

Regional Transportation Plan



THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC BUS SERVICE IN GREATER DANBURY, CT

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INTRODUCTION

The Greater Danbury - New Milford region is a growing and prosperous metropolitan area. It is served by a regional public bus system operated by the Housatonic Area Regional Transit District (HART).



Annual funding for HART services and their periodic expansion is significant. Officials and citizens are anxious to see these funds wisely spent. Numerous statistical and ridership tables are readily available to enable interested parties to understand HART's productivity and finances.

But until now, the broader perspective on HART's historical roots and systematic development over decades, has not been available. This history is provided in this report to facilitate wise investment in regional transit.

We begin with a review of Danbury trolley service. While now only of historical interest, public bus service in Danbury, and then the surrounding region, grew from that base.

As will be seen, transit service trends in the state and nation are well reflected in Greater Danbury's bus service developments from then on.

THE STREETCAR YEARS

Trolley service operated by the Danbury and Bethel Street Railway began in Danbury and Bethel in 1887, operating a 15 mile network of track at its greatest extent.

The Danbury and Bethel system was not typical in Connecticut, as most local trolley lines were interconnected and operated by the Connecticut Company or the Connecticut Railway and Lighting Company.

The primary coverage area was the old and historic central area of Danbury. An August 2000 retrospective in the Danbury News Times by George Orgleman describes the service:

The main line was on Main Street from City Hall to Wooster Square. From Wooster Square the line went north on Main Street to North Street, ending at the intersection of North Street and Padanaram Road.

From Wooster Square the tracks went east to White Street to the edge of Beaver Brook at the intersection of Triangle Street and White Street. The line went west from City Hall up to the West Street park. Here the track divided, one line going farther out on West Street to Lake Avenue.

The other section of the line went out Division Street to West Wooster Street, along West Wooster to Frye's Corner, west on Park Avenue to the Fairgrounds, down Backus Avenue to Kenosia Avenue and on to Lake Kenosia.

From the City Hall the tracks went down South Main Street to the cavernous car barns and then South to Bethel and down to its Main Street, ending at Fountain Place.

The trolley barns on South Street, now occupied by the Party Depot, are the sole remaining remnant of the line still in existence.

TRANSITION FROM TROLLYS TO BUSES

The Danbury and Bethel Street Railway ran into financial difficulty around 1914. Ridership decreased with the decline of the local hat factories. The company lost investments in a failed extension of a trolley route between Bridgeport and Danbury that only made it as far north as Trumbull.

Competition for passengers from the automobile grew as roadways were improved and mass production made cars more affordable. A fire in the trolley barns in the early 1920's destroyed 19 trolley cars, causing further financial trouble.

Then, small privately operated buses operating flexible routes dubbed "jitneys" appeared. Jitneys (so named because they had a 5 cent fare, and jitney was slang for a nickel at that time) began operation in Danbury in the 1920's.

But service was not permitted on the trolley routes. Local conflict with streetcar companies and safety issues affected jitney operations all over the country. Though common elsewhere in the world today, jitney service never really took hold in the United States.

In 1918, J. Moss Ives, the brother of famous Danbury composer Charles Ives, took charge of the trolley line after its bankruptcy. He purchased the first buses by 1921 to operate a route between West Street and Lake Avenue in Danbury, rather than expending the capital to extend the trolley line.

Ives reorganized the trolley company as the Danbury and Bethel Traction Company in 1925, now operating on 13 miles of track. As a cost saving measure, he proposed buses on all routes in 1926.

In response, the trolley motormen struck on November 22. The strike did not save the streetcars. By the end of December, 1926, trolleys ceased operation and buses had taken their place.

Danbury and Bethel had the first trolley system in Connecticut to go under and make the switch to buses. The rest of the state eventually followed suit, with the last of the Connecticut Company trolleys ceasing operation in New Haven by 1948.

Although loss of streetcars are now looked on with regret, trolleys were then considered old fashioned

and outmoded. A contemporary document from 1938, "60 years in Danbury" published by the Hamilton Press, states: "Danbury was a pioneer among many cities which have since replaced the trolley car with the more modern bus system."

THE POST WORLD WAR I PERIOD

The 1920's saw the introduction of the first intercity bus services in the region. In October 1925, the New England Transportation Company proposed a route between Poughkeepsie and Danbury roughly paralleling the New Haven Railroad's Maybrook Line.

The New England Transportation Company, like the Connecticut Company, was organized by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. The railroad's intent was to replace unprofitable passenger service on its Maybrook Line with buses.

Interestingly, many of the intercity routes started by New England Transportation are still being operated in some form today by Peter Pan and other private long haul bus companies.

During the 1920's and 1930's, multiple bus routes and providers ran within the Housatonic Region, with Danbury the locus of regional mass transportation.

Pershing Square, at the intersection of West and Main in Danbury and the very center of the downtown business district, was a major stop and transfer area for the Danbury Power and Transportation Company (sometimes referred to as the Danbury and Bethel Transportation Company), the successor to the Danbury and Bethel Traction Company. The headquarters of the bus company remained at the old trolley barn on South Street.

Intercity services had a terminal at 314 Main Street, Danbury, near the intersection with Elm Street, as pictured below. Blue Club Coach Lines operated a Bridgeport–Newtown-Danbury Route. The company operated three daily trips on this route beginning in August, 1929.



Danbury's intercity bus terminal at 314 Main Street

A. William Sperry was the president of Danbury Power and Transportation in the early days of local bus operations. Sperry was a well known civil engineer whose firm, Sperry Engineering, constructed the Yale Bowl in New Haven. He was succeeded as president by his son, William T. Sperry, in 1950.

By the 1930's we see a high level of bus service in Danbury, as documented by this excerpt from the

1935 Danbury Traffic Survey:

1. Danbury & Bethel Transportation Company makes fifty-four trips from Main Street on a twenty minute schedule, also eighteen extra trips a day. Main Street to end of North; Main Street to end of White Street; Main Street to end of West Wooster; Main Street via Franklin St to Well Ave; Main Street to Lake Kenosia via West & Lake Avenue; Main Street to Hospital via Osborne Street.

2. New England Transportation Company operates from the Railroad Station on White Street. Five round trips a day to Ridgefield via Main, West, Division and West Wooster Streets. Five round trips to south Norwalk via Main, West, Division and West Wooster Streets. Two round trips to New Milford via White and Federal Streets. Two round trips to New Haven via South Street and Coal Pit Hill. Two round trips from Pittsfield to New York going from the north to the south.

3. Brewster & Danbury Motor Company operates two buses from Main Street via West Street and Lake Avenue.

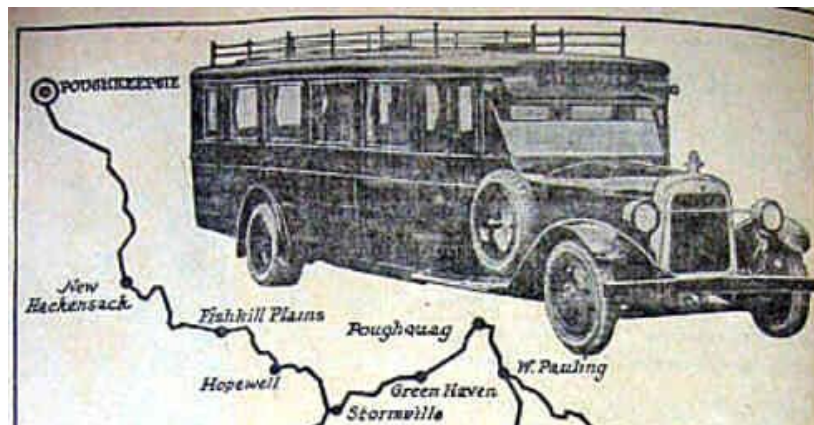
4. Danbury Interurban Company operates ten buses going from the center of Main Street to Poughkeepsie, Hartford, Waterbury and Bridgeport. Four round trips from Main Street via south Street and Coal Pit Hill. Five round trips from Main Street through White Street. Two round trips from Main Street through North Street.

5. The City Taxi Company operates school buses to the High School as follows: two from Brookfield, one each from Branchville, Redding and New Fairfield.

6. Between eight and twelve independent companies operate through Danbury on which we were unable to get desired information.

Also in 1935, as reported in the Danbury News Times, Danbury Interurban Lines acquired Scenic Lines, which operated between Pittsfield and New York, and Hartford and NYC.

This was on the heels of its acquisition of Packard Lines with bus routes that ran Danbury-New York, Danbury-Poughkeepsie and Danbury-Boston. According to the paper, Danbury Interurban was then one of the largest bus lines in the east.



Bus from Danbury to Poughkeepsie

In 1937, Western CT Stages ran a route between New Hartford and New York City that served several towns in the Housatonic Region. One way fare from New Hartford to NY was \$2.25. There were 4 daily round trips that served Sandy Hook and Bethel and six round trips per day serving Ridgefield and Danbury.

Clearly, privately funded bus transportation was doing well in the area.

TRANSIT USE PEAKS IN THE 1940'S

During the Second World War transit use skyrocketed throughout the country. National ridership peaked

in 1946 at 23.4 billion annual trips.

Today in the early 21st century, public transit in the US is enjoying a steady increase in modal share and ridership, but is still less than half of the total seen during the war.



Two Danbury Power and Transportation Company buses, manufactured by Yellow Coach, standing at Pershing Square circa 1940. The view is from West Street next to the Pershing Building looking towards Main Street (Photo courtesy Danbury Historical Society).

In the 1940's, the Danbury Flying Eagle Bus Company ran 16 round trips a day from Danbury to Bridgeport. The service ran via Bethel, Newtown, Botsford and Stepney.

Buses ran every half hour in the peaks beginning at 5 AM to almost 1 in the morning, carrying workers from Danbury to the booming factories at General Electric, Remington Arms, United Aircraft and other plants.

At that time Walters Transit ran one round trip per day to Ball Pond in New Fairfield, from New York, via the West Bronx, Yonkers, Hartsdale and Hawthorne at a cost of \$1.25 one way. The company also ran a Putnam Lake-Ball Pond-Danbury route with 7 daily round trips.

In 1945 and 1948, Danbury Power and Transportation updated its fleet with eight 28 foot GMC TD3206 and four 30 foot TDH3610 model diesel buses. This streamlined style bus, produced beginning in 1940 with some variants in production until the late 1960's, was a common sight in towns and cities across the US.



Style of bus used in Danbury and Bethel in the 1950's

A famous example of the TDH3610 model, shown above, carried civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks in the days of southern segregation.

SEEDS OF CHANGE IN THE 1950'S

A 1953 a Danbury community survey by the Columbia School of Engineering provides a snapshot of the local bus service at that time. It provides a sense that service was on the decline:

Local transit service, which is supplied by the Danbury Power and Transportation Company, is contracting because of the use of private automobiles, television and telephones. The service is at the point where further reduction will probably not be possible, from a practical standpoint. It is sufficient for the demands that are made on it, however.

The intercity bus lines connect Danbury with South Norwalk, Brewster and Bridgeport. The bus operations are conducted skillfully, reliably and economically.

Danbury Power and Transportation Company service operated from 6 AM to 11:45 PM weekdays on 15 to 30 minute headways. Cash fare was 15 cents; 16 tokens could be purchased for \$2, or a book of 40 tickets for \$3.

Between January and May, 1954, Danbury Power and Transportation ran 232,946 miles and took in almost \$64,000 in fares. Prior to a fare increase hearing in 1954, bus company president William T. Sperry took the unusual step of raising fares before official approval by the state Public Utilities Commission (PUC), and issuing receipts to passengers for the difference in fares. The receipts could be redeemed in the event the fare increase was not approved.

In 1959 Danbury Power and Transportation again petitioned the PUC for a fare increase. From 1953-1954, revenue had dropped from from \$134,000 to \$91,000. There was a small profit for the company in 1954-1955, then losses in 1956 and 1957. The PUC granted a fare increase of 5 cents.

A September 1958 community monograph, prepared by the Connecticut Development Commission, lists the bus services in Danbury that year:

- ***There were four interstate bus operators serving the town at that time, one intrastate bus operator and the local services provided by Danbury Power and Transportation.***
- ***Local bus service to Bethel was provided during the weekday with hourly headways.***
- ***A Poughkeepsie-Danbury route was provided by Empire Bus Lines. The bus from Poughkeepsie served Route 22, then followed Fairfield Drive to Ball Pond, and on into Danbury to Main Street. Empire ran one round trip per week on Thursdays.***

In 1950 Intercity Coach Line ran between Danbury and Bridgeport serving Newtown, Bethel, and Danbury with 5 round trips Monday-Sunday. The economy in Bridgeport had cooled after World War II and bus service was reduced accordingly. In the mid 50's, fares were graduated on the route based on distance

traveled, with \$2.55 for a round trip ticket between Danbury and Bridgeport.

The Arrow Line, a subsidiary of the R&H Company, ran a New York, Yonkers, Ridgefield, Danbury, Newtown to Boston route with 6 daily round trips.

TRANSIT CRISIS OF THE 1960'S

By the 1960's, bus and rail passenger transportation was on the decline everywhere due to escalating costs and decreasing ridership. In Connecticut and nationally, legislative steps were taken to preserve public transit.

In 1961 The Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 507 "Concerning the Establishment of Transit Districts." The Act was intended to encourage municipalities to form transit districts to supervise operation of privately operated bus or rail services. These agencies were also empowered to set fares and establish new transit services for the public good.

In 1963, the state created the Connecticut Public Transportation Authority to support foundering rail passenger service. Their mandate was extended to bus services in 1965.

The successor to this agency, while now advisory to the DOT, still exists at the state level and is known today as the **Connecticut Public Transportation Commission**.

In 1964 the Federal Urban Mass Transportation Act was passed. The Act led to the formation of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA), which created a funding mechanism for the support of public transit.

UMTA was operated under the aegis of the US Department of Transportation, created in 1967. UMTA was renamed the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in the early 1990's and is a key sponsor of HART today.

The same year the mass transportation act passed, William T. Sperry ran into trouble. In addition to Danbury Power and Transportation, Sperry operated Danbury-Brewster, Danbury-Bridgeport and Danbury-Norwalk service through Intercity Coach, and the Danbury Bus Company.

He also ran White Lines in Bridgeport, bus services in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and Levittown, New York, and school bus services in Danbury and surrounding communities. The school bus services were used to help support the public bus routes.

On September 30, Danbury Power and Transportation, Danbury Bus and Intercity Coach suspended service after their liability insurance lapsed due to non-payment. Sperry also owed thousands in property taxes, and had failed to file payroll taxes. Chieppo Bus of New Haven operated the local bus service on an interim basis.

During the 1964 crisis, Danbury Mayor J. Thayer Bowman raised the possibility of creating a public transit authority jointly with the Town of Bethel, using the enabling legislation passed back in 1961.

Less than a month later, on Friday, October 23, school bus service was interrupted throughout the region when buses operated by County Bus Service, a Sperry affiliate, were seized by the State National Bank of Connecticut.

The fleet was repossessed Thursday evening and driven en masse to Prospect, CT. School bus service resumed the following Monday after new investors purchased the school buses.

In 1965 Sperry sold the local bus franchise to the Candlewood Bus Company, who operated a Danbury-Bethel and White Street-Fry's Corner-Franklin Street route for about a year and a half.

They in turn were followed by the ABC Company for a few months before all local bus service ceased in 1967.

LOCAL BUS SERVICE RETURNS

There followed a period where no local bus services operated in Greater Danbury, a situation not unique to the Housatonic Valley. Elsewhere in the state, Connecticut Company buses stopped running for a time in 1972, and started up a few months later after the provision of state subsidy to continue services. Connecticut Company operations would become CONNECTICUT TRANSIT.

Nationally, privately operated local bus and passenger rail services were foundering, with only the long distance bus operations surviving. Transit ridership in the US sunk to its lowest point ever, with 6.6 billion annual trips.

In 1971, Vincent Socci of Danbury Taxi and Limousine proposed the operation of two bus routes in Danbury using small buses. The service never got off the ground, and the cab company closed eight years later due to rising fuel costs.

By 1972, successful referenda to form a Danbury-Bethel Transit District were held in Danbury and Bethel. The first members of the board were Robert Putnam (chair) and Joseph Taylor of Danbury, and James Dolan of Bethel.

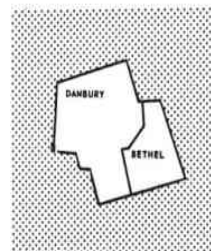
On July 2, 1973, local bus service began operating under an emergency grant of \$7,000 from the City of Danbury. Thereafter, ConnDOT contracted for operation with the Candlewood Valley Bus Company, and service policy was implemented by the Danbury-Bethel Transit District.

There was a famous handshake agreement between Candlewood Valley President William Clinkard and Colin Pease of Conn DOT. Due to an administrative delay, Candlewood Valley was asked to run service without a contract. The handshake was offered as the only state guarantee of repayment. William Clinkard, always a gentlemen, accepted.

Danbury - Bethel

Transit District

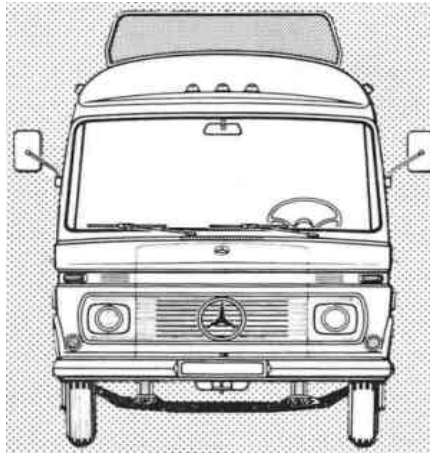
256 Main St. Danbury, Conn. 06810 Telephone (203) 743-2769



Stationery letterhead of the old Danbury - Bethel Transit District

Candlewood Valley operated two routes similar to those at the end of the Danbury Power and Transportation Company days. In 1976, three Mercedes Benz 0309D 16 passenger buses and two 1974 GMC T6H 5308A buses were in operation in Danbury and Bethel. The GMC buses were owned by ConnDOT, and the Mercedes buses were owned by the City of Danbury. Base fare was \$0.60.

The new Mercedes buses were a "shot in the arm" for the image of public transportation in the area. They were judged by all to be very attractive vehicles, also in use in some upscale Gold Coast towns.



Excerpt from 1977 cover of the area's Regional Transportation Plan, featuring the new Mercedes buses



Bus 3126, a 53 seat 1974 GMC "fishbowl" owned by ConnDOT and operated by Candlewood Valley Bus, which saw service in Danbury and Bethel

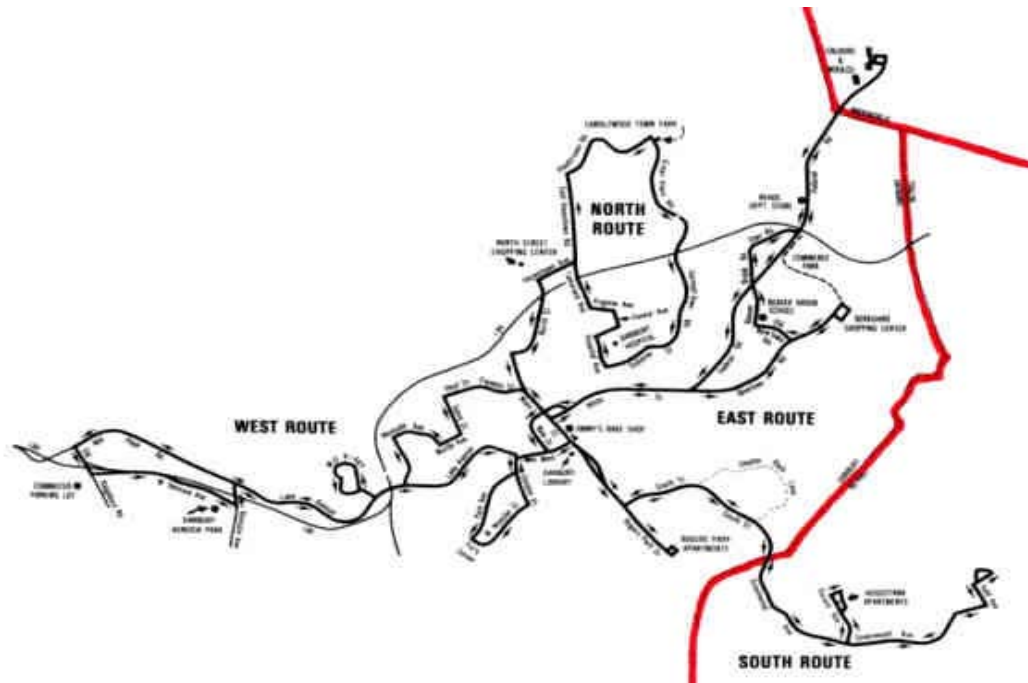
Candlewood Valley leased facilities on Grays Bridge Road from the Town of Brookfield (the current location of the Brookfield Public Works complex), while the Danbury-Bethel Transit District was coordinated out of the offices of the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO) on Main Street, Danbury.

A number of intercity routes still operated in the region in the mid 1970's:

- ***Bonanza Bus of Providence, RI, operated a NYC-Danbury-Waterbury-Hartford route. Nine round trips were provided daily, with the earliest arrival in Danbury from Hartford at 6:30 AM. The last bus of the day to Hartford departed at 11:50 PM. Fares were \$1.40 Danbury-Waterbury, \$2.20 Danbury-Hartford and \$4.90 from NYC to Danbury. The bus stopped at 76 White Street in Danbury.***
- ***A second Bonanza run provided service between Pittsfield, MA, and NYC, with stops in New Milford, Danbury and Ridgefield. One morning and evening round trip was provided, with an extra evening departure from NYC to Pittsfield on Sunday. The bus stopped in New Milford at Robustelli travel on Danbury Road and at Ridgefield News on Main Street, Ridgefield. It was \$1.05 to take the bus to New Milford, and \$0.95 to Ridgefield from Danbury.***
- ***Chieppo Bus of New Haven operated Danbury-Bridgeport service with flag stops along the route in Bethel and Newtown. Four round trips were provided Monday-Saturday. The Bridgeport-***

Danbury fare was \$1.75 one way; Newtown to Danbury was \$0.35, and Bethel to Danbury \$0.30. Chieppo's stop in Danbury was at 53 Main Street.

• Kelley Transit of Torrington provided a Brewster, NY, to Torrington route via Danbury and New Milford. The service ran one daily round trip. The fare from Danbury-Brewster or Danbury-New Milford was \$1.05. It was \$2.20 to travel Danbury-Torrington.



1978 route map of local bus services in Danbury and Bethel (to southeast), with small extension into Brookfield (to northeast)

In 1978, The Danbury - Bethel Transit District was under the leadership of Peter Winter of Danbury. With Nancy Deibler of HVCEO providing part time staff support, they began the process of acquiring new buses to implement expanded bus services in the region in accordance with HVCEO's Transit Development Program.

A year later, New Milford joined the transit agency. James Terrell and Cliff Chapin were early bus transit advocates from that community.

After a marketing study, the name of the expanded district was officially changed to Housatonic Area Regional Transit (HART).

HATS, or Housatonic Area Transit System, was also considered, in commemoration of Danbury's past role as the nation's hat manufacturing capital. But it was decided that the emerging image of a modern bus system should not be tied to faded glory.

The beginnings of today's SweetHART dial-a-ride service for persons with disabilities and seniors emerge at this time. Federal regulations encouraged regional coordination of dial-a-ride services, which were then provided in the region by a host of separate agencies.

Plans were made by Nancy Deibler to consolidate dial-a-ride operations under HART in Danbury, Bethel, New Fairfield, Ridgefield, Redding and Newtown. A goal was to avoid the fractured and non-regional system operating on the coast; Greater Danbury could keep its municipal subsidy costs down by economies of scale in a regional system.

HART BECOMES SERVICE ADMINISTRATOR IN THE 1980'S

In 1981 HART moved out of the HVCEO office at 256 Main Street to a new office next door at 248 Main

Street.

In 1982, HART took delivery of ten 30' TMC city cruisers painted in red and white livery. The arrival of the new buses changed the relationship between Candlewood Valley Bus, ConnDOT and HART.

When the new buses were placed in service, Candlewood Valley began operation of service in a direct contractual relationship with HART, in lieu of ConnDOT. The area was getting more control of its bus service and how it would be operated.



Ribbon cutting for the new HART buses in 1982. Pictured from left are New Milford First Selectman Clifford Chapin, Danbury Mayor James Dyer, Congressman William Ratchford, and HART Chairman Emanuel Merullo of Danbury.

Also in 1982 nine paratransit vehicles manufactured by Coach and Equipment arrived that year for operation on the regional dial-a-ride service, now called SweetHART.

The Danbury Chapter of the American Red Cross initially operated the service under contract to HART in Danbury, Bethel, Newtown, Ridgefield and Redding.

In the early 80's local bus service was operated in Danbury and Bethel on seven routes at 45 minute frequencies:

- ***Monday through Friday, service began at 6 AM with the last departure from Danbury at 5:45 PM. On Saturdays, service began at 8:00 AM with the last departure at 5:00 PM. There was no Sunday or evening bus service.***
- ***A New Milford-Danbury route was provided at 90 minute intervals between 9:10 AM and 3:30 PM during the week with additional service during peak periods. Saturday service was provided at 90 minute intervals from 7:40 AM to 6:10 PM.***
- ***Commuter shuttle services to major employers in Bethel and Danbury was provided in addition to fixed route service.***



Excerpt from HART system map of 1982

In 1984 HART selected J.A.C.E. transportation of Danbury to operate the fixed route bus service and Candlewood Valley to operate SweetHART, both under four year contracts.

In 1988 both operations were consolidated under J.A.C.E. A year later, the J.A.C.E. operation was sold to Laidlaw Transit, which continued to operate HART services until the early 1990's.

In the late 80's, bus operations ran out of Shelter Rock Road in Danbury, and administration at this time was still headquartered at 432 Main Street.

Fares increased in 1984 to 75 cents within Danbury and Bethel and \$1.15 to New Milford. A multi-trip "Bye-Pass" was introduced with 10 or 40 pre-paid trips.

HART municipal membership grew in the mid 80's with the addition of the towns of Brookfield and Newtown in 1985, Redding and Ridgefield in 1987 and New Fairfield in 1988. SweetHART service was expanded to Brookfield in 1988.

HART began operation of a Danbury Mall-Ridgefield route in 1988, Monday thru Saturday, using Stripper Well restitution funds. After a loss of state funding in 1991, a peak period weekday commuter shuttle would operate, funded until the late 1990's.

Ten Orion 1 35' transit buses were delivered to HART in 1989. Some of these buses would remain in service until 2008.

GROWTH IN THE 1990'S

A major service upgrade was instituted in 1990, replacing the day long 45 minute schedule.

Fixed route buses began operating seven routes weekdays on a 30 minutes peak, 60 minutes off peak schedule on the urban fixed route system. On Saturday buses operated with 60 minute headways all day.



Photo of SweetHART user on the cover of the 1986 Regional Bus Service Plan

In 1991, after careful planning, HART management took the service operation in house. Drivers became HART employees. Cost savings and improved quality control were realized by the direct operation.

Also that year HART operations moved to 62 Federal Road in Danbury, the former location of the Danbury drive-in, while the administrative office remained at 432 Main Street.

HART briefly ran service in Westport, CT, in October, 1992. A DMV inspection had found in excess of 300 defects on the eight transit vehicles operated by Westport.

At the request of ConnDOT, HART provided bus transportation for nine days in the town, running over 800 hours of service. After the immediate crisis passed, Westport service was then, and remains, operated by the nearby Norwalk Transit District.

A series of fare increases in 1992 and 1993 led to the base fare being set at \$1, with a zone 2 fare of \$1.50, and a zone 3 fare of \$2. The system zones were Ridgefield (south zone), Danbury, Bethel and Brookfield (central) and New Milford (north).

In 1993 HART completed the construction of the downtown Danbury Pulse Point on Kennedy Avenue. The expanded bus system of the mid eighties had caused congestion at the intersection of Main and West Streets, thus the need for a more spacious location.

The facility, designed by Johnson and Richter of Avon, CT features a large canopied waiting area, passenger shelters and a ticket agent.

Later that year the HART administrative office moved to 107 Newtown Road in Danbury. Five years later, in 1998, the administrative and operations functions were consolidated at 62 Federal Road after an extensive rehab and expansion of the Federal Road bus facility.

The CityCenter Trolley, a single route that linked downtown Danbury points of interest, began operation in 1996. The service originally ran a rubber tired 1996 Cable Car Concepts mini trolley, augmented by a Dupontrolley Frontenac trolley in 2002.

In the beginning, service ran 10 AM to 10 PM, Thursday and Friday and Saturday noon to midnight. This was the first time HART service operated after 6:30 PM.



CityCenterTrolley

In 1995, New Jersey-based ShortLine operated an I-84 bus route that served Newburgh, Fishkill, Patterson, Brewster and Danbury, with stops at the Bonanza bus terminal on Mill Plain Road at I-84 exit 2, and the Danbury Fair Mall.

While this service did not ultimately succeed, it led to the two states discussing a Danbury-Brewster rail commuter feeder service.

By the mid-1990's, intercity service was provided solely by Bonanza Bus, operating a New York-Danbury-Southbury-Hartford route and a NYC-Albany route that included Danbury, New Milford and Gaylordsville.

In 1998 Bonanza would lose its Mill Plain Road terminal, and temporarily move operations to the HART Pulse Point. Bonanza opened a permanent storefront terminal on Elm Street, across from the Pulse Point, by year end.

The HART Danbury-Brewster Shuttle began operation in 1998 with the support of the New York and Connecticut DOT's. The route provides a timed transfer from park and ride lots in Danbury to the Village of Brewster, NY, train station.

In 1995 HART replaced its fleet of 1982 buses with 10 Novabus RTS transit coaches (now in a new blue and white scheme). The RTS design dominated US transit systems in the 80's and 90's. A retooled version of the bus, dubbed the RTS Legend, recently resumed production.

BUS TRANSIT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Federal welfare reform in the late 1990's led to opportunities for further expansion of transit services. Public transit was rightly seen as key in the efforts to move low income residents off public assistance. The catch phrase "Transportation is the 'to' in Welfare to Work" became popular.

ConnDOT took a leadership role here, fostering the development of regional committees of social service and transit providers to study service options and look at gaps in the provision of bus service.

The collaborative in the western part of the state, comprised of the Housatonic, Litchfield Hills and Central Naugatuck Regions came to be known as JobLinks.

Here in the Housatonic Valley Region, it was quickly determined that passengers and employers were most impacted by the lack of bus service in the evenings and on Sunday. Rather than extending all seven bus routes in the urban fixed route system, HART ran several evening and Sunday pilots to develop a smaller system to service the majority of the demand with the least resources.

The routes served major employment locations and housing complexes using small buses like those

used in SweetHART. This led to the creation of three coordinated Jobs Access LOOP routes.

The Mall/Hospital LOOP began in 1999, the New Milford LOOP in 2000 and the Newtown Road/South Street LOOP in 2003. The LOOP buses run hourly 6:30 PM to 10:30 PM week nights, 5:30 to 10:30 PM Saturday nights and from 9 AM to 7 PM on Sunday.

A short lived Ridgefield LOOP, following a route similar to the old Ridgefield service during the weekday peak, operated from 2001 to 2006.

On the heels of the Jobs Access expansion came the Governor's Transportation Strategy Board. The Board was created by then Governor Rowland to develop an overall transportation strategy for Connecticut.

Two projects supported by the Transportation Strategy Board began operation in the Housatonic Region in 2002. One was the Ridgefield-Katonah Shuttle, patterned after the successful Danbury-Brewster Shuttle (also with the involvement of NYSDOT).

The second was the Danbury-Norwalk Route 7 Link, an inter-regional route between Danbury and Norwalk, operated jointly with the Norwalk Transit District.

Both services operate during the weekday peak period. Small buses are used on the Katonah Shuttle and ex-CT TRANSIT New Flyer 40' low floor buses are used on the Danbury-Norwalk service.

HART took delivery of 10 Orion V transit buses in 2001, followed by a single Orion VII low floor bus in 2002. Orion buses, manufactured in Oriskany, New York, are widely used in the New York City transit system.

Bonanza Bus became a subsidiary of Peter Pan bus lines in 2003. Peter Pan intercity service is now limited to a single route between New York, Danbury, Southbury, Waterbury and Hartford.

In 2004 HART increased its fare to \$1.25. HART was now running a 14 route system; interconnections with other systems and new services had created a confusing fare structure.

It was determined that a simplified fare structure would be more beneficial than maintaining the zone system. A more deeply discounted 10-ride and monthly pass price was established and fare zones were eliminated.

In 2006, after many years of stagnant funding, a state dial-a-ride grant program was created that allowed an increase in provision of services in the SweetHART program.

Each town and city in the state received an apportionment based on formula that took into account the square mileage of the municipality and its senior population. HART began SweetHART service to the Town of Roxbury at that time.

In 2007, national transit ridership reached 10.3 billion trips per year, the highest level in 50 years, and an increase of more than 2% over the prior year. According to the American Public Transit Association, public transportation use grew 32% percent nationally from 1995 to 2007.



A HART Gillig low floor bus, fresh off the line in December, 2007

Ten new Gillig low floor buses, manufactured in Hayward, California, were received by HART in 2008 to replace the 1995 RTS bus fleet.

A state transit funding program dubbed the Governor's initiative will enable a third interstate rail feeder shuttle to begin in late fall 2008 between New Fairfield and the Southeast Metro-North rail station.

HART is actively pursuing a resumption of Danbury-Bridgeport service and enhancements to the Danbury-Waterbury services operated by Peter Pan for the 2009 fiscal year.

HART is a significant regional asset, moving in step with its member communities.

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