CONNECTICUT
Port Authority

NOTES OF
FREIGHT RAIL & PORT WORKING GROUP

Monday, October 26, 2026
2:00 PM

Location: VIRTUAL

TEAMS Link was provided.

Working Group Members in Attendance

Chair Michal O'Connor (Connecticut Port Authority); Andrew Lavigne (Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development); Kyle Craig (Connecticut Department of Transportation); Jennifer Perry (Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection) Pamela Sucato (Connecticut Department of Transportation); Anthony Afriyie (Connecticut Port Authority)

Registered Attendees

- John Hughes
- Paula Clarke
- Brendan Fox
- Janice Ehlemeyer
- Kate Wimsatt
- Michael Eisele
- Kevin Spinella
- Sean Hughes
- Lori Vitagliano
- David Aldridge
- Mike Riley

1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order shortly after 2:00 p.m.

Opening remarks delivered by Michael O'Connor of the Connecticut Port Authority reviewed the purpose of the Freight Rail & Port Working Group and the public comment process.

Members of the public were reminded that they may participate through scheduled public meetings or submit written comments through the Connecticut Port Authority website.

2. Public Comment

Jonathan Murray: Murphy Road Recycling (0:02:08)

Jonathan Murray, Vice President of Post Collection Operations for Murphy Road and Companies, described the company's use of rail and trucking to transport municipal solid waste (MSW), construction and demolition debris, and recyclable commodities. He reported that the company operates recycling and transfer facilities in Connecticut and neighboring states, including a materials recovery facility in Berlin, and stressed the importance of maintaining multiple transportation and disposal options as Connecticut's in-state waste processing capacity has declined.

Mr. Murray characterized rail as an efficient option for long-distance waste movements that can reduce heavy truck traffic, emissions, and roadway wear. He stated that approximately one million tons of construction and demolition material already leave Connecticut by rail annually and that the company operates more than 500 railcars. He identified significant impediments to expanded rail use, including high costs for sidings, mainline switches, loading facilities and railcar acquisition, as well as permitting delays and unreliable service. According to his estimates, construction of a siding can exceed $500 per foot, while a mainline switch can cost between $500,000 and $1 million, before accounting for some related design work.

He described four directly rail-served waste transfer facilities across Connecticut and Massachusetts, with additional rail connections at recycling facilities in Berlin and Hartford. In response to questions, he estimated that out-of-state waste movements are approximately evenly divided between rail and truck, although the mix varies by market and service conditions. He explained that rail-served facilities along the Hartford Line can miss a day of service when nighttime freight access windows are unavailable, and that the company maintains additional railcars to manage these disruptions. He also noted that the railcars used for waste return empty after being cleaned at the destination.

Asked about moving waste by water, Mr. Murray said that the company had explored New Haven as a potential barge location but had not found the approach cost-effective because of the need to accumulate large volumes of waste, limited destination unloading infrastructure, and additional handling costs. He recommended recognizing rail as an important mode for waste and recyclables, streamlining approvals for rail-related facility upgrades, improving rail service reliability, considering assistance for siding and switch development, avoiding policies that penalize out-of-state disposal, and evaluating a higher allowable truck weight. He offered to discuss prospective rail infrastructure locations with the Working Group.

Stratford Mayor David Chess: Town of Stratford (0:16:39)

Mayor David Chess discussed rising municipal waste management costs and the limited competition available for waste disposal contracts. He stated that Stratford

received only one bid for incineration services and experienced a 12 percent increase in waste costs. He emphasized that waste management will require multiple solutions, including local or regional treatment options that reduce the volume of material requiring transportation.

Mayor Chess expressed interest in exploring marine transportation for Stratford's waste, although his administration had not yet evaluated a specific waterborne option. He described the town's discussions with a company developing a waste-processing technology referred to in the transcript as "BurCell Technologies," which he said could reduce waste volume and produce methane for energy. He indicated that Stratford was pursuing a memorandum of understanding and was considering opportunities to use energy generated by a future project at its water treatment plant and possibly at adjacent development. He also discussed technologies to reduce water content in wastewater sludge and the resulting transportation burden.

Jennifer Heaton-Jones: Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (0:23:27)

Jennifer Heaton-Jones, Executive Director of the Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority, identified driver shortages, rising trucking costs, and increasing waste volumes as key challenges for the region. She discussed a proposed "bale and rail" project in Danbury that would use the Housatonic freight line to transport MSW directly from a rail-adjacent transfer station to an out-of-state landfill. She emphasized that the project depends on permits for baling and other supporting infrastructure, and recommended state incentives or grant support for rail facilities and improvements.

Ms. Heaton-Jones cautioned that waste reduction programs do not eliminate the need to transport material and that the long-term availability and cost of out-of-state landfill capacity remain uncertain. She stated that her region generated about 108,000 tons of MSW a decade earlier, compared with approximately 152,000 tons in 2025, and urged continued investment in disposal capacity, rail access, existing infrastructure, and efficient in-state trucking. She also supported examination of the current 80,000-pound truck weight limit.

In response to questions, Ms. Heaton-Jones said the authority's municipal tipping fee was approximately $108 per ton, compared with $111 per ton for private haulers. She said the municipal fee had increased from approximately $88 in 2019 and currently included a $6.50 transportation surcharge and a $3.50 fuel surcharge. She expressed hope that the rail project could help stabilize costs. Asked whether diminished east-west freight connections around Danbury represented a lost opportunity, she said she could not assess the rail network question in detail and reiterated the need to account for first- and last-mile handling and transfer costs.

Chadwick Schroeder: City of Bridgeport (0:33:43)

Chadwick Schroeder, Sustainability Manager for the City of Bridgeport, discussed the environmental and public-health burdens associated with waste transportation and disposal facilities. He identified truck congestion along Interstate 95 and vehicle queuing at the city's waste incineration facility as sources of localized emissions, particularly affecting residents near the facility. He noted that competing uses and waterfront

redevelopment may constrain opportunities for new marine freight facilities in Bridgeport.

Mr. Schroeder expressed support for investment in freight rail and potentially marine transportation, while emphasizing the importance of reducing disposal volumes through improved source separation, recycling, reuse, and extended producer responsibility programs. He cited contamination of recyclable materials and inconsistent public information about recyclability as barriers to improved diversion.

He urged the state to provide clearer policy direction and permitting standards for emerging waste-treatment technologies and new facilities. He also emphasized land availability, community acceptance, environmental justice, and the potential use of community benefits agreements to address impacts on host neighborhoods. He suggested that out-of-state disposal should serve as an option for residual materials that cannot reasonably be processed or recovered in Connecticut, while recognizing a continued role for trucking.

Robert Zarnetske and Mayor Tom DeVivo: Town of Windham (0:42:00)

Robert Zarnetske requested an opportunity to provide additional comments on behalf of Windham. He highlighted opportunities to reduce the transportation burden associated with wastewater sludge by removing water before shipment. He then introduced Mayor Tom DeVivo, who described a potential freight-oriented redevelopment opportunity in Willimantic.

Mayor DeVivo identified a roughly 45-acre former mill property with access to the Providence & Worcester and New England Central rail corridors. He described its proximity to road connections and a separate approximately 200-acre gravel property as potential advantages for industrial reuse, aggregate transportation, transloading, and other rail-compatible employment uses. He urged the Working Group to consider Willimantic as a candidate for further freight development analysis rather than focus exclusively on waste transfer facilities.

The mayor also discussed the need to restore the Pine Street Bridge to improve access to the redevelopment site. In response to a question from CTDOT, Windham representatives clarified that funding was being sought, with an estimated project cost of approximately $7 million to $8 million, and that the municipality expected to contribute rather than seek full state funding. Windham representatives expressed interest in coordinating with state agencies, railroads, and neighboring municipalities, and invited the Working Group to visit the site.

3. Working Group Discussion

Following the public presentations, working group members thanked the speakers for their comments and discussed how the testimony would contribute to the working group's ongoing analysis.

4. Next Steps

Review testimony and materials received during the three public meetings held to date. Continue seeking comments from freight operators, municipalities, regional organizations, and other stakeholders, including additional information from Windham and its regional council of governments.

Consider the testimony in developing policy, permitting, investment, and freight infrastructure recommendations for the Working Group’s report.

5. Next Public Meeting

TBD

6. Adjournment

Closing remarks thanked the public participants and working group members for their participation. Members of the public were again encouraged to provide written comments and participate in future meetings.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:51 p.m.