



# Minutes

**Wednesday February 20, 2013 - 7:00 PM**  
**SWRPA Offices, Stamford, CT**

Council Members in attendance: Chairman Jim Cameron, Rodney Chabot, Sue Prosi, Tim Beeble, Roger Cirella, Bob Jelley, Dave Hendricks, Mitch Fuchs, John Hartwell, Terri Cronin, Laura Cordes, Jeff Maron and Jim Gildea.

Guests: Eugene Colonese-DOT, Sue Doering–Metro North, John Austin, Holly Schultz, Martin Cassidy.

Chairman Cameron opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

## **Minutes:**

Motion by Bob Jelley, seconded by Rodney Chabot, to approve the minutes of January 16, 2013. Approved.

### **1. Nemo Blizzard:**

Sue Doering reported that east of Westport more than two feet of snow accumulated. Metro North had to dig out switches, and clear the tracks, yards, platforms. Metro North brought in MTA forces and requested National Guard assistance. Jeff Maron asked why Metro North had announced on Sunday evening that there would be bus service on the Waterbury line for Monday commuters but at 4 AM Monday morning a Metro North email announce that there would not be bus service. Gene Colonese responded that this was miscommunication due to Metro North's uncertainty of conditions. Mr. Colonese added that the M-8s performed well after the tracks were cleared. The switch heaters can melt 3-5" of snow per hour, but couldn't keep up with the blizzard. There was 36" of snow in New Haven. There may be some financial assistance to the railroad from the federal government. Sue Doering confirmed that based on union contracts, train crews are paid even if the trains do not run. Sue Doering will investigate the issue of tweeted messages from Metro North exceeding the 140 character limit, sometimes truncating the heart of the message.

### **3. Stamford Garage RFP Update:**

Eugene Colonese reported that the technical review is taking more time than anticipated. The evaluation Panel will make a decision in early march. Dave Hendricks reported that the Task Force had only met twice but that he has reviewed the materials, and he is "excited by the proposals."

#### 4. **Report on SWRPA East Stamford Station Proposal:**

John Hartwell attended the public hearing on the East Stamford Station. Approximately 60 members of the public attended. The push for the station is driven by residents and businesses of the area rather than commuters. The proposed station is less than 2 miles from the Stamford Station. The planners recommend that the East Side be a bus node for shuttling commutes to the Stamford Station along the transitway.

#### 5. **Governor's Budget:**

There is a proposed \$2,000,000 cut in funding to DOT. Gene Colonese reported that the rail budget seems to be intact. \$70,000,000 will be taken from the Special Transportation Fund.

#### 6. **Mainline Issues:**

Mitch Fuchs reported that overcrowding on trains is intermittent. Sue Doering said that Metro North performs passenger counts on trains twice per year. Mr. Colonese advised that train size is based on a loading standard of 95% of maximum capacity for peak trains and 85% for off-peak trains. He also reported that the West Haven Station will open in July with 700 parking spaces. Terri Cronin reported roach infestation in restroom cars.

The issue of a fire on a train car was reviewed. Some passengers pressed the buzzers to alert the train crew. Passengers popped out windows to release smoke. The train crew chastised passengers over the intercom for pressing the buzzers. Sue Doering reported that there was a grounding issue of short duration that caused smoke. The crew reported the issue, and Metro North sent mechanics to the scene.

#### 7. **Branchline Issues:**

**New Canaan Branch:** Holly Schultz, a resident of the Talmadge Hill Station area on the New Canaan Branch, addressed the Council regarding the need for sidewalks along Route 106. 14% of the train passengers using the Talmadge Hill Station walk to and from the station. There is heavy traffic and speeding cars. The Town of Darien will not paint the crosswalks nor provide signage, nor will they construct sidewalks if New Canaan will not do so along Route 106.

**MOTION:** The Connecticut Rail Commuter Council supports efforts to provide improved pedestrian access to Metro North Train Stations. Motion by Mitch Fuchs, seconded by Rodney Chabot. Approved with Sue Prosi abstaining.

Rodney Chabot reported that the burned out light bulb at the Talmadge Hill Station parking lot has been replaced by CL&P.

**Waterbury Branch:** A siding at Beacon Falls is planned. Gene Colonese indicated that the increase in ridership from adding a train to the schedule could exceed the number of seats on that one train. A study projected a 750 person increase in ridership. Gene Colonese will check to see if the Derby siding is switched and connected to the branchline at both the north and south end points.

**Danbury Branch:**

Tim Beeble reported a problem on the 2/19/2013 5:16 PM Stamford – Danbury train. From South Norwalk to Wilton the train crawled at 15 MPH. The conductor announced that rain had caused a problem with the new signalization system. Sue Doering indicated that the problem was caused by a defective VPC computer board rather than the rain.

**8. Shore Line East:**

Gene Colonese reported that DOT is looking into mid-day train service to New London, but this must be fit into the Amtrak schedule. There is still an issue with DEEP and boaters with regard to the draw bridge. There will be M-8 testing on Shoreline East in early spring.

**9. Rail Related Bills before the Legislature:**

Jim Cameron reported that the Council's Legislative Sub-Committee reviewed 35+ bills in the Legislature related to the commuter rail and recommends a few for the Council to endorse:

There are 4 bills that address dedicating rail fares to the Special Transportation Fund and prohibiting such funds from being swept into the General Fund.

**MOTION:** The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council supports HB 5301, HB 5128, HB 5122, and SB 627. Motion by Bob Jelley, seconded by Terri Cronin. Motion approved with Jim Gildea and Sue Prosi voting against the motion.

**MOTION:** The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council supports SB 472 to expand the number of spaces at stations with DOT parking. Motion by Bob Jelley, seconded by Rodney Chabot. Motion approved with Terri Cronin voting against the motion.

**MOTION:** The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council supports SB 469 to require that a Connecticut resident serve as a voting member of the MTA. Motion by Jeff Maron, seconded by Terri Cronin. Motion approved with Bob Jelley voting against the motion.

**MOTION:** The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council supports HB 5449 to expand the current Council or create a new council for the Hartford/Springfield line. Motion by Bob Jelley, seconded by John Hartwell. Motion approved with Sue Prosi voting against the motion.

**MOTION:** The Connecticut Commuter Rail Council supports HB 5127 to require that Metro North extend the validity of weekly and monthly tickets when service is cancelled for more than 48 consecutive hours. Motion by John Hartwell, seconded by Mitch Fuchs. Motion approved with Sue Prosi, Bob Jelley, David Hendricks, Terri Cronin and Laura Cordes voting against the motion. Rodney Chabot abstained.

**10. Council Meeting Schedule:**

The Council will continue with the meeting schedule for 2013 as posted with the Secretary of State. The Council will strive to limit the meetings to 90 minutes.

Motion to adjourn by Jim Cameron, seconded by Mitch Fuchs.  
Meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by: Tim Beeble Secretary