

# Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-277

**Title:** AN ACT RESTORING SERVICE ON THE SHORE LINE EAST RAIL LINE.

**Vote Date:** 3/18/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/4/2024

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Transportation Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill proposes to restore Shore Line East funding back to its pre-pandemic levels, this would add to the number of trains on the line and make schedules much more frequent. During the pandemic SLE funding was cut and has continued to have reduced schedules since then and is the only line that has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Restoring funding and train schedules will allow for commuters and tourists to better rely on SLE as reliable option to get around Southeast CT, which will return ridership overtime. Some of the intended benefits could include a reduction in traffic along I-95, a reduction in carbon emissions, lowering users' transportation costs, and showing CT's continued support of transit-oriented development along the line.

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

**Garrett Eucalitto, Commissioner, CT Department of Transportation:** Eucalitto provides SLE ridership numbers, stating that in 2019 with 222 trains per week SLE had an annual ridership of 660,447 compared to 2023 SLE with 112 trains per week SLE had annual ridership of 176,979 a 73.2% decrease in ridership with an around 50% reduction in service. Eucalitto also mentions ridership levels dipping even before the pandemic and a reduction in This bill would require the CTDOT to return service to before 2019 levels but in the adopted governor's budget there is no SLE funding, and the bill makes no adjustment to said budget.

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

**Martha Marx, Senator, CGA:** Marx voices her support of the bill stating that SLE was always meant to return to full funding. Marx believes that it is time for CT to follow through on its

commitment to return funding once more housing was built along the line, which New London it has. Additionally, along the line Electric boat is in the process of hiring 5,700 new employees which would be served by SLE. Marx points out that currently service has major gaps which could have passengers waiting for hours, which severely hamstrings those with no other options making the state less equitable. Marx is in strong support of restoring 100% service along with support for, "express trains, quiet cars, and the long-awaited state-mandated expansion study.

**Robin Comey, Representative, CGA:** Comey voices his support of the bill citing the importance of SLE to his constituents. Comey shares what he has heard from his constituents who are no longer able to take the train to work in New Haven and having difficulty reaching NYC in a reasonable amount of time. Comey believes with the investment already happening around SLE restoring funding would create business growth in his district and along the line.

**Moira Rader, Representative, CGA:** Rader as a legislator of Guilford and Branford voices her support of the bill over the negative impacts reduced service has had over her district. Rader points out that every other line had service returned despite lower ridership at the time and its time for SLE to follow suit. Its unreasonable to expect ridership to be high levels when the service hasn't been whole for so long. Restoring service will improve financial impact to businesses and tourism, reduce carbon emissions, increase transit-oriented development, and create greater connectivity in the Northeast corridor. Rader believes if we are serious about investing in CT's future SLE's funding must be restored.

**Anthony Nolan, André Bumgardner, Christine Conley, Representatives, CGA:** Nolan, Bumgardner, and Conley voice their support of the bill stating the need his constituents have for reliable public transportation. The representatives state that residents of southeastern CT have a strong need for SLE with Groton and New London having below average citizen income and could heavily benefited by being connected by rail to the largest industries in the area like CT's two casinos, Electric Boat, and Yale New Haven Health. Industries and towns have also voiced their concerns with the difficulty employees have commuting and the amount of available parking. With the average commute time in the county being 23 minutes, the representatives believe that there is an unmet appetite for more public transportation. Currently with SLE on reduced schedules and infrequent busses using public transportation is difficult. Additionally, the representatives are concerned with the lack of rail connection between Norwich and urban center like Groton or New London these factors lead to increased reliance on cars which are increasingly expensive. Driving is also increasingly dangerous with accidents increasing statewide with New London and Groton being particularly impacted. The representative reference a survey done by the CT DOT of 4,000 CT residents who were concerned with, " schedule and frequency, simplifying transit navigation, and enhanced accessibility and comfort." For the representatives this survey reveals a desire for increased investment into SLE and to get off the roads. Finally, the representatives are concerned with other regions returning to full service giving them a competitive advantage over SLE areas and encourages CT to follow through on their mission of closing the transit gap.

**Christine Palm, Representative, CGA:** Palm voices her support of the bill, expressing her frustration of CT's desire for transit-oriented development without public transit infrastructure.

Additionally, Palm discusses the frequent frustration she has heard from constituents about their difficulties using the defunded line.

**John-Michael Parker, Representative, CGA:** Parker voices his support of the bill.

**William Buckbee, Representative, CGA:** Buckbee voices his support of the bill out of a belief that it is an asset to CT communities. Buckbee cautions that investment would be best placed from Fairfield to Litchfield County in the restoration of the Berkshire line which he believes would return massive benefits. Even though Buckbee believes this would be the best line to restore to service he still supports restoring service to SLE.

**Carl P. Fortuna Jr., First Selectman, Town of Old Saybrook:** Fortuna voices his support of the bill citing potential future development in Old Saybrook around the station and the importance of increased service for the town.

**Matthew T. Hoey III, First Selectman, Town of Guilford:** Hoey expresses his strong support of the bill and expresses his disappointment over the current reductions in funding. In May of 2019 Guilford found that the train parking lot was 61% full, something that will not happen again unless service is restored. Hoey believes that cutting line service and then pointing to lack of service is a self-fulfilling prophecy and the only way to increase ridership is to increase service. Hoey shares that Guilford has a significant amount of development happening around the station with more likely to come increasing the value of restoring SLE for Guilford. Finally, Hoey says that both CCM and SCRCOG both support the bill, of which he is a board member of both.

**Michael Passero, Mayor, City of New London:** Passero voices his support of the bill citing the negative impacts that reduced funding to SLE has had on New London. Many New London citizens have been negatively impacted by the reduce in service being forced back onto I-95. While he understands the challenges on transportation infrastructure, he believes that the bad conditions on our highways, that are in part caused by lack of SLE service, should push CT to restoring SLE service. Passero believes that restoring SLE service will alleviate traffic, decrease pollution, and increase the quality of CT residents' lives. Passero also mentions that new developments in New London have been built around the train station.

**Association of Commuter Rail Employees:** ACRE voices their strong support for the bill and believes that a return in full service will result in an increase of ridership.

**Erik Anderson:** Anderson voices his support of the bill and shares his personal difficulties commuting because of the lack of service.

**Anonymous:** An anonymous source voices their support of the bill citing a need for more reliance on train to meet CO2 emission goals.

**Jeffrey Babbin:** Babbin voices his support of the bill and shares his difficult commuting because of the infrequency of train service.

**Michael Bender, Panning Commissioner:** Bender voices his support of the bill citing the need of rail service for equity, economics, and sustainability.

**Alexander Berardo, West Bay Coordinator, Rhode Island Association of Railroad**

**Passenger:** Berardo on behalf on the RIARP voices his support of the bill out of a belief that restoring service will bring ridership levels up. The RIARP discusses pre-pandemic ridership declines in 2018 that occurred due to maintenance and how only 7 months before the pandemic was full service active. During 2019 Shore Line East recorded 660,000 passengers which is only 70,000 less than the Hartford line. The RIARP believes that with the already reliable/updated tracks, ridership incentives, a few well-place infill stations, and an extension of service through Rhode Island that Shore Line East could be very successful. RIARP emphasizes the rail is the best option for the environment, development, and eventually cost and encourages CT to pass this bill.

**David Byron-Brown:** Byron-Brown voices his support of the bill citing his experiences using the rail before 2020 and his concerns that it is no longer possible to reach NYC without use of a car.

**Jon Burke:** Burke voices his support of the bill citing his difficulty picking up his children at specific times because of infrequent service that forced him to rely on cars.

**John Burt, Groton Town Manager, Office of The Town Manager:** Burt voices his support of the bill citing Groton's initial opposition and concerns over greenhouse gasses. Burt discusses a study done on extending SLE into Rhode Island and its positive impacts and the positive impacts that would come from reducing traffic, carbon emissions, and highway maintenance. Burt believes that reducing service was the opposite of what CT should do and that SLE is vital for the 27,000 commuters to Groton.

**Justin Elicker, Mayor, City of New Haven:** Elicker voices his support of the bill stating that SLE is the backbone of transit in the New Haven area. Elicker believes that SLE addresses both I-95 congestion and environmental problems. Elicker is also concerned that the transit-oriented development that occurred around SLE at full service will be negatively impacted, emphasizing the importance restoring service has for the economic opportunities in the New Haven area.

**Elizabeth Coyne, President and Head of School, Lauralton Hall:** Coyne voices her support of the bill stating how SLE used to be a great resource for her students but in recent years students have struggled to use the train to commute to school.

**Kristen Earls:** Earls voices her support of the bill stating her desire to get cars off I-95, support CT's largest industries, and reduce greenhouse gasses.

**Susan M. Feaster, Founder, Shoreline East Riders' Advocacy Group:** Feaster on behalf of the SLE rider's advocacy group voices her strong support of the bill. Feaster believes that funding SLE will take cars off I-95 and reduce greenhouse gasses. Restoring funding will also support and bolster the economy by enabling tourism in places like Mystic and New Haven. Finally, Feaster believes that restoring funding will support development around the line with places like Old Saybrook already having a \$425 million dollar development near the train station. For these reason Feaster believes that reliable train service and funding matching the other CT lines is vital for the state.

**Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns:** Gara on behalf of COST voices his support of SLE, believing that it is important for causing transit-oriented development, creating walkable communities, enhance tourism, generate tax revenue, and allow individuals to easily commute to work.

**Linda Gaudet:** Gaudet voices her support of the bill pointing out how important the line is for Electric Boat and how difficulty commuting makes it more difficult for them to recruit new engineers.

**Jim Gildea, Chairman, Connecticut Public Transportation Council:** Gildea on behalf of the CTPTC voices his support of the bill. Gildea first addresses the idea that SLE has not been restored service because of ridership but he points out that all other CT lines did not use ridership as a requirement to restore full service. Without restoring full service Gildea believes that ridership will increase along with an increase with service similarly to how the Waterbury branch increased 44% in ridership when 7 trains were added. Gildea also addresses concerns around subsidies believing that an increase of service and thus riders will lower the current per train subsidy. Gildea adds that even if the train is subsidized it should be treated as public service like education or trash collection which is typically thought to be an expense not a business. Finally, Gildea believes that the issue of development of housing around the line, while an admirable goal, should be separated from decisions around the line.

**Patrice Granatosky, Former Mayor of Groton:** Granatosky voices her support of the bill citing increasing dangers on our highways and a desire to reduce carbon emissions.

**Leon Ewing:** Ewing voices his support of the bill citing difficulties getting around CT without SLE and how ridership is likely to increase with funding. Ewing first describes his experience using transit to get around the SLE area, with it taking him three hours to go from Old Saybrook to New Haven via bus, with the same trip only taking 48 minutes via SLE. Ewing then references the 2005 Annual Ridership Report to emphasize the importance of the railway for people who were commuting to NYC or Stamford. Ewing believes that with an increase in service and programs like temporary free fare trains ridership will quickly return. Additionally, Ewing believes that in the short term there should be hourly service between New Haven and New London all day with increased frequency during rush hours, no metro north transfer wait times longer than 15 minutes, better connections to River Valley Transit. In the long-term Ewing believes that Madison should improve their station, there should be direct service to Grand Central, and there should be an extension of service to Westerly.

**Rich Martin, Chairperson, New London Cultural District:** Martin voices his support of the bill stating that many people moved to New London because the public transportation system which is no longer funded and how beneficial it can be for commuters and tourists alike.

**Kelly O'Connor:** O'Connor voices her support of the bill citing the many negative impacts of reducing service. O'Connor is concerned with how reducing SLE service impacts the Physically challenged and Neurodiverse communities who may be unable to drive and were reliant on the line. O'Connor also believes that reducing service is difficult for those who wish to commute to NYC and airports who must rely on spotty schedules and potentially being stranded. O'Connor feels similarly about more local commuters who find themselves disconnected from employers despite having already paid taxes to build the current

infrastructure. Finally, O'Connor believes that restoring SLE would be a boon to both the economy and the environment.

**Elizabeth Pendery:** Pendery voices her support of the bill citing concerns about overcrowded unsafe roads, climate justice, and economic development around SLE.

**Deepti Pradhan:** Pradhan voices their support for the bill citing traffic concerns, environmental responsibility, economic development, accessibility/equity, and the overall quality of life they believe SLE brings.

**Elizabeth Raisbeck:** Raisbeck voices her support of the bill citing concerns over how the initial cuts impacted climate change goals, low-income individuals, and congestion on roads.

**Peter Raymond, Professor of Ecosystem Ecology, Yale School of the Environment:** Raymond strongly supports the bill citing a belief that train ridership is important for lowering CO2 admission and restoring funding follows CT's G3 climate action plan.

**Carol Rizzolo:** Rizzolo voices her support of the bill citing concerns over how expensive it currently is to commute and how cutting funding is counterintuitive to the state's goal of lessening pollution.

**Tim Sperry:** Sperry voices his support of the bill pointing to the amount of transit-oriented development that has occurred around SLE in the last few years and the impact of forcing people onto the roads has on emissions.

**Sanford B. Steever, Doctor:** Steever voices his support of the bill citing the problems on or highways and how trains utilize less energy per person, are better for the environment, and the positive impact it has on the state economy.

**Linda Theodoru, Treasurer, EFCDW:** Theodoru voices her support of the bill citing how Europe's rail system allows people to stay out of cars which decreases parking congestion in towns and lowers citizens' expenses.

**Eugenia M. Villagra, Co-Chair, Groton Conservation Advocates:** Villagra voices her support of the bill out of environmental and commuting concerns. Villagra believes that trains are one of the best ways to reduce emissions by carrying many people and reducing the need for roads which take up an enormous amount of space. By getting people off the roads, we can also reduce road congestion and accidents while benefitting people's health as people who ride the train have been found to be at lower risk of obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

**Claire Walsh, Chair, Democracy Women in Action:** Walsh voices her support of the bill citing current difficulty for commuters, the damage cuts have had on tourism, and climate change.

**Thomas Broderick:** Broderick voices his support of the bill stating that he believes that the state during the original development of SLE should have forced towns along the line to upzone near stations to allow for heavy development along the line. Broderick believes that if funding is restored along with better zoning SLE will retain high ridership overtime.

**Kira Baum:** Baum voices her support of the bill recounting her current difficulty taking the train because of the limited schedule not being compatible with childcare.

**Brooks A. Bentz:** Bentz voices his support of the bill citing a desire to decrease road congestion and reduce fuel consumption. Bentz also suggests creating a highspeed train with limited stops from New Haven to Providence.

**Suzanne Boorsch:** Boorsch voices her support of the bill citing difficulties using the line and a strong concern about climate change.

**Frank L. Burns Jr., Executive Director, Conn. Tourism Coalition:** Burns Jr. voices his support of the bill citing tourism's reliance on trains and how in the summer tourists from the Metro NY market are either forced to contribute to congested roads or go somewhere else losing out on potential tax revenue.

**Christopher Cahill, Urban Planning Student:** Cahill voices his support of the bill citing concerns over climate change, people with disabilities and cannot drive, the amount of money CT has already spent on the line, and the economic impact.

**Randy Collins, Associate Director of Policy, The CCM:** Collins voices his support for the bill citing how important it is for transit-oriented development, reducing traffic congestion, and support of largest employers like Electric Boat.

**Thomas Crow:** Crow voices his support of the bill citing his own difficulties with the line and how trains enabled their partly disabled non-driving daughter to be able to get a job. Crow believes that he is just one of many who are reliant on the train and points to the development that has occurred around the line in recent years.

**Debra Dickey, Eastern CT Fed. of Dem. Women:** Dickey voices her support for the bill citing current difficulty for tourists and commuters alike.

**John W. Emerson:** Emerson voices his support of the bill citing his own experiences being forced back onto the highway and potentially being forced to become a two-vehicle due to lack of service. Emerson believes that concerns about lack of ridership before restoring service is silly, stating that even if ridership is down, he would be willing to pay a higher fare if it meant increased schedules.

**Amber Garrard, Director, Office of Sustainability Yale University:** Garrard voices her support of the bill citing Yale's desire to reduce employees use of single-occupancy vehicles. In feedback from employees, Yale found that for their employees to use the train consistent and frequent schedules were vital if it were to be considered a commuting option. Garrard believes that SLE has long been underfunded and underserved as far back as 2018 when Amtrak shut down SLE for upgrades and maintenance which made service infrequent and led to a 27% drop in commuter passes, which is responsible for the pre-covid ridership drop. Since the pandemic the ridership of other CT lines has slowly returned to normal, and Yale believes that with a return to pre-pandemic service on SLE will see a similar dynamic.

**Jodie Gillon, President & Ceo, BioCT:** Gillon on behalf of BioCT voices her support of the bill citing the need for industry to have affordable transportation.

**Pete Harrison, Director, Desegregate CT:** Harrison voices his support of the bill citing a belief that transit oriented communities address both the affordable housing crisis and climate change by getting away from low-density car-oriented land. Harrison believes that this type of development addresses problems of economic and racial segregation and thus support increases in funding for transit like SLE.

**Alexander Hoffman:** Hoffman voices his support of the bill citing a desire to reduce road congestion, reduce energy consumption, reduce car ownership, lower housing costs, increase economic activity, and have a reliable connection for eastern CT to reach Metro North.

**Stewart Hudson, Executive Director, Lowenstein Foundation:** Hudson voices his support of the bill citing the need Southeastern CT has for transportation infrastructure as its economy rapidly grows, while also being vital for tourism and education.

**Ginny Kozlowski, Executive Director, REX Development:** Kozlowski voices her support of the bill out of a belief that it is significant for the regional economy, workforce, and community development, specifically of underserved communities. Kozlowski believes reliable rail is vital in attracting and keeping employees and currently the lack of reliable schedules and the lack of synchronization between different lines makes CT rail lines insufficient for many residents. For Kozlowski having reliable rail is vital in allowing citizens to achieve economic independence and upward mobility. Additionally, Kozlowski notes that having a strong rail system attracts new residents such as remote workers who desire a high quality of life and being connected to job centers.

**Steven Lamoreaux, Professor, Yale University:** Lamoreaux voices his support of the bill stating that the lack of ridership stems directly from the cuts to funding as the train has become impossible to use for many people. Lamoreaux is concerned about the contract that we currently have with Amtrak for rail use as to expensive and unfair. Lamoreaux also points too development and industry that exists along the line and how important SLE is to serve those areas. Lamoreaux looks how much the state can reduce in emissions with the train breaking even if only 25 fewer cars are on the road. Finally, Lamoreaux emphasizes how much cheaper it is for an individual to use the train as opposed to a car and believes the state should focus on advertising these potential savings.

**Perry Maresca, Economic and Business Development Manager, Town of Branford:** Maresca voices their support of the bill citing its importance to Branford and high congestion/danger. Maresca believes that for the climate it is important to try to get people off the highways for both citizens and tourists and the train is the best way to do it. SLE already has the infrastructure available all it needs is an increase in schedule and better synchronization with other major lines/trains.

**Steve O'Connor, Vice-President, Cara Therapeutics:** O'Connor voices his support of the bill citing the currently unusable scheduling where most working individuals will find themselves stranded if they rely on SLE.

**Penny Parsekia:** Pareskian voices her support of the citing environmental concerns and a belief that ridership will rebound with service. Pareskian also references a study by the



CTDOT that says it is plausible to extend the rail to Westerly which has her support and the support of The Westerly Town Council.

**Larry Rizzolo, Member, Guilford Planning and Zoning Commission:** Rizzolo voices his support of the bill citing difficulty making connections because of infrequent scheduling and concerns over carbon emissions. Rizzolo also believes SLE is vital in addressing the housing crisis and emphasizes the defunding of shoreline east has undercut Guilford's transit-oriented development. SLE is important for Guilford's future development and population and thus restoring funding to SLE has Rizzolo's strong support

**Garrett Sheehan, President & CEO, Great New Haven & Quinnipiac Chambers of Commerce:** Sheehan voices his support of the bill citing struggles filling workforce that would be partially alleviated by better transportation. Sheehan believes that underfunded transportation pushes underserved communities out of the workforce ultimately hurting economic development. An increase in SLE funding would help solve this problem and boost activity across the economy and has Sheehan's full support.

**Vitor Villagra, Founder & President, Health & Technology Vector Inc.:** Villagra voices his strong support of the bill citing, "Capacity and efficiency, traffic reduction, environmental benefits, reduced infrastructure strain, cost-effective transportation, predictable travel times, safety, land use efficiency, economic development, reduced parking demand, time efficiency, accessibility for all, stress reduction, social interaction, and reduced reliance on personal vehicles."

**The following people voiced their support the bill, many of which shared their personal experiences and difficulties with SLE and climate concerns.**

- 9 Anonymous Sources
- Janice Atkeson
- Charles Brewster
- Mary Buchanan
- Patrick Buckley, Assistant Clerk, CGA
- Elena Cahill
- Jane Cavanaugh
- Alpha Coiro
- Jeffrey O'Connor
- Richard Dalterio, Doctor
- Eugenie H. Devine
- Eileen O'Donnell
- Paul Neri
- Nancy Ellman
- Amy Eppler-Epstein
- Pat Florio, Senior Administrative Assistant
- Susan Frost
- Harriet Gowanlock
- Susannah Graedel, Instructor Natural Science Illustrations, Yale Peabody Museum
- Karl Hager

- Barb Hammarlund
- Henry Haskell
- Gail Hoxsey
- John Huffman
- Edward Johnson, Groton Resident
- Malvin Karwoski
- Peter King
- Kris E. Kuhn
- Theodore Langevin
- Tony Leonard
- Judith Liebmann
- Keith Lorch
- Liz MacAdie
- Clayton Mansfield
- Stephanie Marshall
- Claire Matthews
- Richard Melchreit
- William Neale, Retiree
- Stanton C. Otis
- James Perito
- Nikki Rasmussen
- Ann Rumberger
- Lynn Saltz
- MaryBeth Sarr
- Dana Semeraro
- Robin Silsby
- Edward Stanley
- Alinor Sterling
- Jessie Stratton
- Yann van Heurck
- Carissa Violante
- Susan Welsh
- Darlene Zimmermann
- Remy Zimmermann
- Cathryn Argyros
- George Atwood
- Laura Buchanan
- Bruce Buchanan
- Ernest Carosella
- Jane Chesnutt
- Laura Copland
- Irina Cottrill
- Stephen Davis
- Rose Dostert
- Fred Fischer
- Michael Furgueson

- Andon George
- William Gowanlock
- Thomas Graedel
- Willia Griggs
- Lisa Hagy, Member, SLE Riders Advocacy Group
- Zachary Hayden
- Lous Iovino
- Theresa Kaiser
- Kenneth Kelly, Member, SLE Riders Advocacy Group
- Tom Laurenson
- Jeffrey Leonard
- Maureen Lopes
- Anthony LoRicco Jr, Member, SLE Riders Advocacy Group:
- Michelle Maitland
- JoAnn Merolla-Martin
- Shirley McCarthy
- Britton Miller
- Robert Nixon
- Peter Northrop
- Dana L. Oviatt
- Anna Palchik
- Carol Lambie-Parise
- Michaelle Pearson
- Steven R. Pendery
- Katha Pollitt
- Eraclito Rapuano
- Joan Rawlings
- Carol Reimers
- Mark Ryan
- Richard Saltz
- David Schneider
- Marge Scheider
- Margaret Sipple, Steering Committee Coordinator, Living Wisely and Well
- Jay Strange, Transport Hartford Coordinator, Center for Latino Progress
- John Steever
- Zell Steever
- Mary Stevens, Concerned Citizen
- Sue Sutherland
- Jeremy Toyn
- Howard Veisz
- Lorraine Veisz
- Veronica Wallace
- Dinah Wells
- Barbara Yaeger

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Susan Paisley:** Voices her opposition to the bill due to noise concerns.

**Reported by:** Noah Gulla

**Date:** 3/25/2024