

Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council President's Forum March 26, 2008

Summary of Proceedings

Chair James Blair read an opening statement and introduced Metro-North Railroad President Peter Cannito, who had recently announced that he would be retiring in July. Peter Cannito then presented Robert MacLagger, Richard Bernard, Gregory Bradley, Ron Yutko and Thomas Tandy, members of his senior staff. Attending from the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council was Rodney Chabot; from Connecticut DOT was Albert Martin, Deputy Commissioner and Eugene Colonese, Rail Administrator.

Prior to the public speaking portion of the program, Mr. Cannito highlighted Metro-North's performance measures: On-time performance is up, reaching 100% on four separate occasions; ridership surpassed 80 million in 2007 and is projected to achieve 82 million for 2008. Mr. Cannito noted that this represents twice the number of rides that occurred in his first year as MNR President. President Cannito also mentioned that there is growth in non-traditional markets and increased ridership has offset costs. In conclusion he noted that the M8 contract was awarded and the program is on schedule. There are 100 seats in the M8 car, a loss of 20–22 seats over the current M2 configuration, due to ADA compliance and the relocation of environmentally sensitive equipment to inside the car. He added that the M3 rebuild is being done in-house and 10 cars are complete.

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES EXPRESSED BY RIDERS

Customer Service Relations/Communication

1. Would it be possible to create a default setting on the online schedule tool that notes the current time and lists the next few train departures?
2. It would be helpful to post PDFs of station schedules in addition to line schedules.
3. A rider was charged a \$5 penalty even though there was no ticket machine on their side of the station.
4. The annual customer satisfaction survey was good, but it should include questions about origin-destination.
5. What is the policy for the train crew in terms of wearing ID badges?

Response: ID badges should always be displayed. First name pins will be out in the next couple of months. Spotters are being employed and corrective action is being taken. If you encounter a worker without a name badge, alert MNR to the train number, time of day and day of week.

6. Cell phones are becoming annoying with people speaking loudly and using vulgarity. Conductors tend to take a passive approach to this issue. Quiet cars are needed.
7. DVD rental boxes could be a revenue source.
8. There should be local beers in bar cars.
9. Smoking on platforms should not be allowed.

Station/Facility Conditions/Improvements

1. Platforms conditions are not sufficiently maintained. A puddle of vomit went one week without proper removal from MNR workers.
2. Graffiti on seats is a concern.
3. Restrooms at Grand Central are appalling. They lack auto flushing and sensor sinks.

Response: MNR has expanded restrooms at Grand Central and added new restrooms on lower level. MNR is also expanding/renovating the Station Master's office in GCT that also has bathroom facilities. MNR will look into motion-activated bathroom fixtures.

4. Have laptop trays in non-facing seats and more flip-up seats been considered?

Response: We have not considered laptop trays, but MNR is looking into bicycle possibilities.

Service Issues

1. Short trains on the New Haven line is not a good thing.

Response: MNR agrees that shortage of trains on the New Haven line is a concern. The first 100 M8's will not replace old trains, but be added to the current stock.

2. Earlier trains are needed to get to the airports.
3. M7 cars should say either "local" or "express". Everyone knows they are going to Grand Central.
4. A rider sometimes takes the first departure in the morning at Beacon at 6:03am. Why is next departure not for another 30 minutes?

Response: The gap in service is because the first Poughkeepsie train goes all the way to New Haven due to a lack of equipment.

5. A rider's commute from Beacon to Ludlow has increased recently.

Response: Bob MacLagger replied that some station pairs are a problem. The rider may be the victim of some of the express train scheduling. Mr. Cannito stated that they will

get back to the rider on this issue. The growth of intermediate, reverse peak and off-peak routes are areas MNR is looking at.

Capital Planning

1. Would money spent on New York/Penn Station access be better spent investing elsewhere such as the Maybrook Beacon line, which could be created for \$100 million? A 1989 feasibility study for this project should be revisited in light of current gas prices.

Response: It is not thought that the ridership projected on the proposed Maybrook line would justify investment. There is no active consideration of a Maybrook-Beacon line.

Safety and Security

1. Passenger conduct on late trains is bad. One train was the setting for a fight between 30 youths. There is no MTA PD presence.

Response: MNR is working with MTA PD to identify trains with high frequency of problems.

Bicycles

1. A bicyclist representative criticized the MNR policy of not allowing bikes on peak trains and suggested that the policy should be amended.

Response: MNR encourages bike use, but no system with a ridership like MNR's allows for peak bike storage. A larger number of trains are necessary in order to offset the number of seats lost to bike storage.

2. The infrastructure is needed to accommodate more bikes. Could reverse peak trains have bikes on them?

Response: Reverse peak trains are as crowded as peak trains. Not allowing bikes has to do only with ridership.

3. Coordinated planning is needed to address the bike issue. It was surprising to hear that there are no bike provisions on the new M8's.

4. Former president of CT Bicycle Coalition proposed that special old cars be set aside for bike storage. He proposed a summit between engineers/designers and bicyclists and suggested that perhaps vertical racks could be placed in the vestibule.

Response: The new M8 is already designed. Any bicycle cars would have to be an option order at \$2.2M a car. There are bicycle trains on the New Haven line on the weekends. The café cars are used for bike storage.

5. A bike advocate challenged the board to be forward-thinking concerning the bike issue. Over the next 20–30 years, it will be critical to create an interwoven network of transportation options.

Response: MNR is not close-minded on the bike issue. Both sides need to work together and partner in getting more funds. It must be remembered that there are costs associated with “thinking out of the box.”

6. Regarding bicycle storage space on the M8's and M3's, space allocated is a few inches short of accommodating even more bikes. Metro North should incorporate more flip-up seats like on Danish Railways.

Response: While MNR encourages riders to bike to/from stations, the cost to retro-adapt trains to accommodate more bikes is prohibitive.

Other/Suggestions

1. Push-pull trains have been demonstrated to be dangerous, as in the Glendale, CA accident. There, 11 rows of each end of the double-decker trains have been roped off as a designated crush zone is evidence to this fact. Instead, Metro-North should employ turntables to turn trains around.