

## **New Britain-Hartford Busway: Setting the Record Straight**

- 1. Opponents claim:** The Busway is a “single-mode infrastructure investment” that will not support existing or future rail service and would preclude a Waterbury-Hartford link.

**Fact:** The Busway is designed to be part of a transit network. Buses to Hartford will provide suburban riders with access to existing Amtrak service at Union Station while at the same time delivering commuters to jobs in the core of downtown and in regional centers. Busway riders will connect with the proposed New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail at two stations—Hartford and Newington Junction—with the potential for an additional connection at West Hartford’s Flatbush Busway station. Rail service could still link Waterbury and Hartford in the future via Bristol, New Britain, and Berlin.

- 2. Opponents claim:** A rail plan would serve more communities than the Busway.

**Fact:** Busway buses will run to and from neighborhoods in Hartford, Farmington, Plainville, Bristol, Newington, Cheshire, Southington, Waterbury, West Hartford, and New Britain along 38 miles of off-Busway routing and 9.4 miles of exclusive right-of-way, enabling a 14% increase in bus ridership in Greater Hartford and greatly expanding transit options, especially to off-Busway destinations such as downtown Bristol, West Farms Mall and the UConn Health Center area. In many locations, buses are able to serve more riders than rail would because buses can pick up riders along their routes rather than serving only downtown and park & ride commuters. The Major Investment Study selecting Bus Rapid Transit as the preferred mode for this corridor established that the Busway would attract more riders than rail would, and would therefore do more to reduce congestion on I-84.

- 3. Opponents claim:** Busway bridges will prevent electrification of the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield route for commuter rail and prohibit double-stacked freight.

**Fact:** The Busway construction will raise the Broad Street Bridge clearance from 19’ 1” to at least 19’ 8”. Current and proposed bridge heights will allow full-electrification, and double-stacking can be accommodated if that is the region’s top priority. We’ll need to decide whether we want a corridor that is electrified or one that accommodates double-stacked freight. Generally double stack freight is not allowed in electrified passenger rail corridors. Many bridges between New Haven and Springfield would have to be raised in order to accommodate full height double-stacking of freight.

- 4. Opponents claim:** The Busway will cost close to \$600 million due to cost overruns. Restoring passenger rail service would be cheaper.

**Fact:** The Busway cost estimate of \$572 million prepared by ConnDOT for the Federal Transit Administration is based on an engineered plan for all intersections, bridges and underpasses, stations, and parking, and includes the purchase of all necessary buses. This cost estimate is all inclusive, it allows a 12% contingency for potential cost overruns, allows for cost escalation, and includes all engineering, project management, and inspection costs. At this time the DOT is reviewing the budget to identify further efficiencies that could reduce the cost. Opponents have asserted that the cost would be less to restore passenger rail, but estimates have not made a detailed assessment of the true cost of restoring passenger service, including the necessary stations, parking, train cars, rail improvements, and roadway work that would be needed to bring a freight line to safe passenger standards. Opponent estimates also fail to include a comparable contingency for unexpected costs, cost escalation, and costs for engineering, management and inspection.

**5. Opponents claim:** Funding is currently available to restore rail service to the Waterbury-Bristol-Hartford corridor.

**Fact:** The \$267 million that the federal government is about to approve for the Busway is not transferable. An alternative project to expand rail service would have to begin a new process to earn federal funding which would require extensive studies comparing the merits of the project against other proposals nationwide and would again assess whether rail is the best mode for this corridor. The Busway can begin construction this year and be up and running by 2013. Furthermore, the Waterbury to Newington Junction rail line is not eligible for federal high speed rail funding because it is not one of the national high speed rail corridors.

**6. Opponents claim:** The FTA has said, "The decision of how best to provide transportation services within a specific geographic region, including the choice between a busway or a heavy rail project, is not made by the Federal Government. Instead it is the responsibility of local decision makers and the project sponsor. Thus, if local decision makers wish to redefine the project as heavy rail rather than as a busway, they may do so. "

**Fact:** While the selection of a locally preferred alternative is purely the prerogative of the local government, the federal government will not fund any fixed guideway investment until it has met the planning requirements of the New Starts program. To select a new mode for this corridor at this time will require that the project go through alternatives analysis, environmental impact evaluation, preliminary design, and final design. At each step in this process, the federal government measures the merits of the project against other projects proposed across the nation. In addition, the federal government examines the process to insure that the studies are mode neutral, and that the selection of the locally preferred alternative is based upon solid findings in the alternatives analysis. This is a several year process and there is no guarantee that the

proposed project will end the process ranked highly enough to receive funding. The busway has been through each step of the process and has been recommended for full funding.

**In short, the Busway is a real plan with funding. Supporting the Busway now invests in the economic growth and quality of life of the Hartford region and is a signal to the federal government that Connecticut is committed to investing in transit improvements. Serving 16,300 riders in the most congested corridor in the region would be a major step forward as part of a comprehensive transit strategy for the region's residents.**