BRANCH LINE PROJECTS UPDATE

Railroad Tie Replacement Project – May incorporate alignment changes proposed in Phase I of the study

ConnDOT and Metro-North are planning a Railroad Tie Replacement project for the branch as part of overall Branch line improvements. Work is scheduled to begin in the Fall of 2008. The first section to be replaced will cover the segment from Ridgefield to Danbury, a distance of approximately 11 miles. Work on the remaining tracks from South Norwalk to Ridgefield will take place in 2009. ConnDOT is working with Metro-North to incorporate some of the curve modifications into the tie project that were proposed in the Phase I Danbury Branch study. This would help reduce travel time on the Branch.

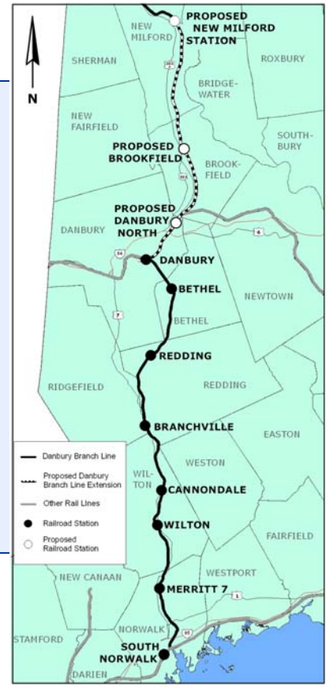
Communication and Train Control Project – A required initial step to service enhancements

The CTC Project, also known as the Danbury Branch Signal Project, Project No. 302-0007, would introduce an automated signal system on the Branch. This would allow automatic switching of equipment to passing sidings. Currently the train conductor on the Branch is required to 'manually' throw the switch allowing trains to enter a siding. The CTC project was originally proposed to include addition of steel poles that could accommodate both the signal system and a 'catenary' system (allowing for installation of overhead contact wires for electrified rail service). However, the capital cost of the poles pushed the project over current available budgets. To avoid further delays of the program, ConnDOT will implement the CTC project as an electrified electronic track circuit. While this involves burying cable instead of mounting them on poles, it will be done in a manner so as not to preclude future construction of a pole line capable of supporting electrification.

The Signal System will improve the flexibility of rail service on the Branch. It includes the ability to remotely control train movements and switches from Metro-North's Control Center in Grand Central Terminal. The sidings at Norwalk, Wilton, Branchville, and Danbury will function as fully automatic control points (CP's). Signals at these Sidings will be GO-NO-GO signals similar to those now in use on the New Haven Mainline, and will eliminate the requirement for manually throwing switches. The total cost for the project is approximately $80 million and is expected to be completed in three years.

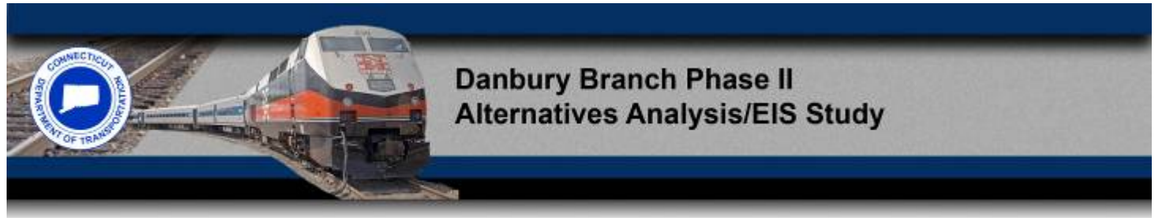
The Study Corridor

The Study Corridor is the existing rail and highway transportation corridor consisting of the regional Route 7 highway and the Danbury Branch rail line running north-south connecting the population centers of Norwalk, Wilton, Redding, Ridgefield, Bethel, Danbury, Brookfield, and New Milford. Rail passenger service is provided by Metro-North Railroad for ConnDOT between S. Norwalk and Danbury for a distance of 23.6 miles. Limited rail freight service is provided by Providence and Worchester Rail Road between S. Norwalk and Danbury. Rail freight service is provided by Housatonic Rail Road Company between Danbury and New Milford for a distance of 14.3 miles. The study corridor will be defined as 1,000 feet in width, specifically, 500 feet measured on each side of the Danbury Branch rail right-of-way centerline, from the existing South Norwalk station to New Milford center.



For further information
about the project please contact:

Andrew H. Davis, Project Manager
Connecticut Department of Transportation
Tel. 860-594-2157 Fax. 860-594-3028
Email. Andrew.H.Davis@po.state.ct.us



Public Scoping Meeting 2008

www.danburybranchstudy.com

Danbury Branch EIS Kicks Off with Public Scoping Meetings

With the publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) has formally launched the regulatory evaluation process known as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Danbury Branch rail corridor. This process allows for implementation of potential service expansion and capital improvements to the 156-year-old Danbury Branch rail line.

1950's Electric Train on the Danbury Branch

The EIS process encourages and requires public involvement and input. Public outreach begins with a series of three public meetings to be held in the project's study area:

TUESDAY, JUNE 17, 2008 – 6:00-8:00pm
New Milford Town Hall
E. Paul Martin Room, Town Hall, Top Floor
10 Main Street, New Milford, CT 06776

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 2008 – 6:00-8:00pm
Wilton Town Hall Annex Building, Room "A"
238 Danbury Road, Wilton, CT 06897

THURSDAY JUNE 19, 2008 – 6:00-8:00pm
Ridgefield Town Hall (large conference room)
400 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT 06877

The project's initial statement of purpose and need and the initial set of alternatives proposed for the study will be presented at these meetings. Comments may be given verbally or in writing at the scoping meetings. Every reasonable effort will be made to meet special needs. The meeting locations will be accessible to persons with disabilities.

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

What the Scoping Process Means

Scoping refers to the process by which lead agencies solicit input from the public and interested agencies on the nature and extent of issues and impacts to be addressed in the EIS. **It also addresses the methods by which they will be evaluated.**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), passed in 1972, specifically requires that the lead agency (FTA and ConnDOT in this case) consult with federal agencies that have jurisdiction by law or special expertise on the proposed action. For the Danbury Branch corridor, these agencies include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CT DEP), the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the U.S. Department of the Interior. The lead agency must also solicit appropriate information from the public during EIS preparation.

New electric rail car slated for New Haven Line service could operate on a re-electrified Danbury Branch

Although the Phase II Danbury Branch Study has been preceded by significant work in Phase I (which identified existing conditions, the range of alternatives to be studied, the project study area, and preliminary environmental concerns), formal scoping under NEPA and Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) is still required. The Scoping process will identify the environmental resources to be investigated; the level of detail required for each resource studied; and further refinement of the alternatives.

Purpose and Need

Interested parties are invited to consider and comment on the preliminary statement of purpose and need for the project. Comments may be given verbally or in writing at each scoping meeting. Comments will also be accepted by mail or via the project website through July 25, 2008. Mailing Address: Danbury Branch EIS, c/o URS Corporation, 500 Enterprise Drive, Suite 3B, Rocky Hill, CT 06067 or by email through the project website: http://www.danburybranchstudy.com. The draft Purpose and Need Statement is as follows:

The purpose of the Danbury Branch Improvement Program and Electrification is to improve mobility options for the traveling public in the South Western and Housatonic Valley regions of Connecticut; to maintain and improve existing commuter rail service on the Branch, as well as to improve feeder system and intermodal connections on the Branch; and to help reduce congestion in the Route 7 Corridor between South Norwalk and New Milford, CT.

To accomplish these purposes, the following specific objectives are defined,

- Maintain and improve existing commuter rail service between Danbury Branch line rail stations, the Stamford Transportation Center; and Grand Central Terminal by reducing travel time.
- Improve intra-state commuter service options at station stops between Danbury and Stamford.
- Maximize the efficiency of the rail corridor by electrifying the branch or portions of it.
- Identify and develop strategies for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) opportunities at Branch line stations in conjunction with participating cities and towns.
- Identify parking requirements related to passenger demand and TOD growth.

Study Background

ConnDOT began the Danbury Branch improvement program with a feasibility study (Phase I) to examine the needs and identify potential improvements to the New Haven Line's commuter rail branch line service between Norwalk and Danbury. Phase I identified, reviewed, and evaluated a long list of preliminary improvement alternatives to the Branch. This resulted in a list of recommended options, including electrification between South Norwalk and Danbury, partial electrification between South Norwalk and the vicinity of the Merrit Parkway, addition of passing sidings, extension of diesel service to New Milford, and track realignment modifications. Phase II will further evaluate the five candidate alternatives selected from the Phase I analysis and address the development of an implementation plan for the improvement program.

Specifically, Phase II will constitute an environmental impact analysis and documentation for the proposed action(s) following the NEPA and Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) processes.

The overall goal of the study is to develop a single implementation plan that would be advanced to final design/engineering. This plan may consist of more than one of the candidate alternatives: a phased implementation approach may be considered, with near-term improvements and then complex components being implemented later. Such an implementation plan would consider the ability to fund each component.

Improvement Alternatives

The Phase 1 Study evaluated a long list of improvement alternatives to the Branch. These options were screened against six assessment factors (evaluation criteria) to determine whether or not they should be given further consideration. The six assessment factors were: **1) Operation Impact** – the service flexibility offered by the proposed improvement. **2) Environmental Impact** – the environmental areas of concern for each alternative were considered. **3) Fleet Equipment Impact** – in what ways does the proposed improvement impact the fleet? **4) Travel Demand** – what impact does the alternative have on ridership? **5) Time Savings** – what are the travel time savings in minutes that result from the improvement? 6**) Capital Cost** – what is the overall capital cost in dollars for the improvement?

Through extensive public involvement and meetings with the Study Advisory Committee (made up of representatives from each of the towns located in the corridor) the number of options was reduced to the five alternatives listed below. During Phase II of the study, the alternatives will be further evaluated and a preferred alternative will be selected.

A

No Build Alternative

- Maintain existing service between South Norwalk and Danbury
- Assumption is Communication and Train Control (CTC) System is in place
- Georgetown Station will be developed

B

Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative

- Defined as everything that can be done without new construction or new vehicle procurement
- Some service improvements possible, including express service or new outbound service

C

South Norwalk to Danbury Improvements Alternative

- Minor alignment changes
- Addition/upgrade of passing sidings
- Installation of new electrification system between South Norwalk and Danbury
- Use electric multiple units (EMU's)

D

Danbury to New Milford Extension and Improvements Alternative

- Extend passenger service from Danbury to New Milford
- New stations at Danbury North, Brookfield and New Milford
- Improved track alignment to allow maximum speed of 50 mph

E

Transportation Strategy Board (TSB) Partial Electrification with Feeder Rail/Bus Service Alternative

- Requested by TSB
- Partial electrification from South Norwalk to vicinity of Route 15/Merritt Parkway
- Feeder bus/rail service north to Danbury

Please note that the alternatives are not listed in any order of preference and are not ranked; they are assigned letters for ease of review.