thus increasing emissions. He made three suggestions for additions to the bill: Adding a real-time information system for Connecticut's commuter rail and bus system,

adding e-bike charging stations and storage for commuters who use carbon-free commuting options, and establishing a second platform for the Madison station so it can be full-service.

**Tim Sperry, Resident of Guilford, CT**

In his written testimony, he argued that the Shore Line East line is the weakest and most neglected part of our CT rail system and said it should be extended to Westerly, RI. He said that the line needs to run more consistently throughout the day and that the schedule should be equal to or better than the schedule that existed in 2018. He also argued that the way to lower subsidies is by investing money into the line, not by neglecting it further.

**Zell Steever, Resident of Groton, CT**

In his written testimony, he wrote in support of section 1 of the bill. He said that it would make trains run on a more regular basis and people should be able to get where they want to go in a timely manner. He echoed some other supporters on the issue of subsidies and said the way to decrease them is by providing quality public transportation that people want to use. He was supportive of new train cars in Waterbury and Danbury and expanding rail service to New Milford, Seymour, Shelton, and Derby. He offered an amendment to section 2 of the bill which would add additional requirements to the proposed study. He also offered two amendments to section 3 of the bill regarding the proposed Norwich Branch Line.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

No sources of opposition were provided.

**Reported by: Rebecca Wozniak**

**Date: 3/28/2023**