

SUMMARY OF MEETING

Project: Regional Intermodal Transportation Study
Date of Meeting: Thursday, December 3, 2009, 1 p.m.
Location of Meeting: New London City Hall, Council Chambers
Purpose of Meeting: Discussion of Preferred Alternative
Meeting Attendance: Attendees listed on pages 5 & 6

Jim Butler, Executive Director of Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) welcomed attendees and thanked the Steering Committee for being involved in the study. Jim emphasized the concepts that would be presented at the meeting were not detailed site plans. He said the concepts were not a SCCOG plan, but were based on input provided by stakeholders and the public throughout the course of the study. These would only be implemented by the people/entities involved and no concept would be forced on the City of New London.

Larry Englisher presented a preferred alternative that placed a new bus terminal on the east side of Water Street and a pedestrian foot bridge built in three segments – a segment that traversed the train tracks, a segment that connected to the Water Street Garage and a segment that connected to the Cross Sound Ferry property. (see presentation http://www.seccog.org/intermodalStudy/pdfs/SteeringCmte_12309_FINAL.pdf). The presentation was followed by considerable discussion by committee members, the study team and SCCOG. Listed below is a summary of questions and responses in italics.

Dan Karp: Where would people access the garage on Water Street? Does the concept allow enough queue space for cars?

Larry Englisher: Yes. Entry and queue space would be provided in the short term parking area in front of the garage.

John Markowicz: Had you considered a two-story bus terminal?

Skip Smallridge: In our experience with bus terminals, people need to feel they are near the buses or they won't use the indoor waiting area. We think people on a second story waiting area would have too much anxiety as they would have to get down the stairs in time to meet the bus.

Charles Curtin: Taxi parking in front of Union Station works differently than in other cities. The last two cars in the queue are the most active cars because they are closest to where passengers get off the train. You should consider angled back-in parking for taxis because it would create more spaces and is safer.

Larry Englisher: We provided queue space on State Street to enable taxis to use a more traditional queuing approach with loading/unloading occurring in front of the station. There should be further discussion and coordination with the taxi operators on the taxi operating strategy.

Craig Bordiere: How high is the pedestrian bridge? Is there internal and external access to it?

Larry Englisher: The bridge is 55 feet at its highest point and can be accessed both internally and externally.

John Markowicz: The glass windbreak along the bus island is positioned on the east side but the prevailing winds come from the west. I would suggest more enclosure.

Jim Butler: The glass also serves to prevent passengers spilling onto the roadway.

Larry Englisher: The final design could incorporate some windbreaks on the west side.

Sandra Chalk: Is there access to the southbound train platform?

Larry Englisher: Yes, there is access at the northern end of the proposed bus terminal and through the train station and at the southern end of the terminal.

John Markowicz: Did anyone suggest the pedestrian bridge be wider and incorporate a ticket area?

Larry Englisher: No. We were interested in minimizing visual impact and cost.

Sandra Chalk: Where will the access be to Shore Line East (SLE)?

Larry Englisher: The southbound platform now used by SLE can be accessed on the north side of the bus terminal. However, with the increased service the plan is for the SLE trains to be on the freight track and we understand the northbound platform will be modified to accommodate this. Passengers would need to use the pedestrian bridge to access this platform (or the State Street surface crossing).

Frank McLaughlin: Can you expand on the \$3.6 million pedestrian wayfinding?

Larry Englisher: This cost is for more than just the wayfinding; it includes other pedestrian improvement, a lot of paving of sidewalks in addition to signs.

Who will clean the glass in the new bus terminal? Will Greyhound and SEAT contribute?

CTDOT representative Andy Davis addressed attendees and said his department would review the report and would provide comments. He noted that the governance recommendation was that the State acquire the train station property. He said if the State acquired the train station, it would want to take the Water Street garage as well to provide revenue for ongoing operating costs. Andy said the State would need to know what improvements to the Station would be required in the short and long term. He asked that information on acquiring property, maintenance costs and annual operating costs be detailed. He also asked whether an association would be allowable under federal laws and noted that State laws would apply.

Jim Butler said the State will be given a range of costs. We do know the Water St. Garage has had a valuation.

Dick Guggenheim from SCCOG said CONNDOT has submitted a project budget estimate of \$10 million to Congressman Courtney's office for inclusion as an earmark in the reauthorization of the next federal transportation act as a "placeholder" for this cost.

Tony Sheridan: I think today's plan is a dramatic improvement. It looks like the pedestrian bridge is above the top floor of the garage. It will be important for the public to see a final finished design for the bridge.

Larry Englisher: The bridge connects to the top floor of the garage. This is a master plan not a design study but we could include in the final report and presentation photos of similar pedestrian bridges elsewhere as examples.

Andy Davis: The bridge will probably end up looking like the pedestrian bridge in Old Saybrook.

Tony Sheridan: We would need something that would look good and that would compliment the architecture already existing at Union Station.

Jim Butler: The design concept for the building is light and airy, especially compared to the other pedestrian bridge that looked too blocky and heavy.

Dan Karp: Does the State typically own garages at other train stations?

Andy Davis: Yes, we own the stations in New Haven, Stamford.

Harry Smith: Are the garages at stations only for station use? Does the State own garages that serve joint uses?

Chris Bordiere: Generally the garages are used by commuters.

Andy Davis: The City of Bridgeport owns the garage at the station but it is operated by the State and Bridgeport does not receive revenue. This garage, however, also serves as parking for the sports facilities in the area – hockey, baseball.

Jim Butler: Some special arrangements could be made to address non-commuter use of the garage.

Dan Karp: How much space is lost by the proposed widening/moving of Water Street?

Chris Riale: We think a maximum of 50 feet but it is unlikely to result in many lost parking spaces.

John Markowicz: What is the rationale for the pedestrian bridge? Who pays for the pedestrian bridge? What if the response to Shoreline East doesn't justify added trains?

Jim Butler: The State views the pedestrian bridge as very important for safety and hopefully would pay for the bridge, perhaps with assistance from the federal government.

Andy Davis: The State likes localities to contribute a share.

Harry Smith: Even distressed communities?

Andy Davis: All communities.

Todd O'Donnell: I've learned that \$10.8 million has been set aside for a downtown intermodal center and \$7 million to acquire the New London railroad station.

Andy Davis: Sometimes congressional representatives will list projects.

Dick Guggenheim: That item and amount is just a placeholder.

Harry Smith: The team has presented a preferred alternative yet you've noted a number of drawbacks that you're concerned about if the transportation center is located on the east side of Water Street.

Skip Smallridge: Yes, we see a number of operational drawbacks to the preferred alternative.

Jim Butler: We looked at locating the bus terminal on the west side of Water Street in front of the garage, but it resulted in circulation issues, lost parking and would require a retrofit of the garage. We also looked at relocating the bus terminal to Governor Winthrop Blvd. and rejected that location. We think we can live with this design.

Jim Martin: I think the preferred alternative is a wonderful improvement over what we have now. The glass structure would mitigate the concerns about the visual impact of the building.

Sandra Chalk: I think the short term improvements to sidewalks and wayfinding are fantastic. I do not think the study addressed well potential uses of Union Station. It has deep basements, one half the main floor is available as well as one half the second floor and attic. I am puzzled that more thinking hasn't gone into this rather than building new.

Larry Englisher: We concluded Union Station would not work well for bus passengers. The distance from the SEAT bus stop is too great for passengers to be able to make connections and the stop can't be closer. Greyhound needs to be close to buses because their passengers have baggage. Visibility to the street from Union Station is poor because of its narrow windows and ADA accommodations would be needed. This study has not proposed specific uses for Union Station. Placing a visitor's center, café and service desk for rental cars within the station have been suggested. Any purchase or long term lease of Union Station would have to consider the need for parking to support uses of the building, perhaps providing dedicated parking within the Water Street Garage.

Sandra Chalk: Isn't the re-use of existing stations part of the Transportation Enhancement Act? There are wonderful examples of re-use of historic stations for bus and train passengers. These stations also take advantage of transit-oriented-development (TOD) opportunities. Worcester, MA has done a wonderful job rehabilitating their Union Station.

Skip Smallridge: What we're finding with TOD projects nationwide is that a lot of the development besides the transit functions is transit adjacent development and that somewhere only between 5-10% of the people living or working in the development actually use the transit. We also found that stations do not need a lot of retail space. For example, New Haven has about only 5,000 sq. ft retail space even though it has a lot of commuters using the station. Worcester's retail space is on very shaky ground; that station is at the beginning of a 15-20 year redevelopment plan.

John Markowicz: Why didn't you connect the pedestrian bridge to the east side of Union Station?

Todd O'Donnell: It would have been less obtrusive to make the connection on the east side. There was originally a footbridge at the building. I had someone develop concepts for this and an underground connection and can share them.

Larry Englisher: there would be additional impacts on the historic station if a pedestrian bridge were constructed from the east side of the Union Station building. The pedestrian bridge would be very high up since it must go over the catenary unlike the old footbridge. It would also block the view down State Street through to the Thames River if constructed at this location.

John Markowicz: An additional ground-level crossing would have worked but I understand that the federal government wants to reduce, not add crossings, and we need the two that we have to access the ferries.

Larry Englisher: Yes that is true. We documented that in the appendix to the pre-meeting handout as well as follow-up on other comments from the prior meeting.

Jim Butler thanked everyone for attending and for their input, and said a public meeting on the study's recommendations will be held in January. In response to a question, he said there will be a comment period that would end a short time after the public meeting is held. The draft report will then be presented to the SCCOG board.

The meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

Meeting Attendees:

Steering Committee:

Tony Sheridan	Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT
Harry Smith	City of New London
Stan Mickus	Cross Sound Ferry
Mark Hood	CT DECD
Charles Curtin	Curtin Transportation
Dan Karp	Daniels Dairy Downtown
Sandra Chalk	New London Landmarks
Frank McLaughlin	New London Main Street
Dan Steward	SCCOG, Town of Waterford
James Martin	SEAT
John Markowicz	seCTer
Sen. Andrea Stillman	State Sen. 20 th District
Todd O'Donnell	Union Station

ConnDOT

Andy Davis	ConnDOT (Planning)
Craig Bordiere	ConnDOT (Rails)
Jon Foster	ConnDOT (Rails)

SCCOG Staff

James Butler	SCCOG
Dick Guggenheim	SCCOG

Study Team

Larry Englisher
Jim Wensley
Skip Smallridge
Chris Riale
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Paul Schmidt

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URS