

*FINAL REPORT OF THE
MIDDLETOWN RAIL EXPLORATORY COMMITTEE*

Committee Members

Vincent Amato

Robert Bass

*Robert Bourne,
Chairman*

Hugh Cox

David Gallitto

William Kuehn

Larry "CJ" Marino

Mark Masselli

Lawrence McHugh

Ronald Organek

Russ. St. John

Accomplishments

The Committee conducted five (5) working sessions and, in so doing, established a solid working group of individuals dedicated to the promotion of rail transportation in Middlesex County as a positive economic force. The eleven (11) individuals on the Committee represent a broad range of interests from government, business, tourism, the CT Central Railroad, and even model railroading.

One of the initial tasks undertaken by the Committee was to invite representatives of the two rail operations and their respective landlords to discuss the structure of their charters and leases, and to learn of their respective economic/customer base of operations. To that end, Committee members Russ St. John and Bob Bass offered a complete understanding of the CT Central Railroad operations and the obstacles and opportunities inherent within their sphere of influence. Henry Thorpe, Chairman of the CT Valley Railroad, Joe Hickey of the CT Department of Environmental Protection and Dick Rathbun and R. Gotcher of the CT Department of Transportation offered additional information on the operations and, from the State's perspective, opportunities for broadening existing rail line services between Old Saybrook and Hartford. The Committee was also advised of the various administrative functions that DOT performs in overseeing active railroads, rail banked railroads and land banks where rails have been removed. Through the discussions with State officials, the Committee was urged to pursue rail improvements and extensions which are based primarily upon economic development activities.

The CT Department of Environmental Protection owns 22 miles of track from Old Saybrook, north, to mile post 5.5 at the Pratt & Whitney switch. This track is leased to the Connecticut Valley Railroad. The Railroad Museum of New England subleases from the Valley Railroad; its membership of rail enthusiasts and car restorers operates the Essex area. From the Pratt & Whitney switch to the north the rail right-of-way is owned by the CT Department of Transportation. The CT Central Railroad leases from DOT and has the authority to extend its operations as far south as the Pratt & Whitney switch. The Middletown cluster of the CT Central Railroad includes to Portland, Middlefield, Cromwell and Durham to Reeds Gap where linkage is provided for freight traffic coming out of North Haven. The CT Valley Railroad possesses a charter authorizing its operations from Old Saybrook to Hartford. Most of the Middletown cluster is up to Class II standards, meaning that train speed up to 25 miles an hour is permitted.

In discussions with DOT and DEP personnel, the Committee learned that limited funds are available for capital improvements to rail operations. The start-up costs for passenger operations are exceedingly high and are driven, in part, by sufficient population densities. The Committee has been advised that the best opportunities for restoring the line should be tied to economic development initiatives such as in Middletown's Enterprise Zone and undeveloped industrial land near the TPC in Cromwell. Secondly, opportunities could be developed through tourism efforts. Hence, short-term goals should be developed around expanding existing operations of the CT Valley Railroad and the CT Central Railroad to build the necessary infrastructure for ultimate passenger service to and from Hartford.

The Committee, over the past six months, has become very aware of threats to future railroad development and restoration. Cognizant of an adjoining community's efforts to convert rail right-of-way to trail, the Committee initiated, and the Common Council adopted a resolution opposing the "conversion of any and all rails, railroad rail beds, or railroad rights-of-way which currently exist and which may benefit the City of Middletown to any uses other than railroad use."

Simultaneously, support for restoring the rail line was offered by an application of the Middlesex County Revitalization Commission to the CT Department of Economic Development in

September, 1994, of four inter-related components for the specific purpose of restoring rail service from Old Saybrook to Hartford; upgrading rail service to Portland; improving the economic viability of the region; retaining jobs; and, offering industrial sites for potential rail users. While this application was not funded, it is indicative of the regional support that the City of Middletown can garner to further its own interests in restoring the railroad. Inherent in the Revitalization Commission's actions, is the desire of individual towns and their respective Economic Development Commissions to support the re-opening of the line - support which the City should utilize in the future.

The Committee is cognizant, also, of the adverse publicity that individuals or small groups can generate to counteract the overall economic benefit of rail restoration. These actions and activities need to be neutralized by the positive aspects of rail restoration.

Next Phase - Goals

The Rail Exploratory Committee recognizes that any improvements to the rail infrastructure in Middlesex County must be a long-term effort. Improvements must be made to the rail line incremental as funding becomes available and as opportunities present themselves for new, either, industrial development or tourism related development.

Primary in this effort is the need to ensure the economic viability of the CT Central Railroad's operation of the Middletown "cluster". While some degree of economic stability has been achieved over the past several years, improvements are needed in the company's cash flow in order to afford modest capital improvements. The relocation of part of Pratt & Whitney's operations to Middletown should be used as a springboard in establishing a permanent working relationship between the engine builder and the railroad. CT Central's service to its Portland clients is only as good as the Connecticut River swing bridge will allow. Thus the necessity of fully funding its repairs.

Further extensions south beyond the Pratt & Whitney switch will open up new industrial development opportunities which should solidify CT Central's cash and operational base. To that end, the Committee recommends the continuation and expansion of the Middletown Rail Exploratory Committee to include a broader representation. New members might include persons from other communities along the Old Saybrook to Hartford corridor within Middlesex County, persons either currently benefitting or wishing to benefit from the railroad through economic development project and, finally, a corps of rail affectionados who can assist in fulfilling a public relations goal of the Committee. That is, to develop enthusiasm for the rail, to educate the public about the rail, and, finally, to more fully involve the public.

In developing a public relations effort on rail, information needs to be generated to educate persons in Middlesex County on certain technical advances, rail programs and projects in other parts of the Country in achieving freight, tourism and passenger service, and a series of features on the "short line" operations working throughout the State of Connecticut. It is the short line rail companies which have emerged over the past ten years to provide the "feeder" service to industries located off the main lines in areas such as the Middletown cluster.

An extension of the Committee's life, as granted by the Common Council, should involve the creation of a paper trail of continuing support throughout Middlesex County. The Committee should further be charged with the development of a long-range strategy to win State grant/support dollars for rail infrastructure throughout Middlesex County and to generate the all important flow of publicity and public support for rail development.

With these findings and recommendations, the Middletown Rail Exploratory Committee respectfully submits this report dated December 20, 1994.

APPENDIX - DOCUMENTS

- Middletown Riverfront Development Plan Final Report, April 1986
- North End/CBD Urban Renewal Plan - Revised August 24, 1992
- Various new paper and magazine articles
- 1994 Connecticut Rail Passenger Fact Book - March 1994
- Capital Region Transportation Plan - November 17, 1993
- Middletown Planning & Zoning comments to the Midstate Regional Planning Agency Long Range Transportation Plan - July 27, 1994
- Connecticut 1994 Rail Transportation Map - Ownership and Service - May 1994
- Excerpt from Middlesex County Revitalization Commission Application to CT Department of Economic Development dated September 1, 1994

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RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Common Council, on June 6, 1994, authorized the creation of the Middletown Rail Exploratory Committee to investigate the potential of commuter and tourist rail services; and

WHEREAS, said Committee has conducted regular monthly meetings and has invited guests to better understand the issues; and

WHEREAS, the Committee has prepared a written report of its findings and recommendations.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MIDDLETOWN:

That the Rail Exploratory Committee be continued and expanded to accomplish the following:

1. Ensure that the link over the swing bridge is fully funded.
2. Further, develop a Pratt & Whitney/Northeast Utilities/CT Central Railroad relationship.
3. Facilitate rail extension to the south.
4. Develop an independent volunteer rail club serving Middletown; and

FURTHER, BE IT RESOLVED:

That the expanded membership of the Rail Exploratory Committee should include: representation from among Portland, Middlefield, Cromwell, Durham and other communities along the rail corridor; persons interested in rail development for regional economic development benefit; and, rail affectionado's; and

FURTHER, BE IT RESOLVED:

That said Committee shall submit written reports of the Committee's activities to the Common Council on June 30th and December 31st of each year for the life of the Committee.

**RECOMMENDED BY: THE RAIL EXPLORATORY COMMITTEE
ON DECEMBER 20, 1994**

SUBMITTED BY: MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE