

NOROTON HEIGHTS TRAIN STATION

VISUAL INSPECTION REPORT



January 2007



Prepared by the Bureau of Public Transportation
Connecticut Department of Transportation

Overview:

The Noroton Heights Train Station is located adjacent to I-95 in Darien. Access is easy from nearby Exit 10. Strip parking lots line both sides of the station. Located just east of the Stamford Transportation Center, the Noroton Heights Train Station is a notable alternative to the downtown Stamford facility.



The station building is a modern style shelter with a lean-to cover. The old station buildings are located several hundred yards to the east.

A footbridge and Hollow Tree Ridge Road accommodate platform-to-platform pedestrian access. Both have stairways and no elevators. A strip mall and several small businesses line Heights Road along the north side of the station property. I-95 is the south boundary of the station.

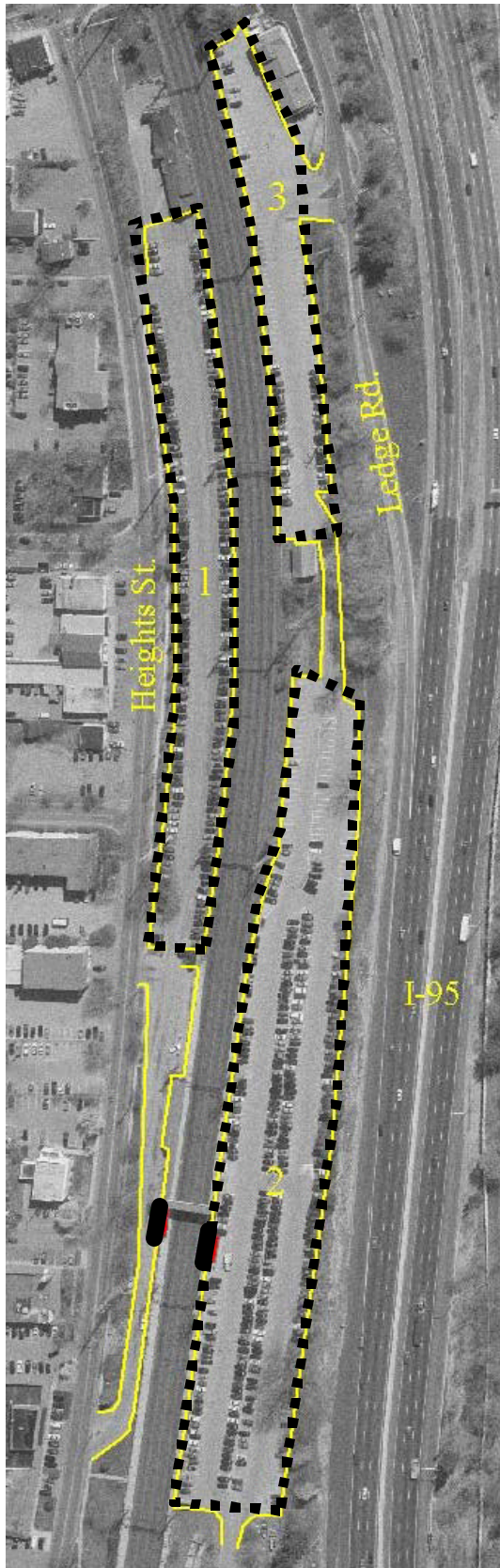
The Northeast Utilities Company intends to place an underground 345-kV cable along the south edge of the eastbound parking lot. This location was agreed to by the Department to minimize potential impact to any future parking structure built at this site.

Finally, the Department has a catenary replacement project underway through this area. At the time of this site visit, the northern-most track was out of service and track plates were in place. Over the next few years, the other tracks will also be taken out of service.



Maintenance Responsibilities:

Owner:	CDOT
Operator:	Town
Platform Lights:	Metro-North
Trash:	Metro-North
Snow Removal:	Metro-North
Shelter Glazing:	Metro-North
Platform Canopy:	Metro-North
Platform Structure:	Metro-North
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
- 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 – September 7, 2006:

Highway Access – Situated between Darien and Stamford, the Noroton Heights Train Station is located adjacent to the westbound on-ramp to I-95. Motorists can access the station from Exit 10 from both directions.

Parking – Each side of the station has a parking lot with remote spaces as far as 1500 feet from the station platforms. Illumination levels should be evaluated. Bituminous curbing along the driveway in front of the station building is cracked and failing. A gate at the east end of the westbound platform controls entry to a high-rail access pad. The painted yellow warning stripe is faded. The eastbound parking lot is split in two by a private sheet metal business. The driveway between the two parking area has signs indicating “No Thru Traffic” and “Gates Closed”. This may be confusing to the occasional visitor.

Platforms – The platforms are in fair to good condition. Some of the joints between platforms are failing. Most platform stairs and ramps are in fair to good condition with minor spalling and cracks, especially at railing connection plates. The stairs to Hollow Tree Ridge Road are also in fair condition. Patched areas are failing. The aluminum platform, stair and ramp railings are weathered with an occasional bent panel. The trackside edge of the platform has a bright yellow stripe. Platform illumination (fluorescent) appears to be sufficient, although corroded. Rusty catenary supports rise up through or just behind the platforms. A sidewalk level entrance to the westbound platform near the west end has an odd offset railing arrangement. While it appears to be ADA accessible, the jog in the railing makes access more difficult.

Canopy – The westbound canopy is in satisfactory condition. Peeling paint, rust stains and corrosion are evident. The canopy drainage is in poor condition. There is an old canopy near the old station buildings at the east end of the station property.

Walks/Paths – The pedestrian bridge appears to be in fair to satisfactory condition. Paint is peeling, many surfaces are pitted and all the stairs treads are rusted. Glazing is in good shape. There are several paths from the parking lots and platforms to Heights Road. Weeds and vegetation encroach on some of the paths. The west end of the station uses Hollow Tree Ridge Road as a pedestrian crossover. Badly patched concrete stairs lead up to the highway bridge where a sidewalk carries commuters over the tracks. A pile of stone impedes movement along the path leading away from the east end of the westbound platform. The sidewalk along Heights Road has sections of steep cross slopes.

Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) – There are TVM’s on the westbound platform.

Shelter – The eastbound platform has a Plexiglas shelter. It is on fair condition with weathered metal surfaces and scratched glazing.

Station Building – The station building is unique in that it resembles an overgrown Plexiglas shelter protected by a metal lean-to. The building contains a coffee shop, several seats and a very small rest room. A soda machine obscures the ticket window.

Bus Access & Taxi Stand – Buses and taxis can access both sides of the station.

Signage – Parking lot signage provides valuable information to motorist looking for a space. Other than the usual Metro-North ticket signs, signage is sporadic throughout the station.

Fences – Nearly all fencing is weathered, rusted, deformed and/or broken.

Litter – Track level litter and debris was scattered under the platforms and beyond the west ends of the platforms.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Access – While ramps and ground level openings permit ADA access to platforms and trains, this station is not ADA compliant. Stairs and steep sidewalks/roadways provide the only access to the two pedestrian crossings.

Amenities (See Appendix A Photos)

- Kiosk: None
- Exterior Paint Theme: Modern. Green, brown and beige.
- Vending Coffee shop and soda machines inside. Newspaper boxes on the platform.
- Benches: Aluminum benches on platform, mess benches in station building.
- Railings: Weathered aluminum railing on platforms, stairs and ramps.
- Light Fixtures: Old fluorescent light fixtures with corroded posts.
- Trash: Track level litter and debris.
- Bicycle Rack: Near station building.
- Platform Clock: Beer clock hanging from canopy.

General Remarks – This station has a modern theme. The station building is unique among all New Haven Line train stations. The large parking lots require a long walk from remote locations to the platforms. These walks are along parking lot aisles or the street sidewalk.

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:

- Trailblazing signs should be placed prior to the ends of highway exit ramps to avoid the clutter of signs at the intersection.
- Add reverse trailblazing signage directing motorists back to the highways.
- Remove tripping hazards on platform such as sign post stubs and old brackets.
- Repair spall on platforms, stairs and ramps. Repair railing base connections.
- Repair the two stairways at the west end of the platforms.
- Clean and paint the pedestrian bridge and replace stair nosings.
- Remove newspaper boxes from platforms and primary paths.
- Provide hours of operation sign for the station building and concession.
- Clean and paint canopy.
- Repair canopy drainage.
- Monitor construction activities and adjust signage accordingly.
- Clean and paint catenary structures. Coordinate with Metro-North.
- Repaint yellow warning stripe on the platform edge.
- Clean and paint eastbound shelter. Replace scratched glazing.
- Remove the pile of gravel from the east end of the westbound platform.
- Review the signage at the driveway between the two eastbound parking lots.
- Fix awkward railing placement for the sidewalk-level platform entrance near the west end of the westbound platform.
- Clean track level litter and debris.

Amenity Upgrades:

- Add a station kiosk on each side of the station.
- Place a station entrance sign near the westbound drop entrance. Place a small station entrance sign at the other parking entrances.
- Add TVM to eastbound platform.
- Replace all aluminum seats with black mesh benches.
- Add trashcans to primary platform access points.
- Construct a shelter for vending behind the platform or near primary paths, provided it does not interfere with pedestrian movement along these platforms or paths.
- Replace beer clocks with station clocks on westbound platforms. Add a pedestal mounted station clock to the eastbound platform

Governance Improvements:

- Evaluate illumination levels in and around the station and supplement lighting as required.
- Replace platform light fixtures.
- Repair platform surface, foundations, bearings and joints as required.
- Replace all platform, stair and ramp aluminum railing with black railing.
- Replace chain link fence at the east end of the westbound platform with raised concrete sidewalk for at least half the parking lot length.
- Replace all chain link fencing between the parking lot and the tracks with sidewalk. This could involve over 4000 feet of fence.
- Replace all bituminous walks along established paths with concrete sidewalks.
- Place pole mounted light fixtures along all new concrete walks.
- Review content and location of station signage. Supplement as needed.
- Add platform edge tactile warning strips.
- Install a raised concrete sidewalk between parking spaces/driveways and platforms.
- Consider the historical restoration of the older westbound canopy at the east end of the station property. It could be used as a picnic area for current occupants of the old station.
- Replace Height Road sidewalk where needed to provide a more even walking surface.
- If the ticket window is to be permanently closed, expand the small rest room to provide an ADA compliant bathroom facility.

Major Capital Improvements:

- Rehabilitate or replace the pedestrian bridge with an ADA compliant structure.
- Extend and/or replace westbound platform canopy.
- Add a canopy and/or replace the shelter on the eastbound platform. Consider a smaller version of the westbound station building.

-- END OF NARRATIVE --



Pedestrian Bridge at Noroton Heights

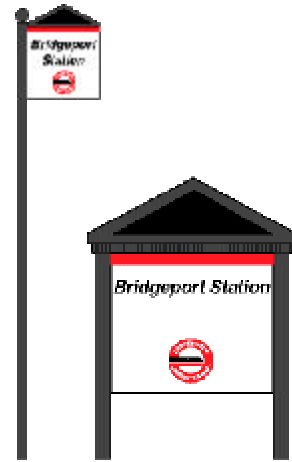
APPENDIX A



Pole Mounted Lights



Kiosk (Historic)



Signs (Contemporary)



Bench (Contemporary) and Railing



Fence, Walk and Post Mounted Light Next to Track



Trash Can (Black preferred)



Bike Rack