

# CTDOT: Low turnout shows support for NHHS rail

Daniel Jackson | Posted: Friday, June 15, 2012 11:40 am

John Bernick, project manager for the New Haven to Springfield rail project, said the low turnout of residents at the public hearing June 7 showed most people are in favor of the project. “There really weren’t any dissenters.”

“When you hold these hearings, typically you only hear from the people who are against the project. The people who are for the project, they look at the notice and they go ‘hey, I like this. I don’t need to show up.’”

About 30 people showed up for the environmental impact hearing for the New Haven to Springfield rail line at Central Connecticut State University to discuss the environmental impact of the rail. Held in Torp Theater, the room had the potential to hold 360 people.

Some residents offered some suggestions for the rail line: lower the cost of short trips, place bike racks at each station, create a station in New Britain and extend continuous service to the Greenwich area.

Bernick said many of the comments fell outside the scope of the project but the state will subsidize the rail line to lower short trip fares. For example, a train ticket from the Berlin station to Meriden currently costs \$4 online and \$6 if purchased 15 minutes before the train arrives.

“That’s being worked out,” said Bernick. CTDOT is currently exploring models on how to best subsidize the rail.

The NHHS line, projected to open for service in 2016, will cost \$647 million in a mix of federal grants and state money. Designers plan to build a double track from New Haven to Springfield which will carry trains making 25 round trips up and down the line at faster speeds—up to 110 mph. These funds do not include the purchase of trains and the upgrade of stations.

The funding to build the double track through Berlin will cost \$60 million dollars and was some of the first funds appropriated for the project. The federal government granted the state \$40 million through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009.

The remaining \$20 million for the construction in Berlin was funded by the state of Connecticut.

While in support of the rail, Yvette Ghannam said there were many opportunities for New Britain if a station were put in. People would travel up from New York City and students attending CCSU would have more transportation options.

“We need the opportunity for jobs. We need the opportunity for education,” she said.

Because she commutes to Greenwich by train for her job, she drives to New Haven to use the Metro

North Trains because they are more reliable. She lives close to the Berlin border. “But in my case, I would go to Berlin,” she said.

New Britain cannot have a train station because the rail line does not run through the city. To shift the track would be more money than the project currently has, Bernick said.

By building on the existing infrastructure, “you get the absolute most bang for your buck,” he said

The results from public input will be submitted to the Federal Railroad Administration and the Federal Transportation Administration at the end of the year. CTDOT expects the federal government to issue a “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI). After that, the project will head to final design and then eventual construction.