



# Eastern Connecticut Corridor Rail and Transit Feasibility Study (ECRTS)

## Appendix M: Engagement Summary

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## 1. Introduction

The in-depth evaluation of existing conditions in the study area involved a series of engagement efforts to collect feedback from communities, stakeholders, and the public. This report summarizes the engagement activities conducted as part of this study. This outreach includes a Steering Committee, topic-specific working groups, interviews with major employers and anchor institutions across the region, as well as a public survey, public information meetings and a public comment period. Key feedback and guidance helped inform the general approach of the study, as well as the development of the technical documents and final report.

## 2. Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was convened by CTDOT at the outset of the feasibility study and was comprised of agency partners, community members, tribal representatives, business leaders and other organizations. The Steering Committee provided high level guidance and feedback to the study team throughout the study. *The Steering Committee has convened four times over the course of the study to-date and provided key insights.*

Steering Committee membership included:

- CTDOT Bureau of Public Transportation (Office of Rail and Office of Transit and Ridesharing),
- CTDOT Bureau of Policy & Planning (Office of Strategic Planning and Projects),
- Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT),
- Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG),
- Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce,
- Amtrak,
- Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT),
- CTrides,
- US Department of Defense (US Navy Submarine Base Groton and US Coast Guard Academy),
- Tribal Representatives (Mohegan Tribe and Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, including Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Casino representatives), and
- Project Champion, Zell Steever (Groton Conservation Advocates, CT Commuter Rail Council).

**Table 1. Steering Committee Meeting Summaries**

March 21, 2022	Kick-off meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study introduction &amp; background,</li> <li>• Introduction to study team and committee members,</li> <li>• Overview of study scope and working groups, and</li> <li>• Description of study timeline and anticipated meeting schedule.</li> </ul>
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September 7, 2022	<p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comments on overview of existing conditions,</li> <li>• Review of initial potential station locations and zones, and</li> <li>• Emphasis on the framing of benefits associated with improved transit in the region, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality through transit, potential to adjust transit routes/schedules, and improving coordination between trains, ferries and buses.</li> </ul>
March 7, 2023	<p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comments on the Draft Preliminary Feasibility Assessment,</li> <li>• Confirmation that the scope focuses on both commuter rail and ground transportation solutions,</li> <li>• Confirmation that upcoming tasks include the development of a transit plan including headways, span of service, interconnectivity, local and regional connections, and inclusion of the 2015 SEAT Comprehensive Operational Analysis,</li> <li>• Confirmation that the scope includes an overview of parking at potential rail stations across the region and yard and train storage space, and</li> <li>• Emphasis on the importance of transit-supportive land use policies and coordination with the other agencies, such as the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT).</li> </ul>
August 8, 2023	<p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comments on the Draft Final Report,</li> <li>• Confirmation that recent SEAT updates will be reflected in the Final Report,</li> <li>• Confirmation that ridership projections account for tourism, employment, and housing growth,</li> <li>• Emphasis on opportunity for phasing, including information on typical timeline of steps in the project development process and what would be needed to incrementally advance aspects of the identified short- and long-term strategies, and</li> <li>• Clarify next steps.</li> </ul>

The Steering Committee also had the opportunity to provide comments on draft versions of the Preliminary Feasibility Assessment, Final Report and all associated appendices. Input and suggested clarifications from the Steering Committee were incorporated into the documents as the study progressed. One Steering Committee member expressed the opinion that the scope of the study was too narrow, all corridors and stations should be pursued, the project development timeline would be too long, and urged the Department to compare rail and transit costs to the highway capacity costs when considering investment in the transportation network in the region. Some other Steering Committee members requested a formal presentation to legislators in the study area at the conclusion of the study.

## 3. Working Groups

The study team and the Steering Committee identified distinct working groups to conduct outreach and solicit feedback on various aspects of the feasibility study. Working groups convened between 1-2 times over the course of the study. The working groups were organized in the following categories: Municipal, Transit, Ridesharing, and Bicycle/Pedestrian, Rail, and Customer-Focused. Additionally, a Major Employers and Anchor Institutions Working Group category consisted of focused interviews to help better understand the needs of their employees/visitors, commute patterns, and any major developments in the future that should be taken into consideration in the study.

Each working group was strategically engaged throughout the study. Discussion topics were developed by the study team to focus on informing specific components of the work. The feedback from each of the working group meetings was compiled by the study team to supplement the technical analyses and inform the final report. The engagement and feedback of each of the working groups is summarized below.

### 3.1. Municipal Working Group

The Municipal Working Group was comprised of municipal staff and chief elected officials from municipalities in the study area. The Municipal Working Group convened two times with supplemental meetings over the course of the study. In addition to feedback received in the working group meetings, the study team sent a separate survey to the working group participants. The survey focused on identifying future planned developments, transportation improvements, or other community projects that would be informative to the feasibility study and predicting future public transportation demand. This outreach helped to provide local and regional context as well as station site-specific information.

In addition to representatives from CTDOT, the Municipal Working Group included representatives from:

- City of New London,
- Town of Waterford,
- Town of Montville,
- Town of Bozrah,
- City of Norwich,
- Town of Preston,
- Town of Ledyard,
- City of Groton,
- Town of Groton,
- Borough of Stonington,
- Town of Stonington,
- Town of Westerly (RI), and
- SCCOG.

**Table 2. Municipal Working Group Meeting Summaries**

<p>Offered a choice: June 29 or June 30, 2022</p>	<p>Kick-off meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study introduction &amp; background,</li> <li>• Introduction to study team and working group members,</li> <li>• Overview of study scope, and</li> <li>• Description of study timeline and anticipated meeting schedule.</li> </ul> <p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locations and sizes of planned development in the vicinity of possible station sites,</li> <li>• Descriptions of vacant parcels and possible in-fill development opportunities by community, and</li> <li>• Anticipated changes in zoning by community.</li> </ul>
<p>April 24, 2023</p>	<p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential Groton Station Location: Potential for Transit Oriented Development. There is a Tax Increment Financing district. Growth is expected over the next decade. The town is encouraged to see a potential rail station and expressed excitement about the opportunities.</li> <li>• Potential Mystic Alternative Station Location: Town of Stonington acknowledged technical limitations of existing location. New development, transportation improvements, and workforce development in area.</li> <li>• Potential Stonington Station Location: Excellent walkability in area. Parking limitations. Community desire for more rail service.</li> <li>• Existing Westerly Station: Location of employment training hub. Available parking.</li> <li>• Potential Norwich West Station Location: A station had been contemplated in the past. New development in the area. A study on transportation-oriented communities is being developed.</li> <li>• Potential Montville Station Location: Concerns regarding high-level platforms and curves. Available parking. Building a new boat launch and fishing pier just south, adjacent to the new Gateway operation.</li> <li>• Potential U.S Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) Station Location: Emphasis on the need to engage the USCGA in conversations about the potential for a rail station on the property.</li> </ul>

The study team also presented to chief elected officials to provide updates on two occasions:

- A joint special Chief Elected Official (CEO) meeting with the CTDOT I-95E Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study team on December 8, 2022.

- City and Town managers, tribal affiliate members, and military liaisons were also invited.
- An Executive Board meeting of the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) on May 2, 2023.

### 3.2. Transit Working Group

The Transit Working Group was comprised of transit agency staff and other transit focused organizations in the study area. Along with the study’s dedicated Rail Working Group, it was important to seek input from bus and ferry operators, private transport services, and bike/pedestrian organizations to learn about connectivity plans and needs. The Transit Working Group convened twice, on June 29, 2022, and April 26, 2023.

Representatives from the following organizations were members of the Transit Working Group:

- CTDOT Bureau of Public Transportation (Office of Transit and Ridesharing),
- CTDOT Bureau of Policy & Planning (Office of Strategic Planning and Projects),
- SCCOG,
- SEAT,
- Mohegan Sun,
- Foxwoods,
- Windham Regional Transit District (WRTD),
- Estuary Transit District (9-Town Transit),
- Eastern Connecticut Transportation Consortium, Inc. (ECTC),
- Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA),
- Greyhound,
- CTrides,
- Bike Groton,
- Fishers Island Ferry, and
- Groton-New London Airport.

**Table 3. Transit Working Group Meeting Summaries**

<p>Offered a choice: June 29 or June 30, 2022</p>	<p>Kick-off meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study introduction &amp; background,</li> <li>• Introduction to study team and working group members,</li> <li>• Overview of study scope,</li> <li>• Description of study timeline and anticipated meeting schedule, and</li> <li>• Existing transit services and bicycle/pedestrian facilities.</li> </ul> <p>Key feedback received:</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation to Include ferries/ferry connections on maps and in analysis,</li> <li>• Discussion around transit fleet electrification initiatives and timeline,</li> <li>• Noted need for protected bike lanes in the region,</li> <li>• Noted anticipated transit service changes by agency,</li> <li>• Acknowledged recent regional active transportation plan documented substantial sidewalk gaps across the region,</li> <li>• Noted community interest in improving bicycle facilities and accessibility,</li> <li>• Discussed need for public transportation access to public recreation areas, and</li> <li>• Discussed seasonality of public transportation needs.</li> </ul>
<p>April 26, 2023</p>	<p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More frequent transit services are needed for shift employees.</li> <li>• Shore Line East service offers inadequate reverse commuting from New Haven.</li> <li>• High volume for the ferries is primarily from New Haven or New York on Friday evenings, Sunday afternoons, and Monday mornings.</li> <li>• Existing micro transit services are embraced by the public.</li> <li>• Micro transit is ideal for filling in gaps and supplementing rather than replacing fixed route service.</li> <li>• SEAT is applying for grants to expand evening and weekend SmartRide service.</li> <li>• Increasing the frequency of service from hourly to every half hour would better serve commuting needs.</li> <li>• A Working Group has been initiated for a uniform fare study.</li> <li>• Funding is a barrier to expanding span of service and frequency, as it requires increasing the fleet and the workforce.</li> <li>• Extending geographical limits of service with existing resources compromises SEAT’s ability to maintain existing schedule. Requests for route modifications have downstream impacts.</li> <li>• The express bus to Hartford is under consideration because of low ridership.</li> <li>• Better connections to Rhode Island are needed, however there are potential ramifications of becoming interstate providers.</li> <li>• Opportunities for better coordination of services exist among providers.</li> <li>• SEAT geography and membership is shrinking.</li> </ul>



# **CTrail Strategies**

## **EASTERN CONNECTICUT CORRIDOR RAIL AND TRANSIT FEASIBILITY STUDY**

Following the final Steering Committee Meeting, the study team also presented the draft final findings from the ECRTS report, focused on transit strategies, to the SEAT Board. The presentation occurred during a regular SEAT Board meeting on October 18, 2023. The Board expressed concerns around current workforce and equipment constraints to implementing expanded bus service in the region but acknowledged the lower cost and faster timeline needed to implement transit strategies as compared to rail strategies.



### 3.3. Rail Working Group

The Rail Working Group consisted of representatives from the owners of the two passenger and freight rail corridors with specific knowledge of the region’s rail infrastructure, current and future service levels, and future needs. The Working Group met on October 19, 2022, and February 28, 2023. During these meetings, attendees were provided with study context, updates on work completed to-date, and plans for future study work. The study team also requested input on opportunities and constraints in each corridor and feedback on conceptual alignments and station locations.

The Rail Working Group included representatives from:

- CTDOT Bureau of Public Transportation (Office of Rail),
- CTDOT Bureau of Policy & Planning (Office of Strategic Planning and Projects),
- Amtrak,
- Northeast Central Railroad (Genesee & Wyoming),
- Providence and Worcester Railroad (Genesee & Wyoming), and
- Rhode Island Department of Transportation.

**Table 4. Rail Working Group Meeting Summaries**

<p>October 19, 2022</p>	<p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Westerly Station would require significant work to have a high-level platform and the current station has no space in the building for crews.</li> <li>• The existing Mystic Station is on a sharp curve; it would not be able to accommodate high-level platforms.</li> <li>• There is limited space for trains to meet on each corridor.</li> <li>• There are a few remaining unprotected grade crossings (most challenging ones) along the NEC that need upgrades.</li> <li>• Freight needs to be able to move along the corridors at current levels and leave potential to grow operations in the future.</li> </ul>
<p>February 28, 2023</p>	<p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passengers want more service on weekends due to the nature of the trip generators in the region.</li> <li>• There are security considerations along the corridor and, as a result, there needs to be continued coordination with the Department of Defense for possible USCGA station location.</li> <li>• The Thames River Corridor would not need to be electrified before service could be operated (this study is considering both electrified and non-electrified options).</li> <li>• It is challenging for the existing Mystic Station to accommodate high level platforms (sharp curve, super elevation) and the station’s adjacent</li> </ul>

	<p>unprotected crossing, make an alternative location in Mystic more feasible for extended commuter rail service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Working Group suggested a potential siting of the future high-level platforms closer to the CT border at Westerly Station in RI because it is a straighter segment of track.</li> <li>• The Working Group noted that the corridor capacity analysis included the projected additional service operated by Amtrak along the Northeast Corridor.</li> </ul>
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The study team also presented the study overview and findings-to-date during the development of the Existing Conditions technical memorandum to a special meeting of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council on September 21, 2022, in Clinton, Connecticut.

Following the release of the ECRTS draft final report, Amtrak provided additional comments on the study’s findings. Overall, Amtrak expressed support for examining expanded passenger rail service in southeastern Connecticut, both along the Northeast Corridor and to other off-corridor destinations, and welcomed the opportunity to partner with CTDOT and other stakeholders in the future. Specific feedback on the study recommended the consideration of the following:

- Planning for integration of increased passenger service into Amtrak’s existing and future operations in order to maximize operational compatibility wherever possible (i.e., fleet, scheduling, platforms and transfers), especially as Amtrak works to increase capacity and operational resiliency and to reduce travel times throughout the NEC.
- Further analysis on the operational impacts/requirements for terminating trains at Westerly and increased use of the New London Station.
- New stations should be designed in partnership with Amtrak and be built to meet standards set by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

### 3.4. Customer-Focused Working Group

The Customer-Focused Working Group consisted of stakeholder and advocacy organizations throughout the study area as well as the CTDOT Bureau of Public Transportation Customer Experience Unit. The study team received input from groups including the United Way of Southeastern CT, Senior Resources Agency on Aging, Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, United Community & Family Services (UCSF) and Eastern Connecticut Transportation Consortium (ECTC). These organizations have an understanding of the broader needs of diverse communities through their work and interactions. The Customer-Focused Working Group provided the project team with a unique opportunity to learn from stakeholders working with riders and potential riders, especially from vulnerable population groups. The meeting was held on March 9, 2023.

**Table 5. Customer-Focused Working Group Meeting Summary**

March 9, 2023	<p>Key feedback received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges with using existing transit services are due to levels of service, gaps in current geographic locations and span of transit service.</li> </ul>
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- General lack of knowledge of the transportation options available in the region and how to use them also presents challenges.
- Long, convoluted transit trips for trips that are short drives use of personal vehicles and contributes to reduced ridership.
- Employers are trying to hire and want to tap into the youth population, but the lack of transportation options is a major challenge for this segment of the population.
- Transportation is the #1 barrier to accessing healthcare, employment, educational opportunities.
- Employers struggle getting people trained due to lack of transportation to training programs, which has a downstream impact on getting people into livable wage jobs.
- Increasingly, multiple families share one car.
- There is a need for express service between New London and Norwich.
- There is interest in faster, direct, and affordable transit service.
- Car ownership is cost prohibitive for many in the region; there are reports of individuals spending 30 percent of salaries on transportation.
- Some workforce development programs subsidize transportation for individuals participating in the program, but only for the first few months.
- There's a need for travel training to educate people on how to ride the bus.
- There needs to be a single location for people to find out about all the transportation resources available across the region; currently there are several different websites and smartphone applications (apps).
- There has been a general lack of promotion on transit service by human and social service agencies because the existing service is not meeting the needs of people (frequency, span, speed).
- The group suggested that community ambassadors be identified to get the word out about the transportation services available in the region.
- There are language and literacy challenges in this region; signage and information about the transportation services needs to be simple and easy to understand.
- There needs to be seamless transfers between modes.
- There needs to be uniform fares between different transit service providers (different fare structures between systems is confusing to riders and potential riders).
- Transit usage should somehow be incentivized.

## 3.5. Major Employer/Anchor Institution Working Group

The Major Employer and Anchor Institution Working Group manifested as a series of interviews, individual conversations with some of the region's largest employers, academic institutions, and tourist attractions. These types of entities have unique insight on travel patterns, opportunities, and needs in the study area, especially around off-peak public transportation needs. The interviews addressed public transportation options, access, awareness, and usage before and after the pandemic. The interviews addressed concerns and suggestions for public transportation services and infrastructure, transit incentive programs for employees, and parking availability.

Agencies interviewed included:

- Connecticut Port Authority,
- CTDOT Bureau of Public Transportation (Office of Transit and Ridesharing),
- Eversource
- Foxwoods Resort Casino,
- General Dynamics Electric Boat,
- Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce,
- Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation,
- Mitchell College,
- Mohegan Sun Resort Casino,
- Mohegan Tribe,
- Orsted,
- Pfizer,
- Rhode Island Airport Corporation,
- Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT),
- Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA),
- Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT),
- Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG),
- Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer),
- University of Connecticut (Uconn) Avery Point,
- US Coast Guard Academy, and
- US Navy Submarine Base.

The study team received meaningful feedback and information from the organizations interviewed including future plans for development, employee commuting needs, parking operations, along with insights on specific station sites. This information has been embedded into the study and the analysis, helping the study team better understand projected ridership and economic benefits. The information collected is not attributed to any particular organization. Table 6 reflects the key takeaways and themes that emerged across the conversations.

Table 6. Interview Themes

<b>Personal vehicles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple institutions reported 90% or more employees using personal vehicles.</li> </ul>
<b>Parking availability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some corporations are increasing parking.</li> <li>Some corporations have parking options off-site for employees and use a shuttle to get employees from parking to the worksite.</li> <li>There are concerns around growth and limited parking availability in congested areas.</li> </ul>
<b>Pandemic impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colleges and universities report almost all in-person classes with some hybrid courses post-pandemic.</li> <li>There was a major decrease in employees during the pandemic; employers are working to rebuild their workforce.</li> <li>Employers desire to bring employees back to the office post-pandemic.</li> <li>Some jobs require in person work.</li> </ul>
<b>Transit employee incentive programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutions report that the incentive programs are underutilized.</li> <li>A few institutions reported employee carpooling.</li> </ul>
<b>Transit issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infrequent transit service is a major issue.</li> <li>There is a disconnect between transit schedules and work/class schedules.</li> <li>SEAT buses have limited schedules.</li> <li>SEAT buses do not run on Sundays.</li> <li>Amtrak trains stop less frequently at Mystic and Westerly than New London.</li> <li>There are gaps in transit service between New London and Groton.</li> <li>Many individuals that need public transportation are grounds and food staff and/or work second or third shifts.</li> <li>Little access to transportation makes it harder to retain employees, especially newer employees in the second and third shift jobs.</li> </ul>
<b>Suggestions for transportation solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding transportation services to JFK/LaGuardia, Logan, TF Greene, and Bradley Airports could improve the transportation system.</li> <li>Adding Waterford and Groton station locations could benefit riders. More frequent and direct service between New London and Groton could benefit riders.</li> <li>Ferry and water taxi solutions should be considered across the Thames River.</li> <li>Stopping more frequently at Mystic (Amtrak) would be useful.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be a bus stop closer to US Navy Submarine Base.</li> <li>• Rail stations at the US Coast Guard Academy and closer to UConn Avery Point would improve the system.</li> </ul>
<b>Transit/rail preferences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commute patterns suggest that there may be more demand for bus access than rail access at the major employers in the region.</li> <li>• Passenger rail between New London and Norwich is desirable for the major trip generators along the line.</li> <li>• Rail connection to Groton from Guilford, New Haven, and Providence is desirable.</li> <li>• Transit that is direct, has parking, and is accessible to the communities would be valuable.</li> <li>• Daily commuters from Westerly would benefit from increased rail and bus services.</li> </ul>
<b>Pedestrian and bike</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better pedestrian connections and access points are needed.</li> <li>• Additional bike paths are needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job growth in New London and Groton with limited affordable housing availability is concerning. Transit and housing affordability are top of mind challenges for employees in the region.</li> <li>• The younger generation is more open to public transit.</li> <li>• There is a demand for an increase in transit level of service.</li> <li>• There is a desire to transition people from cars to public transportation.</li> <li>• Changes present an opportunity to upgrade security and safety systems at existing and new station locations.</li> <li>• People are using Uber or Lyft to get to the train station.</li> </ul>

## 4. Public Engagement

### 4.1. Public Survey

To engage the public for maximum feedback, the study team launched a MetroQuest survey on December 1, 2022. MetroQuest is an online public engagement tool that utilizes game-like planning techniques to create compelling, interactive, and educational surveys. MetroQuest surveys are designed to optimize engagement quickly. The platform is compatible with most devices, including laptops, tablets, smart phones, and kiosks. Socioeconomic characteristics of the region were analyzed, including on Limited English proficiency (LEP), which led the study team to release the survey in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Mandarin (simplified) Chinese.

The survey was advertised in print and digital media outlets including The Bulletin (Norwich), The Day (New London), The New Haven Register, The Westerly Sun, NBC CT, WTNH, WSFB, and La Voz Hispana. The survey was shared with the study's established working groups consisting of transit and rail service providers, municipalities, large employers, and anchor institutions. The survey was shared on town calendars and posted at all Shore Line East Stations and on the 16 rail cars currently in service. Area municipalities were provided with the survey details to share with their networks, and to post on town and city websites, and social media platforms. The survey was advertised at all three ECRTS Public Information Meetings that were held in Norwich, Groton, and virtually on December 12 and 15, 2022.

The MetroQuest Survey closed on January 6, 2023, with 164 completed surveys. A total of 163 surveys were completed in English and one survey was completed in Spanish.

The survey began with a welcome screen that provided information on ECRTS's purpose and listed the definitions of a feasibility study and public transportation. On the following screen, participants were asked to indicate where they frequently travel and live; this included jobs, school, social activities, and errands. Participants were also asked to identify locations where they would like to see added or enhanced public transportation options by adding public transportation markers to the map. The majority of respondents indicated that they use the corridor to travel outside eastern Connecticut, prefer to travel using personal vehicles, and would use the train as an alternative or second transportation option. Responses were mixed on what was classified as 'close enough' to access public transportation with most respondents saying a short drive, short bike ride or easy walk would classify as 'close enough.' Respondents also reported that their schedule (35%) and location (25%) are most important when considering transportation options.

Participants were asked a series of questions related to bus services, passenger rail services, connectivity, and employment. The results found that 83% of participants never use local bus services and 84% never use regional bus services in southeastern Connecticut. Respondents shared that if transit services were improved 67% would prefer faster trips with fewer stops and 45% shared that they would prefer to have transit services dispersed evenly throughout the day. Respondents also reported that if Shore Line East services were extended into Rhode Island (Westerly), 27% would use it regularly, and 29% shared that if a new rail service was provided from the City of New London to the City of Norwich, they would use the rail service regularly. When asked about the current public transportation system, 41% of respondents rated the current public transportation system's convenience of connections between all modes of transportation a two out of five, with five being extremely convenient. Individuals were asked which public transportation amenities they would find most useful. The top responses recorded were Wi-fi, USB charging stations/ports/electrical outlets, restrooms, bike racks/storage, and paperless/digital ticketing and app. The majority of survey respondents, 51%, indicated that they travel to work five days a week with the majority of respondents working in public service, business, education, engineering, and healthcare sectors.

A total of 134 out of 136 survey respondents shared that they support improved transit options in southeastern Connecticut regardless of their use of public transportation.

The [Public Survey Report \(Appendix G\)](#) details the ECRTS public survey results. The findings of the MetroQuest survey provide the study team with valuable public feedback on where and how people are currently traveling within southeastern Connecticut, and where there may be gaps in current public transportation services.

## 4.2. December 2022 Public Meetings

Three Public Information Meetings were conducted to formally kick off the study and inform the public of the study's purpose, the study overview, the progress to date, and next steps in the study timeline. The meetings were also designed to solicit public input. Each meeting began with a presentation followed by a question-and-answer session to gather feedback from the community.



# CTrail Strategies

## EASTERN CONNECTICUT CORRIDOR RAIL AND TRANSIT FEASIBILITY STUDY

The first two public meetings were in-person and streamed live on YouTube. The third meeting was virtual and conducted over Zoom and was also available on YouTube. Recordings of all three meetings are available on YouTube.

**Table 7. December 2022 Public Meeting Summaries**

<p>December 12, 2022 (6 p.m. - 8 p.m.)</p> <p>Kelley STEAM Magnet Middle School Norwich, Connecticut</p> <p>Attendees: 19</p>	<p>Questions and key feedback received on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees discuss environmental impacts, community impacts, and lack of parking.</li> <li>Attendees inquired about rail improvement, who the study team is working with, ridership projections, and the funding sources for the potential project.</li> <li>Individuals proposed new ideas for the corridor and shared comments of support.</li> <li>Attendees expressed concerns regarding transportation related environmental impacts, CT’s rising population, lack of parking, transit access, lack of service, and expense.</li> <li>Attendees expressed interest in improving grade separations, rail crossings, high-level platforms, and underpasses and overpasses.</li> <li>Attendees expressed interest in funding for the project.</li> </ul>
<p>December 15, 2022 (12 p.m. - 2 p.m.)</p> <p>Submarine Force Library and Museum Groton, Connecticut</p> <p>Attendees: 45</p>	<p>Questions and key feedback received on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees shared the benefits of new transportation services in the Eastern Corridor, highlighting safety and economic growth.</li> <li>Attendees were disappointed with the traffic congestion in CT and the inaccessibility of the current transportation system.</li> <li>Attendees inquired about funding and expressed support to encourage state and federal funding.</li> <li>Attendees asked questions about ridership projections, the study’s focus area, and whether electrifying the corridor was possible.</li> <li>Attendees shared letters of support and encouraged others to take the survey.</li> </ul>
<p>December 15, 2022 (6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.)</p>	<p>Questions and key feedback received on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees asked questions about finding information regarding study details and how to stay informed.</li> </ul>



<p>Virtual</p> <p>Attendees: 34</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees expressed interest in new overpasses and departure boards, electrifying the corridor, potential impacts, pre-existing infrastructure, the laying of new tracks, and the potential project’s limits.</li> <li>Attendees asked questions about frequency analysis, real-time communication at stations, and project funding.</li> <li>Attendees expressed support for the study.</li> <li>Extending transportation services across the state is of interest.</li> <li>Increasing the frequency of transit and electrifying the corridor are valuable undertakings.</li> <li>Some attendees would like to support the new transportation services by advocating for additional funding.</li> </ul>
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Written comments on the existing conditions and initial analyses were provided by community members following the public information meetings in December 2022. Written comments were primarily letters of support for expanded rail and transit service in southeastern Connecticut as well as connections beyond the region west to points in Connecticut and New York and east to points in Rhode Island.

### 4.3. September 2023 Public Meetings

Three additional Public Information Meetings were conducted to inform the public of the study’s purpose, the study process, an overview of findings, and the study’s conclusion. The meetings were also designed to solicit public input. Each meeting began with a presentation followed by a question-and-answer session to gather feedback from the community.

The first two public meetings were in-person and streamed live on YouTube. The third meeting was virtual and conducted over Zoom and was also available on YouTube. Recordings of all three meetings are available on YouTube.

**Table 8. September 2023 Public Meeting Summaries**

<p>September 19, 2023 (6 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.)</p> <p>Groton Senior Citizens Center</p> <p>Groton, Connecticut</p> <p>Attendees: 101</p>	<p>Questions and key feedback received on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees expressed support for the project and emphasis on the potential community impact (economic, social, and workforce development).</li> <li>Questions were asked regarding potential station locations (Mystic Station), future partnerships, ridership projections, and fare affordability.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees expressed support for the expansion to Westerly, RI, and a partnership with RIDOT.</li> <li>Attendees inquired about funding and next steps for the project.</li> <li>Attendees voiced concerns regarding environmental factors, including rising sea levels and increased noise from train whistles.</li> </ul>
<p>September 20, 2023 (1 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.)</p> <p>Otis Library</p> <p>Norwich, Connecticut</p> <p>Attendees: 20</p>	<p>Questions and key feedback received on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees provided comments regarding the positive impact the project could have on local economies.</li> <li>Attendees inquired about electric bus service and rail electrification.</li> <li>Attendees expressed concerns regarding the existing bus service and future improvements.</li> <li>Attendees expressed support for the project.</li> <li>Attendees inquired about project funding and next steps.</li> </ul>
<p>September 20, 2023 (6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.)</p> <p>Virtual</p> <p>Attendees: 36</p>	<p>Questions and key feedback received on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees inquired about potential station locations and service frequency within the corridor.</li> <li>Questions were asked about next steps and funding.</li> <li>Attendees expressed concerns regarding pre-existing, current, and future infrastructure.</li> <li>Some attendees expressed concerns about the timing of presenting ECRTS findings, with SLE service reductions having been announced the previous week.</li> <li>Attendees voiced support for the expansion of bus and rail services and asked questions regarding future operations for the corridor.</li> <li>Attendees expressed concerns regarding environmental impacts including rising sea levels and erosion.</li> </ul>

Written comments on the draft final report were provided by community members following the public information meetings in September 2023. A total of 91 comments were received. Written comments were primarily letters of support for expanded rail and transit service in southeastern Connecticut as well as connections beyond the region west to points in Connecticut and New York and east to points in Rhode Island, citing benefits in terms of commerce, community mobility, ecology, and overall quality of life. Several comments expressed concern over the location of the proposed Mystic Station, while others advocated for increased

frequency of Shore Line East services and the consideration of creating a “hub” of overnight train storage in Westerly.

### 4.4. Public Engagement Summary

Overall, the public was supportive of the benefits that would result from an expansion of rail and transit service in southeastern Connecticut, including increased economic development opportunities, reduced congestion, increased tourism, and increased access to employment and housing, as well as climate, public health, quality of life and equity improvements. Feedback further demonstrated the public’s support for the following:

- Rail/transit connections between Connecticut and Rhode Island,
- Addressing rail/transit needs in Groton,
- Enhancing multi-modal connections,
- The extension of Shore Line East to Westerly, and
- The proposed SEAT Route 32 connecting Mystic Train Station with Olde Mistick Village and general increased transit in Mystic.

Critical feedback received from the public included general concerns regarding the estimated costs and the potential timeline, which were thought to be too high and too long, respectively, resulting in the need for more cost-effective and short-term solutions to better respond to the economic growth of the region. Other concerns included more transit- and rail-specific issues, such as:

- The need for better bus stop and sidewalk infrastructure,
- The need for more frequent bus headways (shorter than 60 minutes),
- The need for increased rail frequency, and
- The lack of accessibility and convenience of the proposed Mystic Alternative and Stonington Borough station locations.