

Regional Intermodal Transportation Center Study
Summary of Public Meeting
November 13, 2008 7:00 p.m.
New London Public Library

Jim Butler, Executive Director of Southeast Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG), sponsor of the study, welcomed attendees and introduced the study team.

Larry Englisher, project manager for the consultant team, made a thirty minute presentation that detailed the purpose, funding, study tasks and schedule of the study, why the study recommends keeping the transportation at its present downtown location, key finding of passenger and parking surveys and potential economic development opportunities in the vicinity of the transportation center.

Larry Englisher noted the purpose of the study is to develop a seamless transportation hub for the region that will support revitalization of downtown New London. A Master Plan will be created for the transportation center after reviewing the suitability of a location, identifying operational issues and solutions, estimating the cost of improvements and identifying development opportunities and public/private partnerships.

The transportation center has a unique confluence of modes. Several services (bus, train and ferry) are located next to each other but are not necessarily well connected. Two sites – existing downtown site and the Fort Trumbull peninsula - were evaluated. The comparison of the two sites indicated the downtown location is preferred.

In August nearly 500 passengers participated in a survey to learn their opinions and travel patterns. Most rated most aspects of the transportation facilities in New London for all modes as good. Few passengers transferred between services and the majority do not visit downtown. Many passengers said they would be more likely to visit downtown if retail, restaurants and cultural/entertainment attractions were expanded.

Larry Englisher spoke about New London's potential for transit-oriented development. He said the city's transportation assets, waterfront location and historic character make New London ripe for this type of development.

Jill Barrett of the consultant team said the study team had conducted thirteen one-on-one interviews with stakeholders. Nearly all said the transportation center was very important to downtown New London and the region and they wanted to see a coordinated plan to move forward. The meeting was then opened up for questions and discussion. The following is a summary of public comment.

I am concerned that civic interests are not involved in this study. Besides people from the region being on a Steering Committee, the City of New London and other local people ought to be participating.

Jim Butler responded that the Steering Committee has many representatives from New London – the Mayor, city staff, transportation service providers, programs such as New London Main Street, City Center District, and New London Landmarks Association.

Major Kevin Cavanagh said he had been working closely with the consultant team and knows they have met with many local officials and community leaders and have a good understanding of the city and the transportation center.

Comments about the transportation center:

Metro North needs to establish regular service to New London and even to Rhode Island. A concerted effort should be made to get patrons of the casinos off I-95 and onto trains as is done by the State of New Jersey and New York to service Atlantic City.

There needs to be better links between the modes, such as signage, weather protection and separation of passengers from automobile traffic and traffic calming.

Schedules should be coordinated better.

Stan Mickus of Cross Sound Ferry noted the ferry is often held up leaving port to wait for the Amtrak train when it is late.

Please keep the plan to feasible concepts, things that can be implemented, especially in today's troubled economy.

More marketing needs to be done to make people aware of New London's assets.

Does the study's scope include a walkway extension to Fort Trumbull? It would be wonderful to connect the downtown to Fort Trumbull, ideally via the rail bridge.

Jim Butler responded this connection is beyond the study scope but the team will look at it in the context of the overall study.

Will the study team work with developers?

No, the study will not be reaching out to specific developers on opportunities in New London. However, the study has real estate professionals on the team who will advise on potential market niches and assets the city could use to attract developers.

Are zip cars being looked at for the transportation center? Two are coming to Conn College soon and having zip cars available to people who arrive by train but don't need a full day or weekend rental may fill a void.

What about bike rentals?

Todd O'Donnell, owner of Union Station said he has been considering using the storage shed area at the station as a place to park bikes.

Could ticketing for all services – bus, ferry and train – be consolidated into Union Station?

The transportation center should accommodate growing bus use in the future. Right now there are not comfortable facilities for bus passengers.

What about establishing a shuttle service to connect people between the modes and the downtown?

This may sound far fetched, but people movers may work.

Comments about development:

The market will respond to improved transportation. Look at what happens in areas where there is good commuter rail.

New London should begin by increasing residential units first, retail will follow. There is a proven housing demand today but it has to be larger to support retail.

I'd like to see condos on top of the parking garage.

There is already good nightlife/entertainment in New London, especially for young people. We need to build on that.

There is also a demand for upscale, larger housing with parking for empty nesters.

More public comment:

Additional comments were submitted on a comment form at the close of the meeting. About one half (10 of 21) of people attending the meeting used the forms to share opinions.

To the question, what do you think is most important to making downtown New London more of a “destination” for visitors or residents, the responses were: *expand retail shopping (4), more housing (2), more small businesses (1), increase population (1), promotion (1), and seamless shoreline service from Grand Central Terminal in NY to the casinos (1).*

Suggestions to improve the transportation center were:

Maintain Union Station as the center and use full space in the station to improve amenities for travelers. Use small jitneys to move passengers around various modes of transportation.

A safe, convenient, well-lit and attractive overhead pedestrian walkway linking the ferries, train station, parking garage and downtown is the single most important issue facing the future of the development of the multi-modal transportation center. This would provide New London a “gateway” for transportation users into downtown New London.

Use space in between Greyhound/Amtrak seating area and put housing/offices above. Keep the transportation center at Union Station by improving and bringing together all modes of transportation facilities and retail.

Consolidate ticket counters and offices in Union Station.

I have used the train, Fisher's and Block Island Ferries and parking with children and luggage. My biggest concern is about convenience and safety on the ferry operator's properties. Pedestrian access/waiting lines are in the parking lots and vehicle travel lanes.

Connections into the city – ease of a trolley bus to move people all over the city.

Build a tunnel from Union Station to the ferry.

Please make sure that the improvements will be able to EVENTUALLY handle a greatly increased rail and casino connection.