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CONNECTICUT

Transportation Strategy Board:
Recommendations on rail freight and marine freight.

Second Section
Please see discussion in first section.

- Chop Hardenbergh

CONNECTICUT TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY BOARD

16 June. THE MOVEMENT OF GOODS WORKING GROUP ADOPTED A REPORT on the freight rail system and the marine freight system. This and other reports need the approval of the entire Transportation Strategy Board, which will forward them as recommendations to ConnDOT and the General Assembly [see 26 July issue].

Connecticut Rail Freight System

(Adopted by the Working Group on 6/19/02, with pending issue for discussion)

The existing railroad freight infrastructure in the state should at a minimum be maintained at its present capacity. Opportunities to improve it in conjunction with other projects, and to increase its utilization, should be taken. To this end, the Working Group recommends:

1. All new or rehabilitated bridges over freight railroad mainlines constructed as part of highway improvements or other State-sponsored projects should be built to provide 22 feet vertical clearance.

2. All mainline freight railroad reconstruction undertaken as part of highway improvements or other State-sponsored projects should accommodate 315,000 pound loads.

3. The state should designate a network of primary rail routes in the state, and undertake a program established to bring them up to modern clearance (22 feet) and loading (315,000 pounds) standards. The network improvement should include selective upgrades to track class where the benefits (such as highway delays at crossings or delays to trains) would warrant.

4. The State should provide incentives for industries adjacent to existing rail routes to originate or receive rail freight. This could take the form of grants or other assistance for the construction of new turnouts and industrial track, with the level of assistance related to the benefits to the State of the expected reduction in truck traffic.

The water freight strategy recommended by the Working Group includes a recommendation to institute feeder barge access to the state from the Port of New York and New Jersey. The Working Group therefore recommends:

5. Provide or improve direct railroad access to the Connecticut feeder barge terminal as part of the designated primary railroad network.

The state would benefit from higher-quality railroad links to the south and west. Ultimately, the state should have access to a high-quality direct freight route across the Hudson, with at least moderate capacity. A link of this nature would provide an opportunity to originate or terminate trailer or container (TOFC/COFC) trains in-state. This could both reduce rail transit times in and out of the state, and remove many truck-miles from the state’s highways. To this end, the Working Group recommends:

6. In the near term, the two regional railroads (P & W and Guilford) should maintain (and possibly increase*) access

over the New Haven Line at least to NYC and Long Island, and via car-float and Penn Station to New Jersey. This would allow both carriers to continue to offer services that would take trucks off the highways.

7. The state’s Class 1 railroad, CSX, should be encouraged by the State of Connecticut to market rail services via the short lines and regionals, to keep shipments on rail as far into the state as possible.

8. The State should support the proposed New York Harbor Rail Freight Tunnel. While there are capacity and clearance limitations on the Northeast Corridor, moderate capacity could be made available at night for general merchandise car types (excluding covered tri-levels), RoadRailer equipment, and single-level COFC. The tunnel would: permit a service using the existing Oak Point link to reach the Metro-North Hudson Line, would link New England directly with large intermodal hubs such as Atlanta and Tampa, and complement the infrastructure improvement recommendations of the Mid-Atlantic Rail Operations Study by the I-95 Corridor Coalition.

*the text in parentheses has not been voted upon by the Working Group

Connecticut Waterborne Freight System
(2nd Draft)
The Working Group regards the proposed feeder barge service as an important element of the waterborne freight strategy, but by no means the only one. The group has also discussed the adequacy of dredging and landside access (both road and rail) for Connecticut’s ports, and whether there might be an expanded deepwater role for them.

Feeder Barge Service
Feeder barge service would transport cargo containers between deepwater vessels at the Port of New York/New Jersey (PONYNJ) and Connecticut ports, where transhipment to/from ground transportation (primarily trucks) would occur. PONYNJ handles about 13 percent of the nation’s container traffic. Of the containers traveling more than 75 miles from the Port, almost 30% are destined to/from trade clusters in southern New England: Hartford, Springfield, and Worcester/Framingham.

Feeder barge service would provide an alternative to transhipment in the congested PONYNJ and would remove many heavy container-hauling trucks from I-95 between the PONYNJ and the proposed Connecticut termini at Bridgeport or New Haven (Coastal Corridor TIA). This diversion would reduce air pollutant emissions, reduce highway maintenance costs, and would likely reduce the number of highway accidents involving trucks. The diversion of truck traffic would also be a clearly visible action that would be received positively by Connecticut residents.

A successful container barge feeder service will bring new jobs to Connecticut (container yard operation), and will create the possibility for new ‘value-added’ container-related services (e.g. warehousing) to grow in-state.

By developing a project with the PANY&NJ, the state would foster a higher level of co-operation between the states and the various state agencies. This improved level of co-operation would help in addressing other regional transportation issues. Because the benefits would also be shared by New York, the PANY&NJ has already indicated a willingness to help fund the operation of the barge feeder service.

Depending on the type of service and the scope and structure of public sector participation, feeder barges could reduce the costs of moving the containers, ultimately contributing to lower prices for retail goods.

A successful service might leverage follow-on funding from the Federal Highway Administration for further improvement of the selected terminal and upland facilities. It could also open other ports (e.g. New London and Quonset Point, RI) to the concept, resulting in removal of additional truck trips from I-95 (Southeast Corridor TIA).

Two presentations have been made to the Working Group: for a Roll On/Roll Off (RO/RO) service to/from Bridgeport, and for a Lift On/Lift Off (LO/LO) service to/from New Haven. The TSB’s consultant has been asked to assess the complex and interrelated economic, operational, and infrastructure issues associated with each proposal. It is likely that only a single barge service would be recommended initially; at present, the Working Group has not developed a recommendation on priority, as it is awaiting the outcome of the consultant study.

The existence of established feeder barge services out of PONYNJ (Boston and Baltimore), the Port Authority’s Port Inland Distribution Network (PIDN) strategy, and the fact that two proposals have been advanced for service to Connecticut, are all indicators of a real potential, particularly in the light of increasing congestion expected on I-95. A private venture subject to market forces would likely result in the most economically efficient service. Either an initial public capital investment or some form of public operating assistance at the beginning of the operation might be appropriate, depending on the type of service and the extent of benefits expected. Models of public participation that would allow the State to recover part of any substantial initial investment should be considered.

Deepwater Ports*
The state’s three major deepwater ports (New Haven, Bridgeport, and New London) are each strategically positioned for growth in at least one “niche” market. They are well positioned with respect to rail and highway access, and can offer low-cost alternatives to PONYNJ for certain commodities. In calendar 2000, these three ports accounted for 16.6 million tons of Connecticut’s total of 19.2 million tons of maritime cargo, up 14% from 1999. New Haven is the largest port by

*The text in parentheses has not been voted upon by the Working Group.
volume, handling 10.6 million tons in 2000.

The Working Group recommends that:

- The long-term planning for dredged material disposal for ports on Long Island Sound be reviewed to assure that it provides capacity for both maintenance dredging and adequate dredging for improvements at the State’s three deepwater ports;

- Adequate long-term financial resources be provided for maintenance dredging of the three deepwater ports; and

- The State prepare a deepwater port master plan, including: a historical analysis and projection of quantities of the principal commodities destined to Connecticut and New England from offshore points; an analysis of the market share of Connecticut’s deepwater ports, including any obstacles to growth in terms of landside facilities or surface transportation access; and recommendations on appropriate improvements for the ports to attain long-term growth.

*The deepwater recommendations have not yet been discussed with the Working Group as a whole. {text from TSB website}