

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-237 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION.

Vote Date: 3/17/26

Vote Action: JFS TO THE FLOOR

PH Date: 3/2/2026

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Transportation Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Section 1 of the bill increases the frequency of Shore Line East to pre-covid levels. Many individuals that rely on Shore Line East for travel have found that the decrease in service has made planning their commutes and work day's difficult.

Section 2 of the bill requires the DOT, in conjunction with statewide bus services, to determine the feasibility for increasing bus service between Naugatuck Valley and New Haven during peak times in an attempt to further increase access to public transit in Connecticut.

Section 3 makes changes to current law's requirements for how and when the DOT alerts the public of a fare increase.

Sections 4-7, in an effort to increase access to public transportation, requires the State Department of Education to administer a program providing grants to school boards for buying state bus passes to be distributed without cost to students in grades 9-12. It also requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to purchase state bus passes and distribute them to Veterans without cost. This sections further expands on previous legislation which gave students grades 9-12 and veterans a 50% discount on state bus passes.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute language makes slight changes to the section on Shore Line East regarding information the DOT Commissioner should take into consideration when increasing its levels of service. It further replaces a DOT requirement to implement certain public transportation

projects and initiatives with the statewide bus study provisions to measure the feasibility of potential bus routes.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Garrett Eucalitto, Commission, Connecticut Department of Transportation:

The Governor's budget does not include funding to restore Shore Line East to pre-covid levels. Extending the full service beyond Old Saybrook to New London requires more crews and trans that in 2019 pre-covid requiring more financial resources.

Section 2 requires implementation of several projects that have no proposed funding again in the budget.

Section 3 enables CTDOT to utilize agency resources to target the public while aligning with modern public engagement strategies and trends.

Sections 4-7 establishes programs administered through the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Education for bus passes. The governor's budget does provide for \$2.5 million for student and another \$1 million for the purchase and distribution of bus passes for veterans.

Sections 4, 6 and 7 refer to state-owned or state-controlled bus public transportation services. The state does not own or control transit districts, so this only applies to entities under the CT transit umbrellas, it would be more effective to expand this program to include the Transit Districts.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Jason Rojas, Majority Leader, State of Connecticut:

The bill instructs the DOT to undertake actions to increase the availability of safe, accessible, and effective public transportation options. Public transportation options, like those in Section 2, call for an expansion of bus service between the Cities of Hartford, Manchester, Rockville, the town of East Hartford and the village of Storrs. This option allows people to forgo typical automobile-centric commutes, saving them money. Infrastructure improvements are of paramount importance in providing our constituents a higher quality of life. The state should support these initiatives.

Stephen Harding, Majority Leader, State of Connecticut:

The bill focuses on restoring and expanding rail and bus services particularly to my constituents in the 30th district. Expansion to New Milford will ease congestion, protect our environment, boost economic development, and improve connectivity. This measure also includes the provision for free bus passes to students and veterans.

Jim Gidea, Chairman, Connecticut Public Transportation Council:

It is critical for commuters, for our environment, and for economic development to restore rail service to pre-COVID levels. Shore Line East has experienced reduced and inconsistent service while every other line has been restored to 100% service. In 2024 we invested \$5 million into Shore Line East and ridership immediately increased by approximately 28%. It is time for

more investment. Included in our testimony are other rail provisions we favor including Danbury, New Milford, Storrs, Naugatuck Valley, Manchester, and Rockville.

Bobby Sanchez, Mayor, New Britain:

Transportation is an access to employment, education, healthcare, housing stability and opportunity. Transportation directly impacts economic mobility and quality of life for cities like New Britain. Our diverse population relies heavily on public transit. Reliable and affordable transportation is essential for veterans and students. Connecticut needs to advance policies that improve accessibility, enhance safety and support vulnerable populations.

Peggy Lyons, First Selectman of Madison:

Thousands of residents that I represent aspire to rely on a cohesive, multi-model transit network. Most Madison residents must walk many miles to reach public transportation. The XtraMile program provides greater access to major regional transportation links. We need to restore Shoreline East to pre-pandemic levels.

Sheri Marquis, V A Veterans Service Officer:

This legislature addresses a barrier I witness daily. I hear stories about veterans who need surgery, but they have no way to get there and home. As a veteran who sits across from veterans daily, I hear that transportation is not just a convenience issue but a healthcare issue. Veterans generally need to travel significant distances for care and VA required exams. Existing transportation programs are limited or not tailored to individual needs. We often feel the need to repay our veterans, and this is something we can do.

Martha Marx, Senator, State of Connecticut:

The bill helps reinstate operations of the Shoreline East Rail Line, the only rail service operating at a deficit. Consistent and reliable railroad services are imperative to employers like General Dynamics Electric Boat who are gearing up to hire 8,000 new employees. We have witnessed the major gaps between train times, low ridership and service cuts due to budget restrictions. Further reductions would make transportation nearly impossible.

Mansfield:

Mayor Antonia Moran

Town Manager, Ryan J. Aylesworth:

The proposed expansion of Bus Rapid Transit from Hartford to Storrs (Mansfield) represents an investment in regional mobility, economic vitality and environmental sustainability for eastern Connecticut. Mansfield, the home of the University of Connecticut serves as a major employment, education research and cultural hub for Connecticut. Even though UCONN draws tens of thousands of students, faculty, staff and visitors it remains underserved by high-frequency, fixed-route regional transit. Establishing reliable frequent BRT service, the state would create a regional transit spine linking the Capitol city with Connecticut's flagship public university. The extension investment would promote equality in transportation funding, reduce congestion, provide students and residents with alternatives to driving, advance climate and emission reduction goals and strengthen the talent pipeline between UCONN and employers in Hartford and the surrounding communities.

John-Michael Parker, Representative, State of Connecticut:

Expanding the Shore Line East would restore it to its pre-COVID pandemic service for seniors, students, community members with disabilities, tourists and others who rely on the public rail service.

Moira Rader, Representative, State of Connecticut:

This legislation represents an investment in the accessibility of our state. Many communities within my district rely on reliable and affordable public transportation to access employment opportunities, education, health care and community life. Expanding the Rapid Bus Transit connections improves mobility. Providing free bus passes to students and veterans directly supports two populations in my district.

Paul Pernerewski, Jr, Mayor, Waterbury:

As Mayor of one of the largest municipalities I see the critical role reliable and affordable public transportation plays in the daily lives of our residents. For out student who live outside the established school transportation zones public transit is a necessity. Our veterans depend on public transportation to maintain their independence by providing essential access to medical appointments, grocery stores employment opportunity and community resources. Expanding transportation access is an investment in equity, education, workforce development and public health.

Dorinda Borer, Mayor, West Haven:

West Haven is home to one of the largest veteran populations in Connecticut. It is our obligation to make sure we give back to them in a meaningful way. This bill provides free passes to veterans and removes a real and practical barrier to mobility, independence, and access to the service and opportunities our veterans have earned. As the former Chairwoman of the Veteran's Affairs Committee, I heard many pleas for assistance and this bill is a step in the right direction and shows veterans that Connecticut stands with them.

Michael Adams. AFSCME Council 4:

We represent many veterans who will be served by this bill. This bill takes a step to ensure transportation is not a barrier but a pathway to opportunity by providing free bus passes to them. Investing in people who have given so much in service to our country and communities moves Connecticut in the right direction.

Chris D'Antonio, Vice-Chair of the Enfield Planning and Zoning Commission

Investing in transit and expanding service and increasing ridership is deeply important in decreasing car dependency, creating more efficient and diverse land use, is better for the environment, and provides everyone mobility regardless of age and ability. I strongly support free transit for students- it is deeply valuable to introduce teens to a transit system that can be valuable for their entire life giving them safe, independent mobility. I am also strongly in favor of the bus rapid transit expansion which would provide a local continuation of a top-tier bus rapid transit system.

Jeffery Babbin, Guilford Resident

I live in Guilford and commute to New Haven using Shore Line East. The large gaps in the afternoon schedule can make it difficult to get home if I have to stay late at the office. If I do not leave my office right at 5:00pm to catch the 5:20pm train, the next train doesn't leave until

7:57pm. Further, if I have to go to Stamford for work-related reasons, no Metro-North trains are able to make the connection to Shore Line East during my evening commute.

Julie Bazile, New Haven Youth Climate Movement

Expanding access to free public transit is one of the most practical ways for Connecticut to help its most vulnerable people. Typically, when bus fares pose a financial burden, it's low-income families, students, veterans, seniors, and communities of color that are most disproportionately affected. This financial burden can limit opportunities for those seeking work, as well as limit access to essential services. Public transit can also help in lowering greenhouse gas emissions and improves air quality by reducing the use of individual cars. I hope the legislature views this bill as a step forward for accessible public transportation for all that invests in positive economic, environmental, and social returns.

Alexander Berardo, Vice Chair of the RI Association of railroad Passengers

We observe a significant increase in ridership of Shore Line East's annual ridership from roughly 193,000 in 2024 to 225,000 in 2025, demonstrating that an increase in the number of trains will increase ridership. Ongoing infrastructure projects such as the Connecticut River Bridge replacement and the Madison Railroad Station Improvements Project will reinforce an increased investment in service. RIAP believes that Shore Line East's long-term growth prospects primarily lie in extending service to Westerly, Rhode Island, as this would enable Shore Line East to serve the Groton-New London market and increase tourism to the Mystic area. It could also open the door to capitol or cost sharing opportunities with Rhode Island.

Patrick Boots, Student, University of Connecticut:

As a student at UCONN, correspondent for the UConn Daily campus and a frequent passenger of public transportation I applaud you for restoring ShoreLine East to its former service level. I appreciate the intent to strengthen the service before Hartford and Storrs-Mansfield, but my concern is a lack of potential compared to the current Hartford-UConn express bus Route 913. BRT-esque service may not change travelers' experience or the timing compared to the current bus service. The record-breaking popularity of the Hartford Line shows what is possible when Connecticut invests in reliable rail transit service. Connecticut has a history as a steward of transportation and can have just as good a transportation network as other metropolitan areas with this bill.

Lisa Brandes, New Haven Resident, current SCSU Graduate Student

Shore Line East is essential in connecting all areas of CT business, arts, tourism, education, and government. I regularly use transit to get to campus and around the state shopping, arts, recreation, volunteering, and to visit my son at Connecticut College in New London. He and his classmates don't have a car and use public transit for everything.

Rachel Briggs, Conservative Law Foundation

The CLF strongly supports sections 1 and 2 of the bill, as these measures restoring and expanding public transit service as they are essential to meeting our climate goals and safeguarding our communities. Trains and buses can not only help us meet our climate goals, but they can protect air quality, especially in areas of high transportation-related pollution. The CLF also supports Section 3, as the public deserves an opportunity to weigh in on any increases in fares. We also support Sections 4-7, as they were implemented last year, but not funded. We encourage the legislature to add parallel sections providing funding for all groups covered in PA 25-65.

Daniel Champagne, Mayor, Town of Vernon,

Our town is making investments in our Rockville Mill Revitalization Program creating over 200 units of workforce housing and commercial spaces. As Rockville continues its progress the expansion of the bus rapid transit system would be a welcomed effort in creating reliable transit-oriented services and strengthen our development efforts.

David Chess, Mayor, Stratford,

In municipal government we see the challenges facing veterans and the obstacles that affect their quality of life. Transportation is a foundational need and for many on a fixed income every recurring expense matters. When this bill passes Stratford looks forward to connecting our veterans to Connecticut's Department of Veteran Affairs to acquire bus passuses through our certified Veterans Municipal Representative.

Association of Commuter Rail Employees:

Edward Valente, Executive Board Director, General Chairman

Kelly Grandfield, Legislative Representative,

Our members play a role in fulfilling the mission of Metro-North Railroad service. We are concerned about the lack of service on Shore Line East and believe the current level of service could lead to a death spiral. There is a lack of connectivity to our trains in New Haven and is about 29%. Additional monies should be appropriated into the line item to increase service levels and then ridership will increase.

Guy Milazzo, State Legislative Director, SMART Transportation:

I represent Conductors and train service employees who operate passenger rail throughout Connecticut and the Northeast. I worked as a conductor on some of the first Shore Line East trains and its success has always depended on frequent and reliable peak-period service designated around commuter work schedules. Today peak-hour trains are spaced too far apart. Schedules were designed around actual commuting times are restoring service patters similar would be practical and effective to rebuild ridership.

Matthew Hart, Executive Director, Capitol Region Council of Governments:

We support expanding CT FastTrack eastward to provide transit options to underserved communities. Extending CTfastrak to the eastern communities expands public access to employment centers, higher education institutions and healthcare facilities while reducing vehicle miles and enhancing mobility goals and the state's climate. It is important to include an assessment of this proposal within the Statewide Bus Study.

Kenneth Kelly, Veteran:

As a veteran and a user of the Shore Line East daily all through Covid 2020 &2021 please fund it please. The old, dilapidated unreliable diesel cars should be replaced at the least with new diesel cars and service must be reserved fully.

Town of Manchester:

Steve Stephanou, Town Manager

Jay Moran, Mayor

This bill represents a transformative opportunity for the East of the River communities and growth of the Bus Rapid Transit. Establishing a route between Hartford and Storrs will bridge a gap in our transit infrastructure. We are investing millions of dollars to transform our

Downtown into a walkable, premier and regional destination. Expanding the BTR system will act as a catalyst for further housing and mixed-use development.

Lisa Thomas, Chair, Coventry Town Council:

Please consider increased connectivity in this bill further east for towns along the Route 384 and 44 corridors. This service is critical to Connecticut's success in reaching its climate resilience goals, improving access to healthcare and supporting economic growth. We need a transportation corridor that bolsters eastern Connecticut.

Garrett Sheehan, President, Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce:

We represent hundreds of businesses and thousands of employees across the greater New Haven region. Many of our members depend on a reliable, robust public transportation network as a fundamental driver of economic vitality. Shore Line East is a transportation artery for our region and the reduction in service following the pandemic have created hardship for employees who depend on the train to reach their workplaces. Restoring this service sends a signal that Connecticut is serious about investing in the infrastructure that supports long term growth and economic recovery.

Juliana Larue, Organizer, Sierra Club Connecticut:

We believe in strengthening Connecticut's public transit system by expanding projects like the BRT or rail extensions. Public transportation emits 45% less CO per passenger mile. These bills ultimately reduce Connecticut's carbon footprint and helps to combat climate change.

Lou Rinaldi, Guildford:

While the bills goals are commendable there are a few gaps that could hinder its success or create unintended consequences. I recommend the following amendments:

- Fund the Infrastructure Mandates
- Close the Fare Hearing Loophole
- Expand Transit Pass Eligibility
- Address the Funding Cliff and Prioritization

Francis Pickering, Executive Director, Western Connecticut Council of Governments:

We support restoring passenger rail service north of Danbury to New Milford. This would expand opportunities for residents of Litchfield County to access jobs in Fairfield County and beyond and enhancing the economic competitiveness of both. This is a strategic opportunity to complete the Danbury Branch as a continuous regional spine serving both Fairfield and Litchfield Counties.

Harland Christofferson:

As a resident of Guildford and a Monday-Friday commuter on the SLE train I am support of the bill. My self along with several residents of Guilford and Madison drive to West Haven and use the Metro-North Railroad bypassing the Shore Line East. There is not return train to Guilford or Madison. Consistently people I speak to would use the trains more often if the Shore Line East had better service especially on the weekend. Public transportation is essential and restoring rail service are practical investments in mobility, exonymic vitality and quality of life in Connecticut.

Amber Garrard, Director of Sustainability, Yale University:

Reliable rail service is essential to Yale's sustainability, regional connectivity and access to employment and educational opportunities. When service levels decline commuters often shift to single occupancy vehicles resulting in increased congestion, higher transportation costs and greater greenhouse gas pollution. Overall transit ridership has begun to recover since the pandemic but the Shore Line East lags due in part to reduced schedules and service disruptions. Restoring service is a necessary and a practical step. This bill represents an important opportunity to ensure that the Shore Line East system again meets the needs of the commuters.

Mary Howard:

As a resident of Branford, I travel on Shore Line East for business and personal needs. I use the Branford train station for park as well as picking up family who visit. to avoid I 95 traffic delays. The current decrease in schedule, lacking power outlets and internet are a step back. Increase Shore Line East and reinstate electric trains.

JoLynn Kennedy: Commuter:

As a constituent who commutes into New York City four days a week the Shore Line East schedule does not align with the needs of commuters. Particularly for evening return trips it is a 90-minute express that stops only in Stamford, Bridgeport and New Haven. Metro-North has six trains giving the better of the two options. Champion funding and policy initiatives to expand Shore Line East frequency and improve alignment with Metro-North.

Rebecca McMackin:

As a small business owner who lives just outside of New Milford, I would like to see the trains extended from Danbury to New Milford. We need public transportation and small expansions to existing lines can lead to larger expansions in the future. There are a large group of activists ready to campaign for this.

People Friendly Stamford:

As a local safe street's advocacy group, we see this as a common-sense bill. The bill provides mobility for school children and veterans with access to transportation. One shortcoming is the free bus passes as a grant program. This creates administrative costs and CT bureaucracy which must manage the grants. Simply allow CT buses and trains to accept student and veteran's ID cards in lieu of payment. We also concerned about the reintroduction of Diesel trains to Shore Line East. Diesel engines are environmentally destructive and perform worse compared the electric trains. Connecticut should be eliminating its outdated diesel fleet.

Keri Ana Provost:

As a car free lifelong resident of Connecticut, I use buses and trains to go to work in Hartford. I take the buses to the grocery store, synagogue, visiting friends, the beach but it is not always reliable, convenient or affordable. We should get as many people as possible out of their private vehicles and into public transportation.

Kristina Powell,

As a mother raising a family I want transportation choices. Restoring Shore Line East to full service is fiscally responsible and supports public health, economic growth and a healthy and sustainable quality of life. Shoreline employers depend on transportation options for their workforce and a fully function SLE supports housing near stations, strengthens local downtowns and connects people to jobs. I support providing veterans and some students with

free public bus fare, but it should include 9-12 grade private school students who addend on scholarship.

Maritza Sanchez, Student, Southern Connecticut State University:

As a first-generation low-income student living off campus public transportation is my primary means of travel. I am grateful for the U-Pass program for Connecticut college students. Creating a similar program for high school students and veterans will remove financial barriers and mobility constraints. Expanding access opens doors to community engagement, employment opportunities and healthcare services. Investing in Connecticut's public transportation will lead to a more sustainable future.

Sustainable Streets Norwalk:

The provisions of this bill represent a step forward in Connecticut's sustainability journey. Everyone in Connecticut deserves reasonable access to a variety of mobility options and public transportation is a tool to reduce carbon emissions, spur business development and alleviate traffic congestion. A growing constituency of pro-transit voters are making themselves heard in Connecticut.

The following also submitted testimony in support of the bill:

Samuel Gold, Executive Director, Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

Jim Gildea, Chairman, Connecticut Public Transportation Council

Susan Feaster, Founder, Shoreline East Riders' Advocacy Group

Brian DaConto, Veteran

Thomas Broderick, Trumbull Town Councilor

Kathleen Callahan, Connecticut Cradle to Career Coalition

Ruth Canovi, Director, American Lung Association, Connecticut

John Chan, Heroes on Wheels

Alex Rodriguez, Save the Sound

Matthew Sislber, Teacher, The Train Campaign

Casey Moran, Founder, Build Fastrack East

Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association

Ronald Catania, Retired DOL Veterans Representative

Isaac Reicin, University of Vermont

Christophere Adams

Paul Chesloff

Jen Duefrene, Shoreline East Riders Advocacy Group

Megan Cunningham Yale School of Management

Ewing Leon, CCSU Student

Abigail Roth

Barbara A Russo

Tim Sperry, Guilford

Jessie Stratton, Groton Conservation Advocates

Andrew Warshall

Devin Walsh

Bill Waggoner

Malik Thompson

William Thorpe

Rebecca Stoil

Benjamin Schwartz

Richard Saltz
Carol Rizzolo
Uniese Rivera
Lisa Rathsack
John Paul
Karthik
Mohammad Normani
Michael Mullen
Joanne Massi
Kenny Sage
Lillian LaFemina
Luis Lage
Blaize Levitan
Bob Lyons
Kathryn Mack
Devin Manning
Thomas Martin
Edward Johnson
Rebecca Hussey
Cynthia Howard
Andrew Hopkins
Andrea Hopkins
James Honer
Henry Haskell
Alyssa
Linda Gebauer
Aaron Goode
Jeri Duefrene
Dylan Delzer
Dan Darbandi
Alison Coreia
Laura Copland
Diane Cooney
Gregory Coleman
Timothy Brown
Carmen Castlevetro
Lisa Brandes
John Bowrs
Ryan Boroski
Kira Baum

Anonymous 43

This bill is critical to the growth of and safety of their community in Seymour. It would make it easier for people to commute to work or school and takes a financial load off individuals during a time where everything is so expensive.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Michael Mullen, Linda Dalessio and Anonymous broadly opposed this bill.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: 3/26/26