

Bus Rapid Transit from Hartford to New Britain: Fact Sheet, August 2011

Why a Busway from Hartford to New Britain?

- The busway will relieve congestion on the Interstate 84 corridor west of downtown Hartford. This corridor is the most congested in the capital region and almost 60% of the region's freeway delay occurs here.
- Frequent, rapid transit: In the peak periods buses will come by stations every 3 to 6 minutes. For stops off the busway with continuing service on the busway, buses will come by at least every 15 minutes.
- The busway is expected to generate between 4,700 to 6,100 person year jobs.
- The proposed busway will entice drivers to leave their cars at home and use transit aiding freeway congestion and reducing greenhouse gases.
- The busway is a more cost effective solution to congestion than widening the freeway or light rail transit.
- The busway will be funded with 80% federal funds, 20% state funds.

What is the New Britain Hartford Busway?

- The busway is a rapid transit facility: a bus only roadway which will provide frequent and reliable transit service all day long.
- Because the busway is for buses only and buses will not be delayed by other traffic, service is reliable all day long.
- The busway is expected to serve 16,000 daily trips, 5,000 of which are trips that formerly were made by car.
- The busway will have 11 stations along its 9.4 mile length. Stations will have level boarding platforms and off vehicle fare payment.
- A busway can affect land use development patterns and has been proven to be a catalyst for transit oriented development. (Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Ottawa, Brisbane and many other cities) In fact, in Cleveland, the Healthline has resulted in a doubling of property values adjacent to the busway and has stimulated over \$4 billion of investment.
- From New Britain to Newington junction the busway will be located in an abandoned rail corridor. From Newington Junction to Union Station in downtown Hartford, it will operate in the Amtrak corridor (part of the New Haven Hartford Springfield corridor).
- Because buses will be able to enter the busway at several locations, the busway permits very flexible service. Buses can leave the busway to provide passenger pick-ups and drop offs. A busway can deliver passengers from their origin to their destination without the need to transfer to another vehicle or route. The benefits of the busway will extend to many communities and destinations: Waterbury, Bristol, Southington, Cheshire, Central CT State University, West Farms Mall, UConn Dempsey Health Center, West Hartford Center, St. Francis Hospital, and Hartford Hospital.

- Busways are ideal rapid transit systems for locations like Hartford where densities are too low to warrant an investment in light rail (light rail requires a density of at least 9 dwelling units per acre for the entire corridor).
- The busway project includes a 4.5 mile bike path to be built parallel to the busway from New Britain to Newington Junction.
- The need for pedestrian and bicycle access to the stations has been built into busway station design.

Busway Cost and Funding:

- According to the latest cost estimates, the busway project will be \$567 million. This covers the cost to construct the busway, the bike path, and the stations, the cost to purchase the buses and the needed right of way, the cost to reconstruct bridges and overpasses, a contingency set aside and finance charges (as required by the federal government.) The cost estimate for actual construction is about \$300 million. \$72 million has been spent already on planning studies, engineering costs, and right of way acquisition.
- It is costly to build the busway in this corridor for several reasons:
 - Poor soils (clay) require deep pilings for bridges and many walls.
 - The confined corridor – the rail line will be operational throughout construction – makes construction expensive.
 - Many new bridges are required as part of the project.
 - Some of the construction cost will be related to the rail line: a new access road for the railroad will be constructed, signal work related to the rail will be constructed as part of the busway project
- The busway will be funded with 80% federal funds, 20% state funds. This equates to \$454 million coming from the federal government for the project. \$275 million of the federal funds are funds that are only available for this project. The remaining federal funds have been set aside for the project out of annual federal appropriations. The state funding (\$112 million) has already been committed or budgeted to the project in prior years' budgets and the current state transit capital plan.
- The state is very close to getting approval from the FTA for a full funding grant agreement, which will provide for funding of 80% of the project by the federal government.

Background – How the Project was Developed

- Planning for the project began in the Hartford West Major Investment Study (MIS) which evaluated alternatives for relieving congestion on Interstate 84 west of Hartford (March 1999). This corridor is the most congested in the capitol region. In fact almost 60% of the region's freeway traffic delay occurs on this segment of highway.

- The Hartford West MIS identified the busway as the most cost effective way to reduce congestion. The final plan also included recommendations for some small highway improvements, which have been making their way forward to construction.
- The Hartford West MIS examined several alternative transit proposals, including light rail, commuter rail, and busway, in several alignments. It also evaluated high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. The New Britain Hartford Busway was the most effective (attracted more riders) transit alternative tested.
- The ridership projections were made with a computer model that is approved by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for projecting transit ridership. The ridership estimates have been exhaustively reviewed by the FTA on an annual basis.
- Upon completion of the MIS in 1999, the Capitol Region Council of Governments and the Central CT Regional Planning Agency designated the busway as the locally preferred alternative (LPA) for the corridor. This was the first step in moving the project forward for federal transit funding.
- Since 1999, the project has been moving forward through the FTA process for new starts funding. This included completion of an Environmental Impact Study and development of design documents. Each year the DOT has submitted a New Starts application to the FTA which has enabled the project to move forward in the funding process.
- The Capitol Region Council of Governments used Transportation Strategy Board funding to help busway corridor towns to develop plans for transit oriented development at station sites.

What About Rail From Waterbury to Hartford?

- The rail corridor from New Britain to Newington Junction was abandoned and acquired by the state in 1993. The rails are no longer in place. But there is an existing rail link from New Britain to the New Haven Hartford Springfield rail line, connecting at Berlin. This, like the remainder of the Waterbury – Hartford rail line, is owned by Pan Am Railway (formerly Guilford transportation Industries.)
- No studies to date, including the 1992 Waterbury – New Britain passenger rail study, the 1999 Hartford West Major Investment Study, and the 2001 CRCOG Regional Transit Strategy, have indicated that a rail line from Waterbury to New Haven will serve the number of passengers that the Busway will (estimates of 2000 to 6000 for commuter rail versus 16000 for busway).
- If the interest in rail is to get riders from Bristol to southwest CT and New York, the existing rail link from the New Haven Hartford Springfield line is more efficient for this purpose. Individuals living in Waterbury already have a rail link between Waterbury and Metro North. If the desire is to use public transit to get individuals from Bristol and Waterbury to Hartford, the Busway is more efficient and effective.

- There will be an annual state subsidy for busway project. It is expected to be about \$4 per **new** passenger, which compares very favorably to the estimated subsidy of \$14 per passenger (in 1992 \$) from the 1992 Waterbury Hartford rail study and it compares very favorably with current subsidies for passengers on the Shore Line east and the branch rail lines, which range from \$9 per passenger to \$34 per passenger.

The importance of doing something now:

- The process for securing discretionary federal funding for a transit project is long and arduous.
- The busway is almost to the finish line, close to receiving a full funding grant agreement from the Federal Transit Administration. The General Accounting Office states that the average federal New Starts transit project takes 14 years from first proposal to actual operation. The busway is on track with this national average.
- The first contract has gone out to bid with construction able to commence in fall 2011.
- Stopping it now for another proposal will mean going back to the drawing board for years of study and design. And there's no guarantee that the replacement project would qualify for discretionary funding.
- Stopping the busway means that we have nothing to offer to deal with congestion on I-84 west of Hartford other than to add some additional services to the corridor. However, that would not provide any travel time savings like the busway would.
- Stopping the busway means that we have nothing to offer to entice drivers to use public transportation.
- Stopping the busway means that those looking for a less expensive way to get around town will have to use the current slow bus system. And those dependent upon public transportation will continue to spend excessive amounts of time getting where they need to go.
- Stopping the busway means we have removed an important tool in our quest to make the Hartford region more sustainable. In fact, a Smart Growth America Report (*Connecticut Smart Transportation Save money and Grown the Economy* , January 2011) notes **"Investments in public transportation create almost twice the jobs that highways do, help others get to their jobs, and attract private sector investment, creating still more jobs. Connecticut should support existing bus and train service and find resources to build the state's two big transit projects: the New Haven to Springfield commuter rail line and the Hartford to New Britain busway."**
- Stopping the busway means stopping our plans for transit oriented development dead in their tracks.