

HB 1079 - Written testimony to support.

Act Implementing the Recommendations of the CT Commuter Rail Council

- Restore service to Shoreline East to pre-Covid levels
- Requires the Department of Transportation to study the feasibility of a statewide transit planning and fare payment app

Status: Referred to Joint Committee on Transportation

Testimony: ETD, like most of the bus systems statewide, continued full service through the pandemic. While ridership initially declined by 70%, today it has risen above 2019 levels. This underscores the importance of maintaining service levels to ensure that public transportation options are still available as passengers return to their former commute patterns.

A single planning and real-time information app would make traveling between bus systems a more seamless experience. A single fare payment app would erase any barriers to transferring between systems and improve affordability. ETD strongly supports such efforts that remove barriers to using our statewide bus system.

HB1080 - Written Testimony to oppose. Would like to participate in any study to improve public transit services in our region.

Act Concerning Transportation Services for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

- Provide fare-free public transportation services for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities who receive services from the Department of Developmental Services.
- Cost shall be paid from funds appropriated to the DOT.
- Districts would be required to install bus shelters for any employer with 10 or more disabled employees on request.
- Study conducted by Commissioners of DOT and Developmental Services and transit districts - the demand and need for state-wide and local transportation services for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Status: Referred to Joint Committee on Transportation

Testimony: Since this bill has no new funding attached, it would have the impact of reducing funding available for provision of service to cover its expenses. This would only further reduce transportation options for the individuals this bill attempts to aide. It also removes the ability for transit districts to control their fare revenue, which is the only means the districts have to raise revenue directly.

The bill also requires transit districts to develop a process to construct bus shelters for employers employing ten or more people with certain disabilities. Transit districts are the only transit providers in the state that have shelter programs. These generally include certain ridership metrics for stop usage to warrant an investment of \$15,000 to \$25,0000 per bus shelter. CTtransit has historically not had a bus shelter program, but is not included in this bill.

While the governor's budget proposal includes significant service expansions, gaps still exist in the state's bus system. People with disabilities are disproportionately dependent on public transit for travel and are therefore particularly impacted by gaps in availability of service. We would support section 2 of the bill which would study improving public transportation services for people with disabilities.

SB1082 - Written testimony to oppose and to ask that transit districts created under Chapter 103(a) be specifically excluded

Act implementing the recommendations of the DOT regarding a reduction in blood alcohol limits for impaired driving and boating, **establishing the CT Public Transportation Council**, the Shore Line East study and Motor vehicles in livery service.

Status: Referred to Joint Committee on Transportation

Testimony: This bill would modify the Commuter Rail Council (now to be CT Public Transportation Council) to include the state bus system. While we have no objection to the council's purview extending to the CTtransit system, we would oppose any inclusion of transit districts.

Each transit district is governed by a board of directors as prescribed by Chapter 103 (a). These boards are made up of members of the participating communities, providing significant local input and control that does not exist in the CTtransit system. In addition, ETD has a Transit Advisory Committee appointed by the board and comprised of system users. This committee informs decisions impacting our riders at a level well beyond that proposed by this bill.

Governor's Bill 6659 - Written testimony to support and consider further investments for suburbs
Act concerning the state budget for the biennium ending June 30, 2025, and making appropriations therefor

Appendix. Expansion section.

Expand Bus Service to Support Workforce Transportation

Funding will provide for service enhancements in bus networks will expand opportunity for transit-dependent and transit-choice riders. Route expansions are informed by the Department of Transportation Customer Experience Action Plan and outreach that was conducted through 2022. The expansion will enable riders to rely on bus service for employment seven days a week, provide greater access for second or third shift jobs, and focus on expanding access to large business and employment hubs. Impacted networks include Greater Bridgeport Transit, Valley Transit District, Southeast Area Transit, Housatonic Area Transit, CTtransit Waterbury, CTtransit New Haven, Windham Region Transit, CTtransit New Britain/Bristol, CTtransit Meriden, and CTtransit Stamford.

Status: Public Hearing 3/0/2023, Referred to Joint Committee on Appropriations

Testimony:

The governor's budget includes significant unprecedented new investments in the state's bus transit system. For ETD, this will mean the addition of Saturday night service and Sunday service in Middletown. These expansions are critical to moving service and retail industry workers. These workers were essential during the pandemic, and buses were critical to getting them to their jobs. Yet today many are unable to perform these jobs successfully because they do not have transportation.

ETD recently conducted a transit study in partnership with RiverCOG. The study recommended Saturday night and Sunday service as high priority areas for service expansion. The governor's budget supports these recommendations.

HB6743 - Oppose; offer to share our fare-study results

ACT CONCERNING FARE-FREE PUBLIC BUS SERVICE. To require the Department of Transportation to conduct a fare equity analysis to evaluate the proposed implementation of permanent fare-free public bus transportation services in the state.

Public Hearing held 2/27

Referred to Joint Committee on Transportation

Testimony: Written testimony to oppose; would like to share with the legislature and administration our experience as the only district in Connecticut to conduct a recent comprehensive fare study that reviewed fare-free options.

As part of ETD's merger with the Middletown Transit District in July of 2022, a comprehensive fare study was conducted. The study found that the cost of fare elimination, both through loss of revenue and increase in costs, outweighed the benefits. ETD instead chose to implement expanded reduced fare programs to target groups for whom fare prices were a barrier. Over the next year, we will be working with various state agencies to establish criteria for a reduced fare for low-income individuals that utilizes existing programs for qualification. We will also be working with our 15 school districts to implement a reduced youth fare. We feel these programs best balance affordability with expenses.

Any fare-free mandate would have a significant impact on service levels statewide. While fare are not a large portion of our revenue, they do make up around 15% and unlock state matching funds. Without fares, we would be forced to significantly reduce service by as much as 45%.

This bill fails to fully realize the federal requirements for a fare-free program. Each transit district is either a direct or indirect recipient of federal funding from the Federal Transit Administration. As such, each district would be required to go through its own equity analysis and fare change policy as prescribed they their individual Title VI plans. Therefore, the state's equity analysis would not permit statewide fare-free transportation, but only on state owned CTtransit services.

Finally, we believe that transit riders should have a say in any fare-free discussion. If the state were to implement fare free and use state funding to fill the gap in funds, there would be a substantial opportunity cost involved. In our recent fare change public outreach, we heard over and over that riders were satisfied with paying a fare as long as service levels were maintained or enhanced. We believe that riders should get to choose if a new investment of state funds would be best spent on eliminating fares or enhancing bus service.

For these reasons, ETD opposes Raised Bill No. 6743. We are happy to share with the legislature and administration our experience as the only district in Connecticut to conduct a recent comprehensive fare study that reviewed fare-free options.

SB243 - No testimony; watching to make sure it remains a study

Act establishing a tax force to study the barriers to transportation for work-based learning experiences.d
Referred to Joint Committee on Transportation