

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will the work take?

Current plans call for completion of engineering design work related to the double-tracking and related stations and crossings work in 2012. Construction work, which must be coordinated with Amtrak, the owner of the rail line, is scheduled to take place between 2013 and 2015. Initial start-up service is planned to begin by 2016.

A key "next step" is completion of the environmental assessment of the improvements and new service, as required by federal and state law. This is currently underway and is planned for completion by the end of 2011. No construction work can begin on corridor-wide improvements until the environmental review is done.

What station enhancements are included in the program?

With double tracking, new platforms will be required on both sides of the tracks at each station. These will be built at the same height as the floors of the trains, so as to provide level boarding, and connected by a pedestrian bridge over the tracks, complete with stairs and an elevator for easy access.

Other station enhancements, such as additional parking, will be included as required and as developed with each town. Several stations may require relocation or other more significant upgrades based on alignment or the development objectives of the towns. In the future, four new commuter rail stations are planned at North Haven, Newington, West Hartford and Enfield. The current high speed grants do not include funding to design or construct these four stations.

One of the primary objectives of the NHHS program is to serve as a catalyst for new transit-oriented development around the stations. While this effort must be led by the individual towns, CTDOT intends to proactively assist in leveraging the investment in railroad infrastructure to gain the maximum local development impact.

What about grade crossings? Will more trains mean more horns?

The NHHS corridor includes 38 public at-grade crossings. The safety system at each of these crossings will be upgraded as the railroad expands from one track to two tracks. The current plan calls for closure of two crossings near Hartford – Flatbush Avenue and Flowers Street as part of the new Britain-Hartford Busway program. The remaining crossings will be upgraded either with four (quad) gates or with two gates and a long solid median divider. Both approaches are intended to prevent motorists from attempting to go around the gates as a train approaches.

Trains are required under Federal law to sound their horns before and while passing through a siding. Increasing the number of trains generally means increasing the number of whistles. However, by upgrading the crossings with quad gates or median dividers, the NHHS crossings will meet the physical requirements for a Federally designated "Quiet Zone." In a Quiet Zone, the engineer is not required to sound the train horn. Under Federal law, municipalities can seek Quiet Zone designation for crossings with such "supplemental safety devices." The impact of increased noise from train horns will be analyzed as part of the NEPA environmental assessment. The ability of Quiet Zones to reduce noise also will be considered in the study.

For more FAQs, please visit the NHHS project website at www.nhhsrail.com