

SOUTHPORT TRAIN STATION
VISUAL INSPECTION REPORT



January 2007



Prepared by the Bureau of Public Transportation
Connecticut Department of Transportation

Overview:

The Southport Train Station is located in the quiet and historic southwest corner of Fairfield. Access is relatively easy from I-95 and US Route 1. However, the lack of trailblazing makes the station's location a well-guarded secret from those not familiar with the area.

Parking is distributed throughout the area in state and privately owned lots.

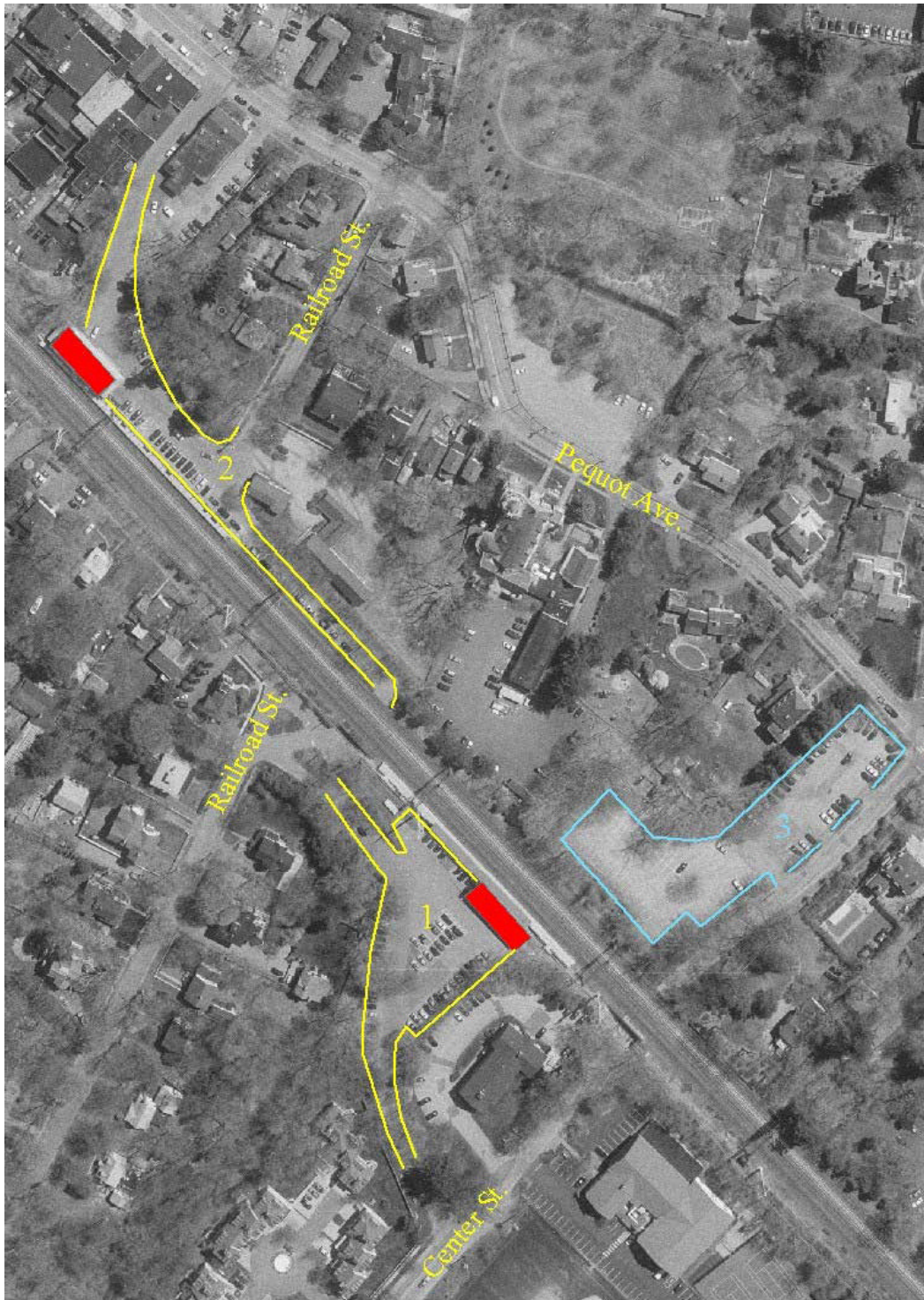
The eastbound station building has been nicely restored and converted into a restaurant. The westbound station building shares its waiting room with an art gallery. The Town has plans to improve the building over the winter.

Unlike most stations, the two platforms are offset from each other, separated by a narrow undergrade railroad bridge. A sidewalk provides a route from platform to platform. Paths in various states of disrepair extend away from the platforms to the local streets.

**Maintenance Responsibilities:**

Owner:	CDOT
Operator:	Town
Platform Lights:	Town
Trash:	Town
Snow Removal:	Town
Shelter Glazing:	Town
Platform Canopy:	Town
Platform Structure:	Town
Parking:	Fairfield Parking Authority

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
- Privately-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 10, 2006:

Highway Access – Southport Station is located near I-95 (Exit 19) and Route 1. Center Street, Old Post Road and Pequot Avenue lead directly to the station. However, once off the highway, trailblazing signage is insufficient to guide a motorist through local streets to one of the daily parking lots. A small trailblazing sign denotes the Center Street entrance to the facility.

Parking – The Center Street entrance has a large sign spelling out the conditions for permit and day parking. Parking illumination needs to be evaluated for effectiveness considering the plush foliage surrounding the lots.

Platforms – The platforms at Southport are only four cars in length. Structurally, the platforms are in fair to good condition. Nearly all the joints between platforms are failing. Some of the stairs/ramps are cracked and spalling. Railing base plates are corroded. The aluminum platform, stair and ramp railings are weathered with an occasional bent panel. The trackside edge of the platform has a faded yellow stripe. Platform illumination appears to be sufficient. Rusty catenary supports rise up from both platforms.

Canopy – The westbound canopy is in satisfactory condition. There is evidence of peeling paint, rust, and corrosion on columns, roofing, connections and framing.

Walks/Paths – Paths leading away from the station platforms to local streets are in poor to failing condition. The walk at the east end of the eastbound platform has an uneven bituminous surface. Railroad ballast and a rusty chain link fence encroach upon the trackside of the walk. Vegetation intrudes upon the other side. An old rusty railroad work platform hangs precariously overhead. The concrete stairs leading down to Old Post Road are crumbling, have a broken handrail and are overgrown with vegetation. Illumination is non-existent. The nearby grass walkway at the east end of the restaurant is a nice touch. However, the wood platform at the side entrance to the restaurant is rotted and falling apart.

The path to the Railroad Avenue underpass is narrow but in good condition. After crossing the road and passing under the bridge, one is faced with another crumbling concrete stairway with rusty handrail and remnants of electrical fixtures. At the top of the stairs, the pedestrian is faced with the end of the platform that juts into the uneven, cracked bituminous walk.

Proceeding to the west end of the westbound platform, one encounters another uneven, cracked bituminous walk that leads to yet another crumbling stairway down to Center Street. On the way to the stairs, the walker needs to avoid a catenary support, high voltage tower and the end of the platform.

Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) – The TVM is on the westbound platform

Shelter – There is no shelter at this location.

Station Building – The eastbound station building is a brick structure occupied by a restaurant. The building appears to be in good condition and well maintained. The westbound station building has a waiting room and an art gallery. The waiting room is clean. The men's room is small but functional. Paint is peeling from the exterior siding.

Bus Access & Taxi Stand – Taxis can access either platform. Buses may have a difficult time maneuvering through the parking lots.

Signage – Station name signs are rusty. Other platform signage is minimal. Parking information signs are well placed and informative.

Fences – All chain link fences are weathered, rusted or broken.

Litter – The area is generally clean, although there is some litter behind the westbound platform. The restaurant dumpsters located behind the eastbound platform had a bad odor.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Access – While ramps and high-level platforms provide access to trains, this station is not ADA compliant. Platform to platform access is restricted.

General Remarks –Southport has a nice train station that needs a little work to bring it up to the high standards of our commuters.

Amenities (See Appendix A Photos)

- Kiosk: None
- Exterior Paint Theme: Yellow (westbound) and brick (eastbound)
- Vending: Vending machines on westbound platform, newspaper boxes on both platforms. Questionable electrical connections to vending machines.
- Benches: Aluminum benches on both platforms
- Railings: Weathered aluminum railing on platforms, ramps and stairs. Other railings are substandard, rusted or broken.
- Light Fixtures: Light poles are corroded and/or ancient. Fluorescent light fixtures need to be evaluated
- Trash: Blue recycling bins and various trash receptacles placed around the station area.
- Bicycle Rack: Bike locker (westbound) and bike rack (eastbound)
- Platform Clock: None

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:

- Additional trailblazing signage along local streets and state highways.
- Add reverse trailblazing signage directing motorists back to the highways
- Repair platform stairs and ramps.
- Clean and paint all elements of the westbound canopy
- Address short-term safety issues relative to paths and stairs to streets
- Repaint platform edge warning stripe
- Repair curb between parking areas and the rear of eastbound platform
- Paint catenary structures (coordinate with Metro-North)
- Remove vending machines and newspaper boxes from platforms and primary paths.
- Provide code compliant electrical connections for vending machines.
- Remove old, freestanding electrical box located across Station Street from the eastbound platform.
- Repair bathroom floor (water damage) and broken stall (men's room)
- Clean area between westbound platform and station building.
- Protect both ends of westbound platform from pedestrians

Amenity Upgrades:

- Add a station kiosk on each side of the station.
- Add station entrance signs to the Center Street and Pequot Avenue entrances.
- Add TVM to eastbound platform.
- Replace all aluminum seats with black mesh benches.
- Replace trash receptacles with steel trash cans.
- Construct a shelter for vending behind the platform or near primary paths, provided it does not interfere with pedestrian movement.
- Replace or supplement bike rack on eastbound side. Monitor security of westbound side bike locker.
- Add station clocks to both platforms, possibly pedestal mounted or on the side of the buildings.

Governance Improvements:

- Evaluate illumination levels in and around the station.
- Install concrete walk and/or black railing (or black chain link fence) beyond the ends of both platforms including on the EB masonry retaining wall.
- Repair or replace stairways (and handrails) to Railroad Avenue and Center Street.
- Re-evaluate the need for the path and stairs from the eastbound platform to Old Post Road. If the path is to remain in place, then install a new concrete walk, replace the fence with a black chain link fence or black railing, and replace the stairs. Otherwise, eliminate the entire path and walk.
- Repair platform surface, foundations, bearings and joints as required.
- Replace all platform, stair and ramp aluminum railing with black railing.
- Replace weathered chain link fence with black fencing.
- Replace all bituminous walks (defining established paths) with concrete sidewalks.
- Review content and location of station signage.
- Add platform edge tactile warning strips.
- Document the historic nature of the station buildings and prominently display the information for public consumption.

Major Capital Improvements:

- Lengthen 4-car platforms to 10 cars.
- Extend and/or replace westbound platform canopy
- Add canopy and/or shelter to eastbound platform
- Provide ADA compliant route for platform-to-platform access.

-- END OF NARRATIVE --

APPENDIX A

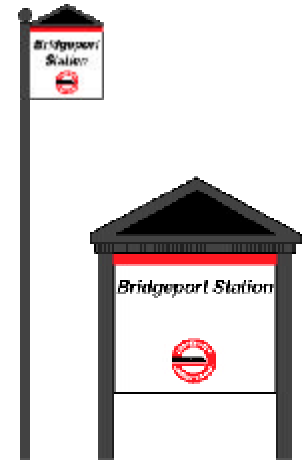
Examples of Amenities



Pole Mounted Lights



Kiosk (Historic)



Signs (Contemporary)



Bench (Contemporary) and Railing



Vending Shelter



Trash Can (Black preferred)



Bike Rack



Fence, Walk and Post Mounted Light Next to Track



Typical Trailblazing Sign