

REPORT OF MEETING

State Project No.: 0414-0073
Project Description: Southeast Area Transit District – Facility Expansion
Town: Preston
Date of Meeting: April 28, 2025
Duration of Meeting: 6:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
Subject: Public Information Meeting
Location of Meeting: Virtual Meeting via Zoom

In Attendance:

Panelists: Adam Fox – CTDOT – Facilities Design
Charles Wiegert – CTDOT – Facilities Design
Emily Anness – CTDOT – Facilities Design

Public Attendees: Six (6) total viewing the Zoom live event.

Purpose of Meeting:

The purpose of this meeting was to present the preliminary design of Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) Project No. 0414-0073, the Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT) Facility Expansion, to the public of the Town of Preston.

A recording of the presentation is available here:

<https://youtu.be/bbYqzseCJmA?si=CWLifj4cKO6vczEg>

A copy of the presentation slides is available on the Project website:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DOTPreston0414-0073>

Discussion:

The Zoom live event started at approximately 6:00 p.m. with the virtual public information meeting introductory slide. Transportation Supervising Engineer Charles Wiegert welcomed attendees and provided a brief overview of the meeting and presentation objectives. Mr. Wiegert then presented civil rights as outlined under Title VI with a slide showing the legal rights of the viewing public, including a post-meeting survey link, and a second slide displaying the CTDOT Title VI Notice to the Public.

For housekeeping, Mr. Wiegert provided instructions on how to use Zoom tools for closed captioning, translations, and submitting comments with the question-and-answer tool. He indicated that the public comment period was open until May 12, 2025, and that questions and comments could be submitted by email and voicemail to the Project Manager, in addition to using the question-and-answer tool during the live Zoom meeting.

Mr. Wiegert then introduced project personnel, consisting of members of CTDOT Division of Facilities Design, CTDOT Office of Public Transit, SEAT, and design consultant Jacobs Engineering.

Following the project introduction, Transportation Engineer Emily Anness began the formal presentation with a brief outline and then presented the following:

- Background on SEAT, including its facility location, operations and transportation programs.
- Purpose and need of the project, providing SEAT's mission, future fleet goals and their consistency with Connecticut Public Act 22-25, and indicating that the current facility was outdated and did not provide adequate space and infrastructure for administration, operations, fleet growth and electrification.
- Aerial photo of the current facility, discussing existing site conditions, available utilities, and condition and uses of the existing onsite building.
- Photos and information on SEAT's current and proposed fleet, reiterating their goal to transition to an all-electric fleet and their need for adequate admin and operations space.
- Project scope and highlights, which includes the design and construction of a new 55,000-sf building to house administrative and operational space, and indoor battery electric bus (BEB) storage and charging, and to provide a "solar-ready" facility with a new solar array and rooftop solar panels. Ms. Anness specified that the existing building would remain but would be renovated under a separate project.
- Proposed site layout and facility rendering, describing the locations of the proposed building, field solar array and rooftop solar panels, details on site circulation/vehicular traffic, EV charging areas, visitor and employee access/parking, indoor bus storage area parameters, and various areas and uses of both the proposed and existing buildings.
- Potential project impacts, including ongoing environmental reviews and consultations.
- Current project schedule and cost, indicating that project design is anticipated to be completed in July 2026, construction to start in spring 2027 and end in fall 2029, and that the project cost is \$50 million and funded by 80% federal funds and 20% state funds.

Ms. Anness concluded the project presentation and opened the Question & Answer (Q&A) Session. Mr. Wiegert restated the methods of submitting questions and comments to the Project Team and how to use the question-and-answer tool. He also provided the following additional project information:

- Fire protection measures incorporated into the project design in order to prevent BEB fires in the indoor bus storage area.
- An overview of Connecticut Public Act 22-25, specifically the conditions that require the state to transition to an all-electric transit fleet by 2030 and that local transit districts are also adhering to this requirement.

During the Q&A Session, the public posed three questions, which were answered by Transportation Principal Engineer Adam Fox and are outlined in the next section of this ROM. At the conclusion of the Q&A Session, the virtual meeting ended at approximately 6:30 p.m.

Questions and Comments:

Question & Answer (Q&A) Session

The following three questions were raised and answered during the live Q&A Session:

Question 1: While the Department addressed fire protection measures against BEB fires in the project design, The New Haven Register reported in July 2022 that the State of Connecticut replaced a fleet of BEBs with diesel buses due to battery fire incidents. Why did this occur, and what has been the development since that time?

Verbal response: Mr. Fox explained that a BEB fire incident had occurred at the Hamden Facility several years ago. In response to that event, the state withdrew the BEB fleet at the time from the roadway network, and the National Transportation Safety Board, CTDOT and others, including the manufacturer, performed an investigation in order to identify the cause of the battery fire. Ultimately the manufacturer identified and corrected the cause of the failure, and since then, CTDOT has utilized an upgraded BEB fleet throughout the state with no other incidents.

Question 2: Has the weight of electric buses been considered in the design? Electric buses are heavier than diesel buses due to battery weight, and therefore, it's more wear and tear on roads. Has that been analyzed?

Verbal response: Mr. Fox indicated that CTDOT has a pavement design unit that analyzes pavement parameters, including thickness and material, and oversees a pavement maintenance program. He explained that truck traffic volume has the greatest impact on the wear and tear of the state's pavement system, whereas the volume of public transit

buses is much less than trucks and therefore buses do not significantly impact the condition of the pavement system.

Question 3: Are electric buses heavier than diesel buses? Are there fewer of them than trucks?

Verbal response: Mr. Fox confirmed that in general, electric buses are heavier than diesel buses, and that there are fewer buses than trucks in the CTDOT roadway network. Mr. Fox reiterated that truck traffic is the primary load being carried by CTDOT's pavement system.

Comments received during Public Comment Period

During the public comment period that closed May 12, 2025, CTDOT received two comments letters via email from a member of the public and from the Town of Preston.

Comments letter #1, received April 28, 2025

Given the fire catastrophes of electric buses, that even occurred when the bus was parked, why are we even considering more spending on electric buses?

<https://www.visiontimes.com/2022/07/27/connecticut-electric-bus-fire-fleet-replaced-diesel.html>

<https://www.nts.gov/investigations/Pages/HWY22FH011.aspx>

Also, electric vehicles are heavier than gasoline-powered vehicles, which means that there is more wear and tear on the roads.

Solar panels might be considered "clean energy" until one considers the mining that must be done for the lithium batteries. And as the sun is blocked out against 'climate change,' the solar panels are generating less power.

The White House released this 44-page document in June 2023 about their "research" (experimentation to which we did not consent) to block out the sun by spraying chemical pollution from airplanes. "Congressionally Mandated Research Plan and an Initial Research Governance Framework Related to Solar Radiation Modification"

Department's Response:

The facilities that house these battery electric buses have an extensive fire protection plan that includes preemptive monitoring of the buses, early warning detection and obviously protective measures for the building.

Battery electric buses are indeed about 20% heavier today than their diesel counterparts. This does create some operational issues as far as how many passengers they can carry, but generally the total amount each is rated for is about equivalent. Also, there are very few city buses when compared to the amount of truck traffic that most roads see. Therefore, the heavier and more frequent trucks are usually a much greater concern to the longevity of the pavement.

Given the size and topography of this site, solar generation is seen as a great opportunity to use an alternative energy source, which aligns with the state's clean energy programs and renewable energy initiatives.

Comments letter #2, received May 9, 2025 from the Town of Preston

1. Are sidewalks proposed along the frontage of the facility?

2. It is requested that the project include a bus stop and shelter along SEAT's property frontage. This will provide people living in Norwich, Ledyard, Montville and Groton to have direct access to the multi-use trail and the area attractions, including Riverwalk, for not only entertainment, but also jobs.

3. Your presentation indicated that a solar array is proposed in front of the property along Route 12. We are concerned with the location of the array as it will be extremely visible to the public and the proposed Mohegan Development, and will be the first thing people will see entering the Riverwalk area. This will not be harmonious with the area and its development.

4. Building design is also of concern. The parcel is located in the Thames River zoning district. Although the development is exempt from our zoning regulation, we hope the project can follow our "Thames River Design Guidelines" for the façade of the building and landscaping of the parcel.

5. Was a traffic study completed for the project? This project traffic design should coordinate with the development plans for Riverwalk and any improvements of the Routes 12 and 2A intersection. Concept plans for the redesign of Route 12 and the intersection are available if you are interested in reviewing the concept plans at this time.

Department's Response:

CTDOT will coordinate with the Town and SECOG to discuss the feasibility of incorporating the requested attributes, design elements and guidelines from comments #1, 2, and 4 into the project, and to discuss potential design resolutions for addressing concerns in comment #3 regarding the solar array and comment #5 for a traffic study. The project scope involves the design and construction of the proposed new building, which includes the installation of bituminous pavement around the new building limits and on the new building's entrance drive and parking area. Due to the project limits, a traffic study and the installation of sidewalks along the frontage of the property fall outside of the scope of this project. The addition of a new bus stop also falls outside the project scope and CTDOT's authority, but CTDOT will refer this request to SEAT, which is the authority that establishes new bus stops and routes for their district.