

BRANCHVILLE TRAIN STATION

VISUAL INSPECTION REPORT



January 2007



Prepared by the Bureau of Public Transportation
Connecticut Department of Transportation

Overview:

The Branchville Train Station is located on Route 7 in the southeast corner of Ridgefield. It is relatively easy to find, although a station sign is needed at each of the two entrances. Vehicular access is provided over two river bridges in varied stages of disrepair. The station is nestled between the Norwalk River, the railroad tracks, Depot Road and Portland Avenue.

The station building houses a bakery and gift shop. New sidewalk and black railing separate the full parking lot from the tracks.

An awning provides some shelter for patrons of the bakery or waiting commuters. The area is neat, likely from the housekeeping efforts of bakery personnel.



A high-level platform with stairs and a ramp provides access to the rail cars. The platform has a full-length canopy and benches.

Maintenance Responsibilities:

Owner:	State
Operator:	Town
Platform Lights:	Metro-North
Trash:	Metro-North
Snow Removal:	Town
Shelter Glazing:	Town
Platform Canopy:	Town
Platform Structure:	Town
Parking:	Town

Station Layout:



Aerial Photo by Aero-Metric, Inc. – Graphics by Urbitran as part of the Rail Governance Study



Station Building
State-Owned Parking Area

Train Station Visual Inspection Parameters:

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (Department) recently inspected all 36 New Haven Line train stations to assess their appearance, safety, means of access and overall condition. Observations have been noted in an inspection report prepared for each station. The findings of these individual reports will be used to develop a Station Improvement Program. Initially, maintenance issues will be passed along to responsible parties for resolution. Soon after, a series of improvement projects will be recommended, followed by a long-term program of maintenance repairs and capital improvements.

The following station components were reviewed as part of the visual inspection process:

- **Highway Access** – While traveling to each station, inspectors observed the placement of trailblazing signage. In addition, they assessed the ease of locating appropriate station parking and drop-off areas. Typically, a green highway sign has been placed in advance of the proper exit for a particular train station. This sign notes the name of the station and commuter service operator. However, trailblazing signage at ramp termini or on secondary routes is typically missing or indistinguishable amid the clutter of other signs. Primary routes from the major roadways to each station need to be established and prominently identified. Conversely, trailblazing the return route is also required.
- **Parking** – This station reports cover signage, illumination and pavement condition issues within station parking areas. The Department and municipalities will address parking capacity and demand matters separate from this report.
- **Platforms** – Each station report details observations related to the general condition of the platforms, stairs, ramps, handrails and railings. The reports also incorporate the comments and recommendations of the Department's Connecticut Rail Station Governance Study - May 2005 (Governance Study) and High Level Platform Visual Inspection & Inventory. The latter inspection effort addresses only main line stations. The Department will inspect branch line platforms and canopies in the second phase of the high-level platform inspection program and incorporate the findings into future improvement projects
- **Canopies** – Each station report details observations relative to the general condition of any canopies located at the station. As noted under the Platform heading above, other studies have been referenced in presenting the findings for this component of the station.
- **Illumination** – The observations noted in each station report do not include a specific heading for illumination. Field visits occurred during daylight hours, thus inspectors could not assess the effectiveness of illumination in parking areas, along paths or on the platforms. Comments have been included in other headings relative to the number of fixtures, location and assumed coverage. This station report incorporates the comments of the Governance Study, where appropriate. However, the reports generally recommend that any first phase of station improvement include an evaluation of illumination levels in all areas of the stations and upgrade light fixtures, as necessary.

- **Painting** – As with illumination, the station inspection reports address painting issues under the appropriate headings.
- **Walks and Paths** – This station inspection report makes note of paved paths between parking areas, streets and station platforms. Where appropriate, general observations of the condition of the paths, vegetation, lighting, signage and stairways along the paths have been included.
- **Ticket Vending Machine (TVM)** – Metro-North has placed TVM's at most high volume stations. Where appropriate, this station report notes current locations. The Department and Metro-North plan to install at least one full service TVM at all main line and branch line stations. They will accomplish each of these installations based on ridership demands and funding availability.
- **Shelter** – Many platforms have shelters in lieu of adjacent waiting areas in station buildings. Typical Plexiglas or glass shelters protect waiting commuters from the elements. Many of these structures are similar to curbside shelters found along local bus routes. If appropriate, this report notes the location and general condition of platform shelters. It also addressed the need for new or additional protective structures.
- **Station Building** – The typical New Haven Line station building is a historic structure with a waiting room, rest room, and ticket office. Some have a coffee shop and/or newsstand. Where appropriate, observations have been incorporated into the station reports. Where station buildings were closed at the time of site visit, applicable findings of the Governance Study have been included in the report.
- **Taxi Stands and Bus Stops** – Taxis can physically access most station areas with the exception of parking garages and gated lots. Several stations have designated taxi stands. However, roadway geometry may limit bus access to most train stations. Stations with narrow parking aisles, tight turns or dead ends can accommodate bus patrons by placing bus stops on nearby streets. This report notes general taxi and bus accessibility issues.
- **Variable Message Sign (VMS)** – Every New Haven Line station has an audio PA system consisting of the typical “steel can” speaker or horn. The inspectors did not assess the regularity, audio levels or content of public announcements. These matters will continue to be addressed by the Department and station operators. Variable message signs or VMS provide a visual backup to audio announcements. These signs not only assist the hearing challenged. They also provide necessary train information over the din of large stations, nearby construction activities or noisy rail equipment. Currently, Metro-North is installing VMS at the designated “key” stations listed in the ADA section below. The Department and Metro-North intend to address visual messaging needs at all stations based on ridership demands and funding availability.

- **Signage** – This heading includes general observations of signs placed on platforms, along paths and in other areas of the station. Inspectors attempted to look at the signage as a first time or infrequent user. Their observations are noted in this report. In addition to observations noted within this topic, signage issues are addressed under the Highway Access and Parking headings.
- **Fence** – Nearly every station uses metal fencing beyond the platform ends to restrict unauthorized access to the tracks. Fencing has also been installed to secure parking areas, demarcate private property or cordon off potentially hazardous areas. Most locations employ a chain link fence, although occasional ornamental steel, cast iron or wood fences can be found. The condition of station fencing has been noted in this report.
- **Litter** – Litter may be the most conspicuous distraction at train stations. Patrons appreciate a well-maintained facility. For this report, inspectors have noted the general appearance of the station including areas under and behind platforms, along paths, around station buildings and in parking lots. It should be noted that these comments are depict the station condition only for the day of the site visit. It is assumed that station operators and Metro-North will continue to maintain the train stations to the high standards of the rail commuters.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Access:** The New Haven Line has its origins in the 19th Century, so many of the stations do not conform to the current ADA standards. Due to funding limitations, the Department cannot upgrade all New Haven Line stations at this time. Therefore, State and federal agencies have incorporated a “key station” upgrade program for twelve of the stations (Greenwich, Stamford, Darien, South Norwalk, Westport, Bridgeport, Milford, New Haven, New Canaan, Danbury, Waterbury, and the proposed Fairfield Metro Station). The remaining facilities will be upgraded over time. Meanwhile, the Department will continue to incorporate code compliant materials and practices into all of its current and planned station upgrades and improvements.
- **Amenities** – This inspection report addresses the inspectors’ observations of amenities placed around the stations. These may include items such as benches, trash cans, platform and stair railings, entrance signs, kiosks, vending areas, bike racks, station color schemes, clocks and light fixtures.
- **General Remarks** – General comments may be included at the conclusion of each observation report to address those matters that do not fall within the criteria of the above list of headings.

Observations – August 16, 2006:

Highway Access – Access to this old train station from the adjacent Route 7 is relatively simple. The Depot Road (north) entrance is signalized. A narrow concrete bridge spans the Norwalk River. Vegetation has overgrown the edge of the roadway, restricting sight distances and giving the appearance of an even narrower bridge. The Portland Avenue (south) entrance is not signalized. This road has an equally dysfunctional structure over the river. Intersection sight distances are also restricted at this entrance. A sign at the Route 7 entrance indicates the presence of the bakery but not the station.

Parking – Parking is distributed along the narrow lot, which is parallel to the tracks. Parking is free at Branchville. The lot is filled on a first come, first served basis. Several spaces appear to have been set aside as bakery customers. The lot's surface is cracked and worn with a few potholes. Lighting appears to be minimal and partially obscured by foliage. Nearly every square foot of the lot is being utilized for parking.

Platforms – The high level platform is worn and weathered but structurally sound. The aluminum railing on the platform, stairs and ramp is weathered. There is no tactile warning strip, and the painted yellow warning stripe is faded.

Canopy – The full-length canopy is weathered but in satisfactory condition. There are bird droppings on the platform and nests in the roof supports. There is grass growing from some of the roof gutters indicating a potential drainage problem.

Walks/Paths – The station building is located in the middle of the parking lot. Access to the platform has been improved by the recent addition of raised sidewalks and black railing along the track side of the lot. This feature provides an attractive buffer between vehicles and trains, while keeping pedestrians away from the parking aisles. In front of the bakery is a narrow pedestrian bridge (right) that spans the Norwalk River. The bridge connects the parking lot to an auto body shop. The bridge deck appears to be structural sound, but the railing is substandard. There are no signs indicating the ownership or availability of this bridge to the public. If the bridge is private, then it should be signed as such. If it is part of the station, the structure should be brought up to current structural standards.



Ticket Vending Machine – There is no TVM at this location.

Shelter – There is no shelter at this location.

Station Building – According to the Rail Station Governance Study, the building is leased in total to a bakery business. There are no inside common areas for rail patrons. The ADA non-compliant bathrooms are designated for bakery customers only. Any seating is for bakery dining only. Finally, gutters are missing from the front and south side of the building roof.

Taxi Stands and Bus Stops – Buses would have a difficult time maneuvering through the narrow parking lot and tighter entrance roads. However, Route 7 is only a few hundred feet away from the station platform. Taxis have normal vehicular access.

Signage – The only signs evident at Branchville station are the two “No Parking, Fire Zone” signs in front of the building.

Fences – The railing along the sidewalk is new and in good shape.

Litter – The area is neat and clean.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Access – No ADA parking spaces have been provided near the ramp to the platform. While a disabled person may have an accessible to the trains, this station cannot be considered ADA compliant.



Seating Under Awning on Side of Station

Amenities (See Appendix A Photos)

- Kiosk: None
- Exterior Paint Theme: Red
- Vending: Only several free newspaper boxes.
- Benches: Several aluminum platform benches, two old weathered benches in front of the bakery and a small table with chairs under an awning for bakery customers.
- Railings: Aluminum platform railing. Black steel sidewalk railing.
- Light Fixtures: No problems were noted.
- Trash: Three blue recycling bins on the platform. Several trash cans for the bakery.
- Bicycle Rack: None evident
- Platform Clock: None

General Remarks – The bakery owner noted that the station’s only pay phone was recently removed. Several rail patrons have complained about its removal. They also complained about the lack of train schedules.

Recommended Repairs, Upgrades and Improvements:

At the urging of the Governor, the Department is establishing a program of repairs, upgrades and improvements to better the appearance, safety, and functionality of all 36 New Haven Line Stations. As a first step, the Department will continue to pass along all maintenance concerns to station operators for their immediate attention. The next step will be to have the Department and station operators upgrade station amenities. These might include benches, kiosks, railing, light fixtures, trash cans, bike racks, clocks and other common station elements. When funding becomes available, the Department will initiate a project to commence the upgrade of amenities at the stations.

With the cooperation of municipalities and Metro-North, the Department will review, categorize, and prioritize the findings listed under the Station Governance heading below. In addition, the recommendations of the High Level Platform Visual Inspection Report and the Connecticut Rail Governance Study will be considered. The resulting priority listing will include a number of projects to accomplish the repairs, upgrades and improvements needed to bring the New Haven Line Commuter Rail Service up to the commuters' expectations.

Finally, the Department anticipates that a number of major capital improvements may result from a comprehensive review of the findings of these station inspection reports. These might include the installation or extension of high-level platforms and canopies, the replacement or addition of shelters, and major ADA improvements. As noted earlier, the Department and individual municipalities will address parking issues separate from this report. However, these too may demand major capital investments. Finally, the recently completed Danbury Branch Feasibility Study and similar reports planned for the New Canaan and Waterbury Branches could lead to other capital improvements at some of the branch line stations.

The findings of this Visual Inspection Report and recommended solutions for station repairs, upgrades and improvements are listed below:

Maintenance Repairs:

- Trim back vegetation near the two highway entrances to recover sight distances.
- Trim the vegetation that obscures illumination in the parking lot.
- Consider a trailblazing sign on Route 7 about a half mile north and south of the station.
- Replace missing gutters on front and side of station building.
- Clean platform drainage gutters.
- Fill in parking lot potholes.
- Replace pay phone recently removed from station.
- Repaint platform edge warning stripe.
- If the rest room is public, remove the "customers only" sign from bathroom door.

Amenity Upgrades:

- Add an information kiosk.
- Add station entrance signs at Depot Road and Portland Avenue.
- If vending machines are to be eventually placed at this station, provide a vending shelter area off the platform and primary paths.
- Replace aluminum platform benches with the recommended black steel benches.
- Place several trash cans around the station.
- Place a bike rack at the station, if warranted.
- Add a station clock to the platform or recommended kiosk.

Governance Improvements:

- Replace aluminum platform, stair and ramp railing with black steel railing.
- Evaluate illumination levels throughout the station.
- Install a tactile warning strip.
- Repave the parking lot.
- Allow the public to use rest rooms in future leases.
- If the general public cannot use the station building as a waiting room, then add a shelter for waiting commuters. The shelter can be placed in the awning area or extended out from behind the platform. This latter choice may eliminate parking spaces.
- Resolve the status of the footbridge across from the station building. If private, provide appropriate signage and disclaimers. If public, then remove or upgrade to standards.
- Inspect Depot Road bridge over river
- Inspect Portland Avenue bridge over river

Major Capital Improvements:

- Improve vehicular access to and from this facility by adding turning lanes on Route 7, improving sight distances, and signaling the south intersection.
- Replace the Portland Avenue and Depot Road bridges over the Norwalk River.
- Investigate the acquisition of the auto body shop property across the river for station expansion, improved access and a bus stop/kiss-and-ride area.

-- END OF NARRATIVE --



New Walk, Railing and Lights at Branchville Station

APPENDIX A

Examples of Amenities



Kiosk (Historic Theme)



Signs (Historic Theme)



Bench (Contemporary) and Railing



Vending Shelter



Trash Can (Black preferred)



Typical Trailblazing Sign