

SOUTH NORWALK TRAIN STATION

VISUAL INSPECTION REPORT



January 2007



Prepared by the Bureau of Public Transportation
Connecticut Department of Transportation

Overview:

The South Norwalk Train Station is located in the SoNo District section of the City of Norwalk. The city and the Department reconstructed the South Norwalk Train Station about 15 years ago. A parking garage, waiting room, ticket windows, municipal electricity offices, and security office replaced the old westbound station building. The old eastbound station building was rehabilitated at the same time. The interior has been nicely restored.



Motorists can get to the station from nearby I-95, Route 7 and Route 1. However, one must be familiar with the since trailblazing is inconsistent. Where signs indicate the station, the message is sometimes lost amidst the clutter of street, advertising, landmark and business signs.

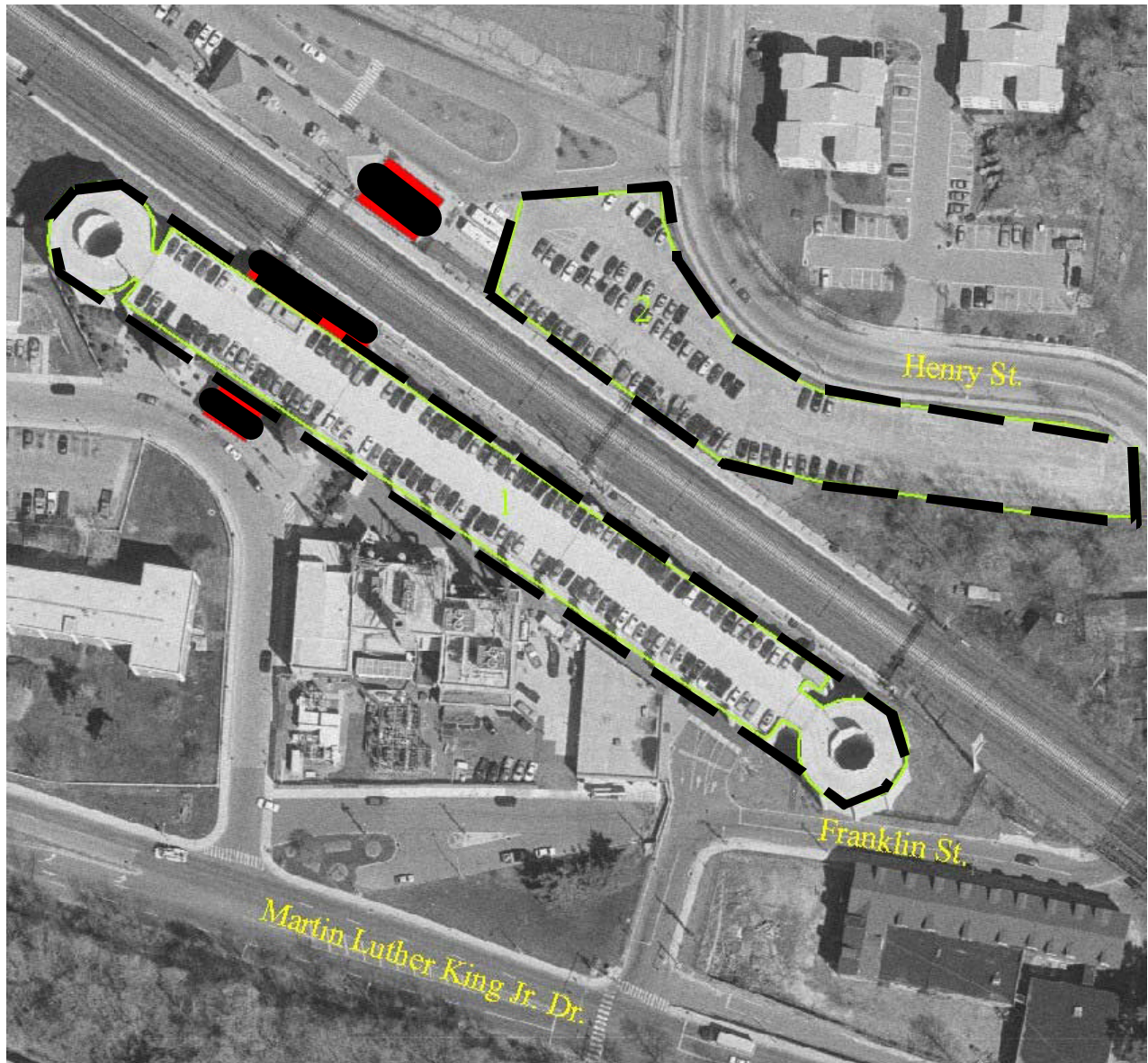
A bright, clean tunnel connects the two station buildings. Elevators and ramps provide platform accessibility for the less able. The two ten-car platforms serve as center island platforms at their respective east ends for Danbury Branch service. At this time, the Department is replacing the railroad bridge over Monroe Street as part of its catenary replacement project. Bridge plates are in place over Track 3 to accommodate the required track outage.

The South Norwalk Station is clean except around the two pocket tracks at the east end of the station. Track level litter has piled up along the rails and under the platforms. Litter is also excessive along the out of service track.

Maintenance Responsibilities:

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

Station Layout:



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



Station Building



State-Owned Parking Area



Municipality-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 – September 5, 2006:

Highway Access – With some difficulty, motorist new to the area can find the South Norwalk Train Station from I-95, Route 1 and Route 7. Highway signs direct motorists off the highway, where local trailblazing signs provide guidance to the station. There is no dedicated station sign at either side of the station.

Parking – The new parking garage is available for permit parking. The smaller surface lot on the eastbound side is for daily parking. Signs provide parking information and fees. These also note the location of overflow parking. Lighting on the eastbound parking lot appears to be minimal.

Platforms – The platforms at South Norwalk are a full ten cars in length. The platforms range in condition from fair to good with some cracks and spall evident. All of the joints between platforms are failing to some degree. Some of the joints need to be leveled. Most stairs and ramps are in good condition, except for some minor spalling. The aluminum platform, stair and ramp railings are weathered with an occasional bent panel. Some railing base connections are poor. The trackside edge of the platform has a tactile warning strip, which is discolored. The wood rub rail is weathered. It could use some paint in the near future. Most of the rusty catenary supports sit behind the platform, except two at the east end, which rise through the platforms. The fluorescent platform illumination appears to be adequate for now, but some fixtures and bases are corroded. Some poster boards are rotted.

Canopy – The South Norwalk Station has steel canopies at the east end of each platform, where the Danbury Branch trains board their passengers. Both canopies appear to be in good condition, except for the westbound canopy, where the drainage is in poor condition.

Walks/Paths – Nearby construction on Monroe Street has affected some of the sidewalks to the east of the station. The lowering of the roadway will require the reconstruction of these walks under the bridge replacement project. Other paths are limited to movement of people from parking lots and bus drops to the station platforms. Across the driveway from the east end of the eastbound building, there is an unexpected and unprotected drop from the top of a masonry retaining wall.

Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) – TVM's are located on both platforms.

Shelter – Six shelters have been placed on the platforms (three on each side). They are all in good condition.

Station Building – The westbound station building is part of the new parking garage. Its modern design contrasts the historic façade of the eastbound building. The westbound building has a coffee shop, ticket windows, rest rooms and adequate seating in its waiting room. There is direct elevator access to the parking garage and the tunnel. The South Norwalk Electric Works has offices in the lower level. As noted earlier, the tunnel under the tracks is bright and clean. The eastbound station building has been restored to much of its original splendor. It offers a waiting room with vending and seats. The rest rooms have a faint odor. Exterior walls could use a coat of paint.

Bus Access & Taxi Stand – Buses can access both sides of the station. Taxis queue up along the eastbound driveway.

Signage – Signage in and around the station appears to be adequate. However, a review of sign placement and content should be performed upon completion of the nearby bridge construction to confirm the continued accuracy of the signage.

Fences – Chain link fencing beyond the ends of the platforms is weather, rusted and broken. Other boundary fencing is equally as poor.

Litter – The station area is generally clean considering the nearby construction. One big exception is the amount of track level litter around the two pocket (side) tracks.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Access – The South Norwalk Train Station is one of the designated key stations for the New Haven Line. For the most part, it is ADA compliant, except for some issues pointed out in the High Level Platform Visual Inspection Report and a recent federal review. Metro-North is installing ADA compliant variable message signs, which will provide visual backup for audio announcements.

Amenities (See Appendix A Photos)

- Kiosk: None, although several information boards perform the same task
- Exterior Paint Theme: Yellow and green buildings, pink and blue on platforms
- Vending: Vending machines and newspaper boxes on both platforms.
- Benches: Wood plank type benches in shelters, curved wood benches seats in the waiting rooms and curved metal benches in front of the main entrance.
- Railings: Weathered aluminum railing on platforms, stairs and ramps
- Light Fixtures: Older fluorescent fixtures, painted but some corrosion evident.
- Trash: Numerous blue recycling bins plus an assortment of trash cans inside and out. A recommended trash can is located at the main entrance (westbound side).
- Bicycle Rack: None noted
- Platform Clock: None outside. Beautiful clock in eastbound waiting room. The variable message signs being installed on the platforms will have date and time.

General Remarks – It has convenient parking and most desired amenities. While one might question the combination of modern and historic architecture in one location, there is no argument that the South Norwalk Train Station is a clean and functional.

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:

- Improve trailblazing signage to and from the station.
- Clean up track level trash on both sides of the station.
- Continue to monitor nearby construction activities and adjust paths/signage accordingly.
- Paint wood rub rail at edge of platform.
- Provide code compliant electrical connections for vending.
- Deodorize the eastbound rest rooms.
- Remove vending machines and newspaper boxes from narrow platform sections and primary paths.
- Upon completion of catenary construction, the contractor needs to replace chain link fence that was removed to access the catenary supports. Use black fence for replacements within several hundred feet of the station.
- Clean and paint any rusted catenary structures in and behind the platforms that will remain after the catenary replacement project.
- Trim vegetation and eliminate pavement weeds.
- Place a bollard in front of the post-mounted camera behind the eastbound platform.

Amenity Upgrades:

- Consider a station kiosk for each side of the station.
- Place a station entrance sign near the main westbound entrance. Place a large station entrance sign at the South Monroe Street entrance, since this is the location of the daily parking lot.
- Replace weathered platform mounted station name signs.
- Add black mesh benches to open areas of the platform.
- Replace various trash receptacles with steel trash cans. Add trash cans 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.

- Add a bike rack to each side of the station.

Governance Improvements:

- Evaluate illumination levels in and around the station.
- Replace chain link fence with black chain link fence.
- Repair platform surface, foundations, bearings and joints and perform leveling, as required.
- Replace all platform, stair and ramp aluminum railing with black railing. Include a gate (with railroad lock) for the Location D signal cabinet behind the westbound platform.
- Replace all bituminous walks (defining established paths) with concrete sidewalks.
- Upon the completion of the bridge construction project, remaining stairs and paths will have to be reinspected. Replace, repair and upgrade items such as bituminous surfaces, deteriorated stairs, non-conforming handrail and inadequate lighting.
- Review content and location of station signage, especially after completion of nearby bridge replacement. Supplement as needed.
- Address ADA concerns noted from the High Level Platform Visual Inspection Report and recent FTA compliance review.
- Relative to the south (eastbound) Monroe Street entrance to the station:
 - Clean up south entrance. Replace the bituminous walk with a concrete sidewalk from Monroe Street to the small parking area east of the station building.
 - Landscape the embankment.
 - Place black fence or railing on top of the Monroe Street wingwall if the bridge replacement project does not address this matter.
 - Install a raised sidewalk and black railing between the south pocket track (#6) and the small parking area just east of the eastbound station building. Connect the walk to the entrance sidewalk recommended in the previous note.
 - Place post-mounted light fixtures along the new sidewalks.
 - Complete the isolation of the Track #6 pocket (Danbury Branch sidetrack) by installing black railing around the Track #6 bumper, starting at the bottom of eastbound platform stairs and terminating at the railing recommended in the previous note.
 - If high rail access is to be continued at this location, install a gate (with railroad lock) and provide sufficient room for high rail vehicles to maneuver onto the track. If high rail access is to be eliminated, extend the sidewalk and railing to the Monroe Street bridge wingwall.
- Install a black gate in front of the open space between the station building and the eastbound platform.
- Replace the raised bituminous walk between the eastbound platform and parking lot west of the station building with a concrete walk.
- Provide appropriate signage for pedestrian access and parking in this area.
- Install black fencing at the top of the slope just north of the Track #5 pocket.

Major Capital Improvements:

- Ongoing Monroe Street bridge and catenary replacement project.

-- END OF NARRATIVE --

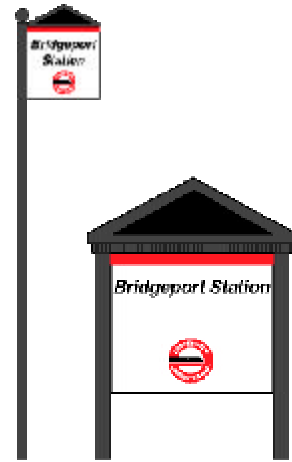
APPENDIX A



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