Chapter 5: Rail Rider Surveys

As part of the analysis of the existing transportation, rail, bus, highway conditions, and intermodal opportunities in the Danbury Branch/Route 7 corridor between South Norwalk and New Milford, the URS Project Team developed and conducted two types of surveys for the Danbury Branch EIS. The first was an on-board survey of existing passengers on the Danbury Branch. The second was a telephone survey of potential passengers who do not currently use the available train service.

Below is a summary of the results of these surveys. The reports for the existing Rail Passenger Survey and the Potential Rail Passenger Survey can be found in their entirety in Appendix E and Appendix F, respectively.

5.1 Existing Danbury Branch Passengers

In order to ascertain the characteristics, preferences, and desires of existing passengers, a questionnaire was distributed to individuals riding the Danbury Branch. The survey was conducted on five AM peak trains on Wednesday, September 24, 2008. Survey participants were asked about their trip origin and destination, trip purpose, trip frequency, anticipated mode changes at both trip ends, preferences regarding service, and demographics.

Methodology

A team of surveyors from URS conducted this survey on five trains that departed from Danbury between 5:34 AM and 7:57 AM. Three of these trains were bound for New York City, and two were intra-state commuter shuttles that ended in South Norwalk. Questionnaires were distributed to passengers on each train, and surveyors encouraged passengers to fill out the surveys, provided pencils when needed, answered questions where possible, and collected the completed surveys prior to arrival at South Norwalk. Passengers were also given the option of returning their surveys via pre-paid mail. It is estimated that the team received an 80% response rate for this survey, based on the number of surveys received and the most recent Metro-North average daily inbound counts for the trains surveyed (November 2007).

Findings

The following are some highlights from the on-board survey of existing passengers:

Trip Origin and Destination
Survey results support the observation that the New York bound trains and intra-state shuttles support different travel markets with the following origin and destination characteristics:
- Origin
  - New York bound trains: The distribution of trip origins was spread somewhat evenly across Danbury, Bethel, Cannondale, Wilton, and Merritt 7 stations.
  - Intra-state shuttle trains: Nearly 80% of respondents boarded at either the Danbury or Bethel station.

- Destination
  - o <u>New York bound trains</u>: Approximately 70% of all respondents disembarked at GCT. The next most prevalent destinations were Stamford (18%) and South Norwalk (5%).
  - o <u>Intra-state shuttle trains</u>: Nearly 44% of respondents disembarked at Stamford, 19% at Merritt 7, and 15% at both South Norwalk and GCT.

Trip Purpose
- More than 90% of all respondents said that their trip purpose was going to work.

Trip Frequency
- Approximately 73% of respondents reported riding the train five or more times per week.
- An additional 18.7% of respondents reported riding the train 3-4 times per week.

Anticipated Mode Changes
- <u>To Boarding Station</u>: Approximately 72% of respondents reported driving to their boarding station alone; 15.4% reported being dropped off (Kiss and Ride); and 7.2% walked.
- <u>To Final Destination</u>: Approximately 56% of respondents reported walking to their final destination; 14% reported using the subway; and 12% reported taking a company shuttle.

Service Preferences
All persons surveyed were asked to evaluate a number of improvements by responding whether they would be more likely to increase their use of the train if a specific improvement was made.
- Nearly 86% of respondents would increase their use of the train if there were more frequent service.
- 87.9% of respondents would increase their use of the train if the travel time were reduced by about 20 percent.
- Better shuttle bus service to and from stations and extending the Danbury Branch to New Milford would cause approximately 35% of respondents to increase their use of the train.

Demographics
- The majority of respondents held a valid driver's license (97.1%) and had access to a private vehicle (93.1%).
- The largest percentage of respondents, 31.0%, were between the ages 51 and 65. An additional 29.6% of respondents were between the ages of 41 and 50.
- Most respondents (66.7%) were male.

5.2 Potential Rail Passengers

In order to elicit commuter opinions and input on a wide range of topics, the *Danbury Branch Area Commuter Telephone Survey* was completed between September 29 and October 15, 2008.

During this time, 400 telephone interviews were conducted among commuters who commute to towns near the Danbury Branch. Survey participants were asked about their current commuting mode choice, history of using Metro-North service, perceptions of the market, and demographics.

Methodology

All facets of the *Danbury Branch Area Commuter Telephone Survey* were completed by the Center for Research & Public Policy (CRPP) in Trumbull, Connecticut. CRPP surveyed a random sample of 400 individuals who commute two to seven times per week, do not currently use Metro-North train services for their commute, and commute to a zip code near the Danbury Branch. Surveys were conducted between 5PM and 9PM on weekdays and between 10AM and 4PM on weekends. CRPP successfully contacted 83% of commuters within the original sample. Such a high completion rate results in a non-biased sample and often indicates that respondents are interested in the topic of the survey.

Findings

The following are some highlights from the *Danbury Branch Area Commuter Telephone Survey*.

Mode of Transportation
- While the majority of respondents (85.5%) reported making their weekly commute by "driving alone," 13% also reported "driving or riding with others" during their weekly commute.
- Respondents reported making their round trip commute, on average, slightly more than four times per week (4.06).
- The average commute time of respondents was 28.82 minutes each way.

Metro-North
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents (72.8%) reported to be either "very aware" or "somewhat aware" of Metro-North train services such as schedules, logistics, costs, and destinations.
- Top reasons reported for not using Metro-North train service or not using it more often for reasons other than a commute included the following: "no need to use the train," "it's not close by/not convenient," "prefer driving," "hard to get to different destinations after train," and "only use it for entertainment/NYC."
- When asked to estimate what the price would be for their weekly commute if they used Metro-North as opposed to their current mode of transportation, respondents reported the following:
  - Estimated average cost to use Metro-North = $49.01
  - Estimated average fuel cost using current transportation = $46.98

The Market
All respondents were read a list of improvements and/or enhancements to the Danbury Branch and were asked how likely, if made, each might influence them to begin using Metro-North for their weekly commute.

- The improvements/enhancements which were reported as having the <u>greatest</u> impact included the following: "lower cost of train fares," "lower cost of parking fees," and "a more convenient train schedule."
- The improvements/enhancements which were reported as having the <u>least</u> impact included the following: "a new intermediate station in Georgetown" and "trains being better equipped for physical disabilities."
- Respondents reported the cost of gasoline would need to reach $4.82 (MEAN) per gallon before they would make a concerted effort to use Metro-North train service for their regular commute.

Demographics

- The majority of respondents held a valid driver's license (98.3%) and had access to a private vehicle (99.5%).
- Approximately three-quarters of respondents (78.3%) were over the age of 45.
- Most respondents (60.3%) were female.