Hartford Line Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies Kick-Off Service Launch Weekend

Beginning with two ribbon cutting ceremonies, one at Union Station in Springfield, MA and another at Union Station in New Haven, the Hartford Line launch celebration held on Friday, June 15 showcased the line’s regional importance. Following these ceremonies, an inaugural train left each station and arrived at Hartford’s Union Station for the grand celebration!

In Springfield, Mayor Domenic Sarno opened that ribbon cutting ceremony followed by remarks from U.S. Representative Richard Neal, MassDOT Rail & Transit Administrator Astrid Glynn, and Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) Deputy Commissioner Anna M. Barry. After the ceremonial ribbon was cut, local dignitaries boarded the inaugural train headed south to Hartford.

Meanwhile, in New Haven, Governor Dannel P. Malloy opened a ribbon cutting ceremony alongside New Haven Mayor Toni Harp, and CTDOT Commissioner James P. Redeker.

“Today’s commuter train service will mean fewer cars on the roads and highways, that in turn will lead to congestion relief and a more efficient regional transportation system in general,” said New Haven Mayor Toni Harp. “These benefits will continue to add up. Fewer cars and less congestion improves air quality, work productivity, and the overall quality of life in Connecticut.”

Governor Malloy and Commissioner Redeker alongside a new Hartford Line train.
Following the ceremony, dignitaries boarded the inaugural train in New Haven, and headed north to Hartford to meet officials and invited guests traveling from Springfield.

Inside Hartford Union Station, hundreds of guests filled the Great Hall, awaiting the arrival of the first trains. Each train broke through a ceremonial banner as they arrived at the station. As passengers departed the trains, they were greeted by the sound of music played by CTDOT employee Edgardo Block and his keyboard as they entered the Great Hall. Guests were encouraged to visit Hartford Line and Operation Lifesaver booths to learn more about the service and rail safety.

At noon, CTDOT Commissioner James P. Redeker welcomed everyone and introduced CTDOT employee Christina Smith who sang a moving rendition of “America the Beautiful.” Among the featured speakers were Governor Dannel P. Malloy, Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin, U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, former U.S. Senator Chris Dodd, Federal Rail Administration Chief Counsel Juan D. Reyes III, U.S. Representative John Larson, and U.S. Representative Richard Neal.

“With the launch of the Hartford Line, Connecticut is taking long-overdue, bold steps to invest in our future – laying the tracks for job growth, business expansion, and the revitalization of our urban areas,” Governor Dannel P. Malloy said. “Investing in our transportation system is critical to drive economic growth, boost development, create jobs, and improve the overall quality of life for our residents. If we want our state to be competitive and attract the jobs of the future, investing in our transportation system is not optional.”

“Investing in transportation means investing in a stronger Connecticut,” said CTDOT Commissioner James P. Redeker. “It’s taken the leadership of Governor Malloy and many others to leverage federal funds to bring this much-needed service to our state. We’ve already seen an explosion of interest in transit-oriented development (TOD) in rail communities and we expect that will only grow as young people continue to make clear that they want transit at the heart of their hometowns.”

“This is a great day for Hartford and all the communities along the line,” Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin said. “This will not only improve the lives of Hartford residents who use public transit regularly, it helps bring transit-oriented development opportunities to the forefront, bringing jobs to people and people to their jobs.”

The ceremony concluded with the sounding of the new Hartford Line train horn. Guests then mingled and boarded their respective trains to the sounds of the Connecticut 102nd Army Band.
New Hartford Line Stations Open in Meriden and Berlin

In April 2018, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held for the new CT rail Hartford Line Meriden Station. Located at 60 State Street, the new station replaced the old station located on the same site. While the station has been in service since Fall 2017, the formal ribbon cutting ceremony was scheduled for the spring to ensure all subsequent track work was completed prior to celebrating the station’s completion.

Meriden was among the first communities to see the economic benefits of Hartford Line service, with a transit-oriented development (TOD) constructed at 24 Colony Street, prior to service launch! Associated with this TOD project was the construction of a 225-space parking garage, which is offered to Hartford Line customers at a reduced rate. 24 Colony Street is among the first of many TOD projects spurred by Hartford Line service.

In June 2018, the new Hartford Line station in Berlin opened to the public prior to service launch. Featuring all the same amenities as the new stations in Wallingford and Meriden, Berlin Station is located at 51 Depot Road. The partial opening of the station allows passengers to use the entirety of the west side platform, as well as approximately 200 feet of the 500-foot platform on the east side (parking lot side) of the tracks. Twenty spaces of the total 220 space parking lot will be unavailable through final construction. Upon full opening, the remaining 20 spaces will become available, including an electric vehicle charging station, and the remaining 300 feet of the east side platform will be operational.

Speaking about the new station, CTDOT Commissioner Redeker stated, “The Hartford Line is about making connections and getting to destinations on time and with ease. Furthermore, it’s about becoming a catalyst for economic development. We hope that, aside from providing countless transportation benefits, communities like Berlin will continue their efforts to implement TOD and generate economic activity around the new stations.”

Berlin Station is expected to open fully in Fall 2018. In addition to the new stations in Berlin and Meriden, a new platform at the existing State Street Station in New Haven was opened for use in June 2018, prior to service launch, and additional improvements, including the reconstruction of stairs in the main entry will be completed in early fall.

Customer-Centric Amenities Available at Hartford Line Stations

The new Hartford Line stations in Berlin, Meriden, and Wallingford offer amenities to create an inviting passenger experience to complement rail travel. 500-foot high-level platforms facilitate safe and efficient passenger boarding onto Hartford Line trains. Connecting the two platforms at each station are stairways, elevators, and an overhead pedestrian bridge to provide safe and convenient access across the tracks. To shelter passengers from inclement weather, overhead canopies cover approximately 50% of the station platforms. During winter weather events, the new platforms are equipped with a heating system to melt snow and ice to improve passenger safety on the platforms.

Passenger train information systems provide real time service updates including arrival, departure, and track information. Each station is fitted with security cameras and Blue Light emergency call boxes to provide a safe environment for your trip. To improve multi-modal connections, each station features several loop bicycle racks. Each station parking lot has varying capacity to charge electric vehicles, allowing two vehicles to charge at once.

Existing stations in Hartford and New Haven underwent several upgrades to improve the passenger experience prior to service launch. Completed in Summer 2016, Hartford Union Station was upgraded with a new 260-foot high-level platform to facilitate quick boarding to improve the station’s ability to handle additional rail service. Similarly, the existing State Street Station in New Haven was upgraded with a new, 344-foot high-level platform to ensure capacity to accommodate Hartford Line passengers in addition to other rail services such as Shore Line East. Other upgrades include a new entrance canopy, the installation of bicycle racks to promote multi-modal connections, and the construction of a new overhead pedestrian bridge and tower to facilitate movement across the tracks.

Additional station information can be found in the stations factsheet in the website library.
Windsor Locks continues to advance TOD initiatives near the site of the future station, located on Main Street, just north of the historic train station. Improvements include sidewalk realignment and widening, traffic calming measures, and much more. The improvements (known as Complete Streets) seek to improve multi-modal connections along Main Street in Windsor Locks to the future Hartford Line station, provide a safer pedestrian environment, and encourage economic activity along this important corridor.

These improvements seek to improve access to local businesses and the Montgomery Mill residential complex which is currently being developed. The adaptive reuse of the former mill will feature 160 residential units within a 5-minute walk of the future Windsor Locks Hartford Line station.

In addition, Windsor Locks has adopted a tax increment financing (TIF) district in the future station area. The new TIF district seeks to capture the value of new development in the area, associated with new rail service, and use this funding for additional public realm improvements. Windsor Locks is among the many communities harnessing the potential of Hartford Line rail service to the benefit of the local economy. The town joins other municipalities such as Meriden, Windsor, Berlin, New Haven, and others that are investigating or actively implementing TOD in communities serviced by the Hartford Line.

Visit nhhsrail.com/benefits to learn more about TOD in other municipalities along the Hartford Line.
Connecticut’s Operation Lifesaver campaign has been busy this spring and summer! Connecticut Operation Lifesaver is the state chapter of Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI), a national, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing public awareness about rail safety to reduce collisions, fatalities, and injuries at street-level rail crossings and trespassing on or near railroad tracks.

Connecticut Operation Lifesaver expanded its rail safety awareness campaign for the launch of the Hartford Line, prior to the increase in rail traffic. For example, many people are not aware that it takes a mile or more for a train to stop! So, it is important never to go around or under a lowered gate at a street-level rail crossing—whether driving, biking, or walking.

Rail Safety Ambassadors have been busy visiting neighborhoods throughout the Hartford Line corridor, conducting targeted outreach to pedestrians and bicyclists near street-level rail crossings, visiting schools and local organizations to conduct age-appropriate presentations on rail safety, and communicating simple, yet lifesaving tips, about how to stay safe near rail tracks.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) developed a fact sheet with safety tips tailored to pedestrians, drivers, bicyclists, and train passengers. The factsheet can be viewed in English and Spanish in the Information Center on the NHHS Program website at www.nhhsrail.com/info_center/library.aspx.

Visit CT Operation Lifesaver’s Facebook page @CTOperationLifesaver for more information.

Free rail safety presentations are available for any group, business, or organization—including schools, parent-teacher organizations, youth groups, and neighborhood associations. To learn more or request a free safety presentation for your group, please contact the CT Operation Lifesaver State Coordinator, Kevin Burns, at Kevin.Burns@CT.gov.
Website Photo Gallery
The Program website features photos documenting construction progress and major milestones. The newest gallery includes photos from the Hartford Line ribbon cutting ceremonies. Visit the online photo gallery at www.nhhsrail.com/gallery to view all the latest photos.

CTDOT Deputy Commissioner Anna Barry at the Hartford Line launch ceremony.

Attendees at the New Haven ribbon cutting include Governor Malloy, Commissioner Redeker, and New Haven Mayor Toni Harp.

Did You Know?
From Monday, June 18 through Sunday, June 24, during its first full week of regular operations in which full-fare tickets were required, the new CTrail Hartford Line service ridership exceeded 10,700 customers!

CTDOT Commissioner Redeker stated, “I’ve spoken with scores of riders who have begun to use the Hartford Line and who are saying their commute has become much easier and less stressful. With easy access and connections to our CTtransit buses, we are opening all kinds of options for getting around Connecticut – whether you’re going to work, to school, or simply playing the role of tourist.”

Questions & Comments
The Program website (www.nhhsrail.com) provides an easy way to ask questions or provide comments to the Program team and receive a response via email.