

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT  
ESTUARY TRANSIT DISTRICT BOARD MEETING

ESTUARY TRANSIT DISTRICT  
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING  
VIA ZOOM  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, at 9:30 A.M.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Joan Gay, Chair, at 9:34 A.M.

ROLL CALL

Committee members present: Joan Gay, David E. Lahm, and Michael Pelton

Absent: Christine Marques

Also in attendance:

Staff: Joe Comerford and Christina Denison

Guests: Leslie Strauss, Board Chair

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF 2025 LEGISLATIVE BILLS

Discussion focused on the six (6) transportation bills that have been scheduled for hearings or have had hearings. As the 2025 legislative session continues, Joe Comerford will be alerted to other bills of interest via “bill tracker” and will inform the committee.

HB 5646 – sponsored by Sen. Matt Lesser and co-sponsored by other legislators in our region. This bill aims to commission a study on public transportation options in and around the City of Middletown, including the expansion of Fast Track into Middletown and service on the Valley Railroad. DOT provided testimony on the bill noting that a previous study done on the Valley Railroad found it was not viable.

HB 6728- aims to amend current statutes to establish a policy that allows veterans to ride free on all state-funded public transportation services on Veterans’ Day. The District did not submit testimony on this bill as the impact on revenue would be minimal.

SB 714 – sponsored by Sen. Christine Cohen who represents several member towns and serves as co-chair of the Transportation Committee. All shoreline representatives co-sponsored the bill. This bill aims to mandate the Department of Transportation to fully restore service on the Shore Line East rail line to pre-pandemic levels. Comerford submitted testimony in support.

SB 1243 – sponsored by Sen. Cohen, the bill aims to provide fare free public bus transportation for high school students, veterans and low-income passengers, which represents about 50% of our ridership. CACT has provided testimony highlighting the potential of service cuts due to loss revenue. Comerford noted that in the past, riders have vehemently opposed service cuts

in favor of paying a higher fare. CACT members will meet with Sen. Cohen, one of the sponsors of the bill, to express their concerns.

SB 1377- aims to implement the recommendations of the Department of Transportation. Imbedded into the bill is a provision to restore funding to transit districts in urbanized areas by repealing the revisions made to section 7-273l of the general statutes by public act 22-40 which freezes transit district funding at FY24 levels and establishes an annual competitive funding program. Comerford indicated that this bill should pass, and he is optimistic that the flat funding language will be removed.

HB 6864- The Governor's Bill outlines the state budget for the biennium ending June 30, 2027, and aims to provide a comprehensive financial framework that supports essential services while addressing budgetary constraints.

Comerford reviewed the process of distributing capital funds and reported:

- the Office of Policy and Management has indicated that additional transportation funding has been added to the budget; however, it is \$17m less than what was requested by DOT
- the Governor has recommended a slight fare increase for CT Transit and the districts
- the state's STF (special transportation fund) faces a potential shortfall in 2027
- the distribution of funds is being impacted by the lack of a budget for the current fiscal year
- uncertainty exists about the impact of the current federal administration's funding cuts on operations and on the Infrastructure Bill
- grant applications are being held up due to STIP amendments that need approval
- the Governor has granted the transit districts an electric vehicle exemption due to the high cost of transitioning without federal support
- the CACT lobbyist is setting up a meeting for Comerford to meet with Sen. Cohen and others on the Transportation Committee.

Of other interest is:

HB 6316- aims to establish a fee on retail delivery services as a way to pay for reducing fares. Comerford stated the bill is unlikely to pass but could be considered as a source of revenue in the future.

Comerford was available to answer questions from the committee members. He will continue to monitor relevant bills, particularly those related to free fares and transportation funding, and will report back to the committee after meeting with Sen. Cohen.

#### OTHER BUSINESS

None.

NEXT MEETING

To be determined.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christina Denison  
Clerk