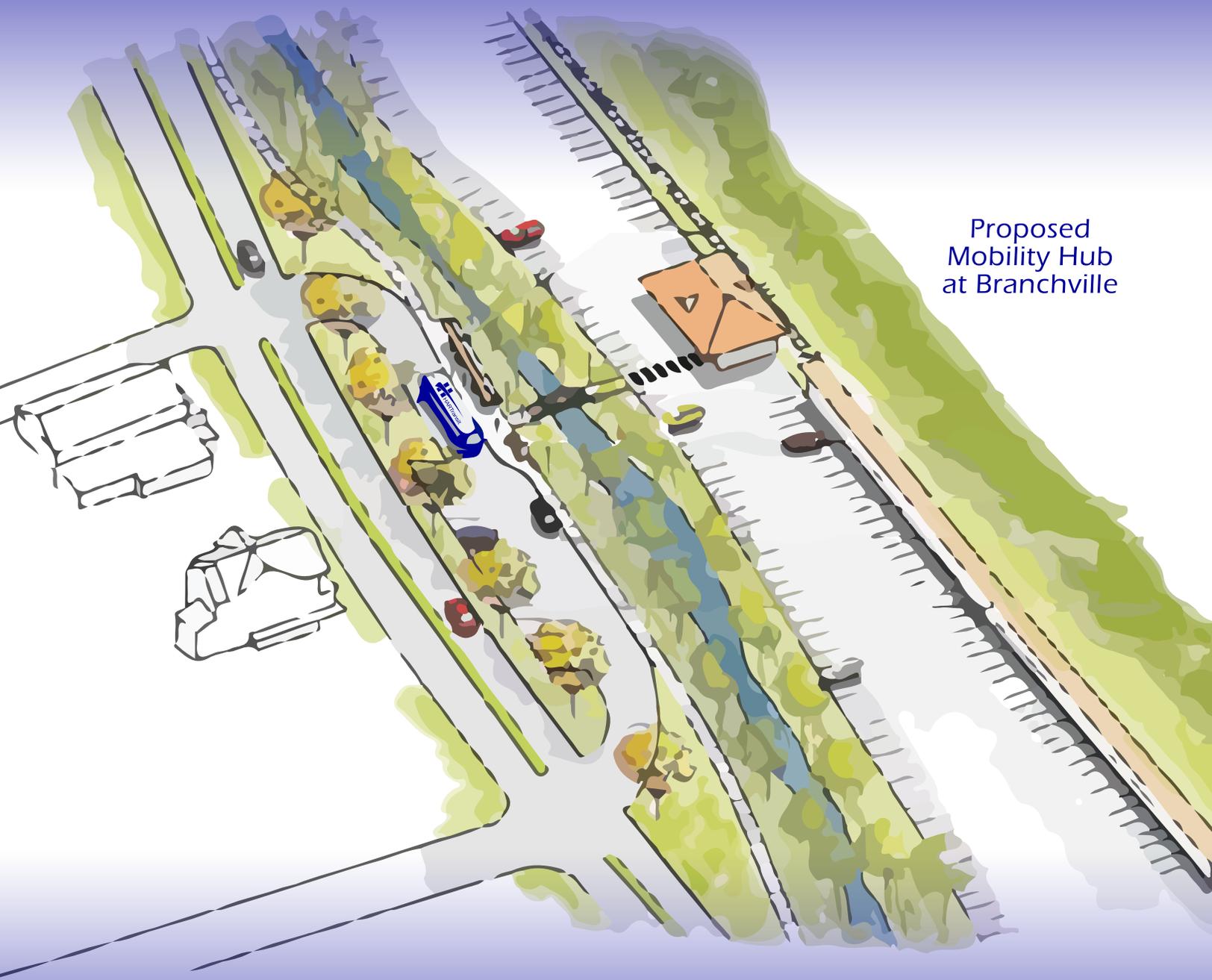


# Greater Danbury Commuter Rail Parking Plan



Proposed  
Mobility Hub  
at Branchville

October 2012

Prepared for: Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO)

By:  HARtransit

# **GREATER DANBURY COMMUTER RAIL PARKING PLAN**

**October 2012**

**This document was prepared in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration and the Connecticut Department of Transportation. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Connecticut Department of Transportation or the Federal Transit Administration.**

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## **I. RAILROAD STATIONS IN THE HVCEO REGION**

### **1. Introduction**

This text is a summary of current conditions and recommended parking enhancements to Danbury Branch Line railroad stations in the Housatonic Valley (Greater Danbury) Planning Region. Note that the Branch Line extends through two of Connecticut's planning regions, from Norwalk and Wilton in the South Western Region northerly through Redding and Ridgefield to Danbury in the Housatonic Valley Region.



***Existing and Proposed Railroad Stations in the Housatonic Region***

There are seven Danbury Branch Line stations from south to north with one in Norwalk, two in Wilton, then one each in Ridgefield (Branchville), West Redding, Bethel and Danbury. Only detailed recommendations for the Housatonic Region's four northern or "Upper Branch Line" stations are given here; Branchville, West Redding, Bethel and Danbury.

The text draws upon recent technical studies of the Branch Line, as well as new information gathered by the planning staff of the Housatonic Area Regional Transit District ([HARTransit](#)).

The bulk of the research summarizes the expansion of rail passenger service proposed by the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials ([HVCEO](#)) and the South Western Regional Planning Agency ([SWRPA](#)) in their joint 2000 Route 7 Corridor Travel Options Implementation Plan, the ConnDOT sponsored Danbury Branch Line Improvement Program, and the 2011 Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study.

The regional transportation planning authorities for both regions have endorsed the northern enhancement of the Branch Line and its proposed extension to New Milford. One additional station is approved for privately funded construction at Georgetown on the Danbury Branch Line, and one each in Brookfield and New Milford are proposed on the future extension to New Milford. These potential stations are also detailed on the following pages.

## **2. Overview of Housatonic Region Railroad Stations**

### **Station and Parking Management**

The station properties are owned by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) and leased to the local municipalities, which manage and maintain them. In the Housatonic Region, the municipalities have established accounts for funds generated through permit sales used to maintain the rail facilities.

All revenue generated from the property, less mutually agreed upon operating and maintenance expenses, is deposited into a reinvestment fund. The state reserves the right to approve or disapprove use of these funds to insure improvement and maintenance of rail station buildings, parking and services.

Rail users who board at stations on the Branch Line must purchase annual permits or pay a daily fee to park. Branchville was the last to offer free parking, which ended in 2010.

The annual permit fees for all four Upper Branch Line stations are the same, at \$250. In contrast, at rail stations in the nearby South Western Region, annual permits range from \$225 to \$845 per space. Even higher rates may be charged for non-residents at these stations.

Most of the Upper Branch Line stations allow for daily parking at a rate of \$5, with Danbury at a higher rate of \$9. Bethel is the only location to offer metered spaces, provided at a rate of \$0.25/hour.

### ***Regional Railroad Station Parking Rates***

<b>Station</b>	<b>Annual Permit</b>	<b>Daily Rate</b>	<b>Hourly Rate</b>	<b>Date of last rate change</b>	<b>Permits Issued</b>	<b>Wait list</b>	<b>Est. time on wait list</b>
<b>Branchville</b>	\$250	\$5	NA	12/10	150	2	1 month
<b>W. Redding</b>	\$250	\$5	NA	01/07	Up to 115	0	NA
<b>Bethel</b>	\$250	NA	\$0.25	01/09	250	25	1 year
<b>Danbury</b>	\$250	\$9	NA	01/09	147	0	NA

There are currently 587 parking spaces combined at the four stations. The vast majority of the capacity, 85%, is managed through permit parking. Far fewer spaces Region-wide are provided for casual rail users, with 46 spaces dedicated for such usage.

## ***Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials***

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In Danbury, however, these spaces are supplemented by a daily permit program that allows for use of open annual permit spaces.

Not all rail users ride every day, which allows for more permits than actual spaces. Cognizant of this, Danbury and other municipalities in the region logically oversell permitted spaces based on observed usage.

Waiting lists for annual permits do not appear to be a major problem. Bethel has the only waiting list of any size, presently 25 persons long with a wait of one year.

### ***Housatonic Valley Railroad Station Parking Capacity, Spring 2012***

<b>Station</b>	<b>Permit Capacity</b>	<b>Daily Capacity</b>	<b>Disabled Capacity</b>	<b>Other Spaces</b>	<b>Total Spaces</b>
<b>Branchville</b>	140	10	4	8	161
<b>W. Redding</b>	65	10	5	0	82
<b>Bethel</b>	165	26	6	0	197
<b>Danbury</b>	142	varies*	5	0	147
<b>Total Region</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>587</b>

\* Daily permits in Danbury may be purchased on an ongoing basis at the Patriot Garage. Daily permit holders may park in any open permitted space.

Regular rail station parking counts have been conducted annually by HARTransit staff over the past several years. These data indicate that usage of the lots has declined, which is consistent with the economic downturn and related lost rail ridership through 2011. Most recently (fall 2012) Regional usage was approximately 62% of station parking capacity, up slightly from the prior year.

It should be noted that the move from free to paid parking at the Branchville Station, in concert with repaving and restriping, reduced both the number of available spaces and observed usage here.

### ***Housatonic Valley Rail Station Parking Utilization History***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Metered Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Disabled Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Monthly Permit Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Non-Metered Spaces</b>	<b>Total Empty Spaces</b>	<b>Utilization Rate</b>
<b>2003</b>	594	12	15	115	19	161	73.0%
<b>2009</b>	594	24	9	ND	ND	152	74.4%
<b>2010</b>	594	22	13	139	139	197	66.8%
<b>2011</b>	587	9	14	209	209	248	57.8%
<b>2012</b>	587	4	17	195	9	225	61.7%

2003 Data collected by Urbitran, 2009 by SWRPA. 2010-2012 data collected by HARTransit. ND = No data

### Regional Rail Ridership and Mode to Station

In 2010, the a.m. peak boarding for the Housatonic Region stood at 646 inbound trips (to Southern CT and NYC), as compared to 594 available parking spaces at that time.

Passenger boardings at the stations in Danbury and Bethel are far greater than can be explained by single occupant drivers parking at the station stop.

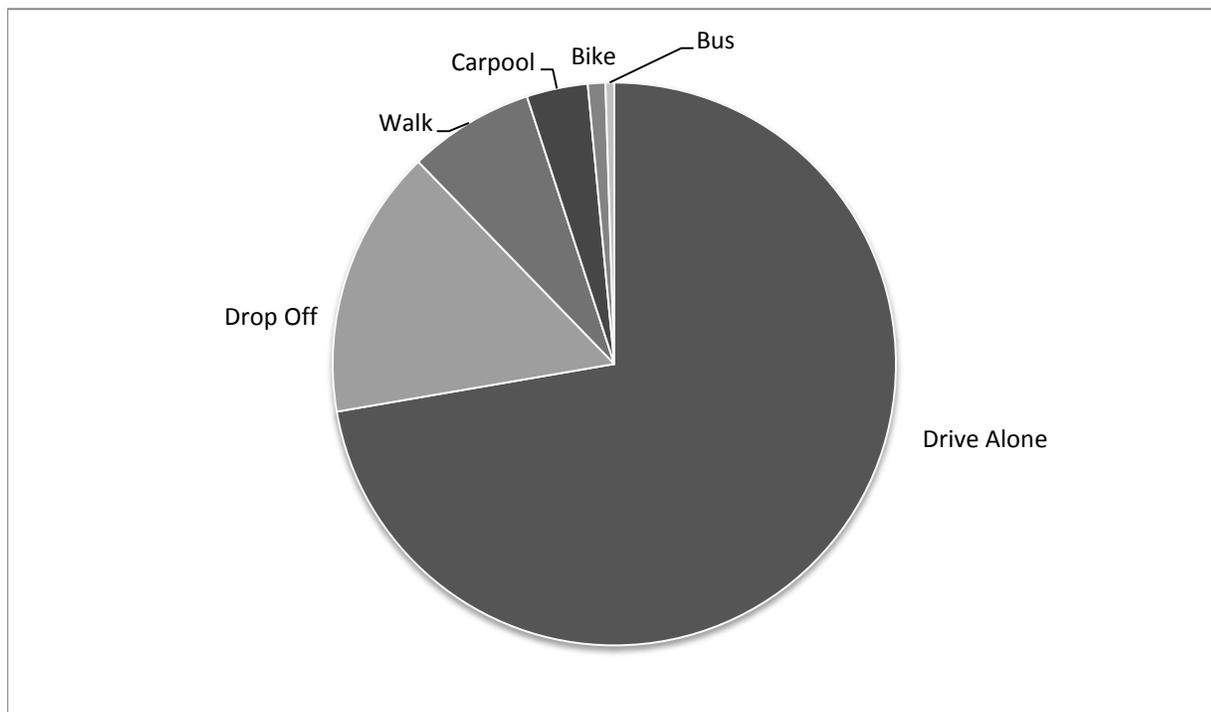
#### **2010 Danbury Branch Line Inbound (to S. Norwalk and NYC) Ridership**

Station	A.M. Peak	Off Peak	Total weekday
Branchville	153	18	171
West Redding	44	3	47
Bethel	241	14	255
Danbury	208	39	247
<b>Total Region</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>720</b>

Source: MTA Metro-North Railroad

According to the Danbury Branch Improvement Program's 2009 Rail Rider Survey Report, 72% of Branch Line patrons drive to their boarding station alone, 15.4% were dropped off and 7.2% walked. Carpoolers account for 3.5% of arrivals, and bicyclists 1%. One half of one percent take a bus to the train station.

#### **Mode to Station by Danbury Branch Line Rail Riders**



### **3. Expansion of the Danbury Branch Line and Parking Impacts**

The 2000 SWRPA-HVCEO Branch Line plan evaluated parking needs with and without service expansion. It was found that even without service expansion, the number of cars parked at stations was expected to continue to grow during the 2000-2015 projection period. By 2015 it was projected that this demand would exceed the current parking space inventory at four of the present seven stations.

The 2000 plan stated that "876 additional riders are expected to board the Danbury Branch between 1999 and 2015 with no improvements to service. This represents an almost 70 percent increase in ridership due to population growth and highway congestion."

The 2012 DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) of the Danbury Branch Improvement Program provides an update to this discussion that suggests things are moving as predicted in the 2000 study. According to the DEIS three of the seven stations, including Danbury, Bethel and Merritt 7, presently require additional spaces.

ConnDOT indicates that a total of 73 spaces are needed on the Branch as a whole right now. The table below summarizes current parking needs on the Branch.

#### ***Danbury Branch Line Existing Parking Demand***

<b>STATION</b>	<b>EXISTING SPACES</b>	<b>BOARDINGS</b>	<b>PARKING DEMAND</b>	<b>DESIRABLE NO. OF SPACES</b>	<b>ADDITIONAL SPACES NEEDED</b>
<b>Danbury</b>	146	216	162	178	32
<b>Bethel</b>	190	259	194	214	24
<b>Redding</b>	82	58	44	48	34 space surplus
<b>Branchville</b>	142	150	113	124	18 space surplus
<b>Cannondale</b>	140	155	116	128	12 space surplus
<b>Wilton</b>	220	170	128	140	80 space surplus
<b>Merritt 7</b>	88	128	96	106	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,008</b>	<b>1,136</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>73</b>

Source: Danbury Branch Improvement Plan 2012 DEIS Report

There has been some progress with improvements to the line, with the soon to be completed installation of Centralized Train Control (CTC) technology on the Branch. The CTC system modernizes the Danbury Branch, improving rider safety and allowing trains to operate more efficiently and frequently.

The CTC system is a prerequisite to the addition of Positive Train Control (PTC), a further enhanced rail traffic control and monitoring system that is mandated by the Federal Government and is to be implemented on all passenger rail services by 2015. Operation of the line to this point has relied on manual technology in use since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Danbury Branch Improvement Program initially considered over 20 different alternatives in Phase I of the study. In Phase 2, this large group was narrowed down to eight, ranging from the no-build option up to extension of service to New Milford and several options in between.

These alternatives are as follows:

- Alternative A: No Build
  - This alternative would allow for maintenance of the status quo. The National Environmental Policy Review Act requires that this option be considered when completing an EIS.
- Alternative B: Transportation System Management (TSM)
  - The Federal Transit Administration defines Transportation System Management (TSM) as “everything that can be done without new construction or vehicle procurement.” There would be an increase in rail service, but not to the extent of that in the in options below.

In lieu of a rail extension north of Danbury, connecting bus service with Brookfield and New Milford station stops originating at the Danbury train station would be added. In addition, commuter shuttles would be provided to the Danbury and West Redding stations.

- Alternative C: South Norwalk to Danbury Improvements
  - Alternative C would provide improvements between South Norwalk and Danbury on the existing Branch. Improvements include track realignments that would allow for increased speeds of up to 60mph; expanded parking and improved access at stations; bridge upgrades; rail yard upgrades; and electrification of the rail line. New rolling stock would be added to allow for expanded service or for the electric trains.
- Alternative D: Extension from Danbury to New Milford (Diesel and Electric)
  - Alternative D would extend the existing Branch passenger service approximately 14 miles from Danbury to New Milford using either diesel or electric vehicles. Both versions of this alternative would include constructing new track to accommodate speeds up to 60mph, adding new stations and parking facilities at Brookfield and New Milford, and adding new rolling stock. A new maintenance facility and storage yard would also be built in the vicinity of New Milford.

- Alternative E: Improvement from South Norwalk to Merritt 7/Wilton
  - Alternative E would provide partial electrification of the Branch from South Norwalk to Wilton. This would require a new traction power system and new rolling stock.

Parking and access improvements would be made at Merritt 7 Station, and there would be minor modifications to track and structures. There is no extension to New Milford under this scenario.

Each of these alternatives will create different parking pressures at stations based on the level of service provided. ConnDOT and URS developed new projections of station parking requirements for each of the alternatives by 2030. As described in the table below, the increases in parking necessary on the Branch will be between 508 and 1195 additional spaces.

***Danbury Branch Line Additional Parking Space Requirements by 2030***

Station	Alternatives A&B	Alternative C	Alternative D-Diesel	Alternative D-Electric	Alternative E
New Milford	NA	NA	108	134	NA
Brookfield	NA	NA	97	101	NA
Danbury	25 space surplus	197	59	149	84
Bethel	101	214	159	215	156
Redding	50	89	43	89	46
Branchville	122	157	71	157	80
Georgetown	0	116	102	116	108
Cannondale	56	64 space surplus	24	64 space surplus	25
Wilton	35	34	35	34	39
Merritt 7	145	200	195	200	196
<b>Total</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>1007</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>1195</b>	<b>734</b>

## **II. EXISTING HOUSATONIC REGION RAILROAD STATIONS**

This section provides a discussion of the existing railroad stations in the Housatonic Valley Region at Branchville, West Redding, Bethel and Danbury. Current conditions, usage and development plans are outlined.

### **1. Branchville Railroad Station**

#### **Physical Setting**

Branchville Railroad Station is located in Ridgefield, CT, directly off of Route 7, near the intersection of Route 7 and Route 102. It is 12.7 rail miles north of the main New Haven Line at the South Norwalk Railroad Station and 3.8 miles north of the Cannondale Railroad Station in Wilton, CT.

Access to the station is across either of two driveways, one of which includes an ungated railroad crossing. A pedestrian bridge across the Norwalk River linking the site from Route 7 is privately owned and not usable by the general public.



***Branchville, CT Railroad Station***

A 1998 historic resource survey by ConnDOT indicates that this station was built in 1905 to the standard design of railroad stations at the turn of the century. It is described as a "one story, Stick style, railroad station, constructed on a fieldstone foundation with a wood frame structural system, asbestos shingle siding, and side gambrel and mansard roof units." The report recommended the building for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Town of Ridgefield leases the station and adjacent property from ConnDOT. The interior was sublet in 1982 to a business which restored the historic character of the inside, and currently operates the Whistle Stop Bakery there.

There are no ticket sales or transit information available in the interior. Branch Line rail schedules are posted on the exterior.

A passenger siding, along with associated track work, was installed at Branchville 1991 in order to allow for more passenger train operations in both directions. A high level platform was then constructed in 1992 to improve passenger boarding and alighting and reduce station dwell times.

In 2000 ConnDOT estimated that the percentage of riders boarding at Branchville and bound for Stamford was 18%.

The Branchville Station is served by the [Danbury-Norwalk Route 7 LINK bus](#), operated jointly by the Norwalk Transit District and HARTransit.

### **Branchville Station Parking**

This particular parking lot was historically the most heavily used of any commuter parking facility in the ten-town Housatonic Region, but a new permit program has impacted lot usage. A permit system was established in the fall of 2010 by the Town of Ridgefield and implemented that December.

The system was put in place to help manage the lot; pavement condition had declined and spaces were being used by people patronizing local businesses. Prior to that time, parking in the lot was free of charge. As described in the chart below, lot capacity was slightly reduced when the lot was repaved and striped when the new permit system was instituted.

The 161 space lot has 140 spaces dedicated to annual permits, which sell for \$250 per year. Ten spaces are for daily parking at \$5 per space. Eight spaces in the lot are dedicated for use by bakery patrons.

### ***Branchville Station Parking Lot Usage History***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Disabled Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Annual Permit Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Non-Metered Spaces</b>	<b>Total Empty Spaces</b>	<b>Utilization Rate</b>
<b>2003</b>	168	2	NA	14	16	90.5%
<b>2009</b>	168	2	NA	13	15	91.1%
<b>2010</b>	168	2	NA	11	13	92.3%
<b>2011</b>	161	2	84	3	89	44.7%
<b>2012</b>	161	4	60	4	68	57.8%

2003 Data collected by Urbitran, 2009 by SWRPA. 2010-2012 data collected by HARTransit. NA = Not Applicable.

Overall lot program and policy is set by the Ridgefield Board of Selectman. Day to day operations are managed by the Parking Authority through the Town Human Resources office. The Parking Authority handles matters such as permitting and parking enforcement. Daily maintenance of the lot is coordinated through the Parks Department, with more significant work completed by the Town Highway Department. The Whistle Stop Bakery is responsible for building maintenance. Lot security is provided by the Ridgefield Police Department.

The town sells permits based on need, whereby persons that can demonstrate they are daily commuters on the rail system get to apply for permits first.

Depending on which improvement options of the Branch Line are implemented, between 71 and 157 new spaces will be required by 2030, according to the Danbury Branch Line DEIS of 2012. Note that the DEIS indicates that the no build alternative will require 122 new spaces by that time.

### **Branchville Station Development Issues**

There are several proposals for parking improvements to the Branchville station.

In 2002, the Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission created a concept plan for a decked parking structure here. Nine years later, the 2011 Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study concluded that developing the long, narrow site in that way would create circulation problems and that the design was not cost effective or efficient. A plan to access the upper deck from the rear via a new bridge over the tracks was a further concern.

As an alternative, the Route 7 Study proposed two options to address the need for enhanced parking at the station. Both suggest surface parking at the southern end of the existing lot would be a better solution than a decked structure. But the Ridgefield P&Z had expressed the view that the southern end of the lot is unsuitable for development based on proximity to the Norwalk River and environmental concerns.

However, according to the Route 7 Study consultants, parking expansion here is feasible from a wetlands and floodplain perspective. ConnDOT is exempt from wetland regulations, and permeable materials could be used to mitigate stormwater management concerns and impacts to the Norwalk River.

Route 7 Study Option 1 would include a relocated and signalized access to the train station aligned with Old Town Road, and capacity improvements to the existing intersection at Route 102. This will require a relocated and upgraded bridge over the Norwalk River. The grade crossing at the north end of the train station would be eliminated. The existing lot would be expanded by 46 spaces to the south.

Route 7 Study Option 2, a longer term vision of development in Branchville, would build on the expansion above by the inclusion of a 185-space parking structure with ground

level retail on the southwest corner of Routes 7 and 102, across Route 7 from the station. Another important element is the creation of a mobility hub on the opposite bank of the Norwalk River from the station and adjacent to Route 7.

The Mobility Hub would include additional parking, a pedestrian bridge over the river, bus transit amenities, secure bicycle parking, an information kiosk, and a taxi stand. Precision Brake currently occupies this site and would have to be relocated.



**Detail of Option 1 of the Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study's Branchville enhancement plan, showing expanded parking at the station lot south of the current location.**



**SWRPA and HVCEO proposed Mobility Hub at Branchville adjacent to Route 7, under Option 2.**



**Proposed parking structure on the corner of Routes 102 and 7 under Option 2 of the Branchville Enhancement Plan, north west of the Mobility Hub.**



well as less frequent midday service between the three population centers. An earlier study by HARTransit in 2001 (Danbury Branch Line Shuttle Feasibility Study) suggested that a commuter shuttle from remote park and ride lots might be successful here.

Reverse commutes anywhere along the Upper Branch Line are problematic with current service levels. If service is expanded to the point where 31 to 38 daily trips are possible, or if service is expanded to New Milford, reverse commutes become more realistic.

Route 7 in this area is served by the Danbury-Norwalk Route 7 LINK. An assessment of the need for bus prioritization at key intersections is recommended. Bus prioritization systems include bus lanes that allow for buses to jump queues, or the installation of electronics on buses that trigger signals to change as buses approach, allowing for more consistent schedules and better connections with other modes.

A recent Federal Transit Administration study recommended that a visitor transportation shuttle service be established between the nearby Weir Farm National Historic Site and Branchville Station. There is little on-site visitor parking available at Weir Farm and no desire to expand on-site parking due to the intrusion it would represent to the site's landscape, which is what made it a landscape painters mecca.

Projections are that visitation to Weir Farm could increase by 30-60%. If these numbers are accurate, and the proposal to establish a shuttle is implemented, it may impact parking availability for rail commuters.

## **2. West Redding Railroad Station**

### **Physical Setting**

The West Redding Railroad Station is located in Redding, CT, just west of Route 53, near the Bethel and Danbury border. It is 17.3 rail miles north of the main line at the South Norwalk Railroad Station and 4.6 miles north of the Branchville Station. The Station is on Long Ridge Road near a three way intersection with Simpaug Turnpike and Station Road.

This station includes a high level platform with disabled access and shelter. There are waste receptacles and public telephones. However, no transit information of any kind is available at this facility. The Mark Twain Library maintains a small collection of books here for the use of rail riders.



***West Redding, CT, Railroad Station***

As for public bus service, Redding remains a semi-rural area, and there is no bus service other than the limited town operated senior/disabled dial-a-ride available to the station.

This new station opened in June of 1999 and is in excellent condition. There is some history here, for in 1992 a high level platform was constructed at the old West Redding Station near this small hamlet's retail buildings to improve passenger boarding and reduce station dwell times. However, the modern gleaming design was inappropriate for the scale and charm of the core of the small community of West Redding.

After negotiations between the Town of Redding and ConnDOT, it was agreed that the 1992 platform and canopy would be dismantled. It was replaced in 1999 by a new platform with a modest station building about 500 feet south of the previous location. In 2000 ConnDOT estimated that the percentage of riders boarding at West Redding and bound for Stamford was 25%.

### **West Redding Station Parking**

Purchase of a \$250 annual permit or payment of a daily parking fee of \$5 is required to use the 82-space lot. As of February 2012, there were 10 available annual permits remaining for the year with no waiting list.

Overall policy and oversight of the station is through the First Selectman's office, and daily operations are handled through the Recycling and Station Parking Manager. Most of the basic functions are handled through this office, including maintenance and annual permit waiting lists. Annual permits can be purchased at the Town recycling center or at the Redding Town Hall.

**West Redding Parking Utilization History**

Year	Empty Disabled Spaces	Empty Annual Permit Spaces	Empty Non-Metered Spaces	Total Empty Spaces	Utilization Rate
2003	4	23	3	30	63.4%
2009	4	ND	ND	25	69.5%
2010	5	26	9	40	51.2%
2011	4	26	8	38	53.6%
2012	5	18	3	26	68.3%

2003 Data collected by Urbitran, 2009 by SWRPA. 2010-2012 data collected by HARTransit. ND = No data.

Daily parkers do not purchase permits or use meters but rather are “ticketed” \$5 per day to park. Enforcement and security are coordinated through the Redding Police Department.

The Danbury Branch DEIS projects that under the no build and TSM scenarios, 50 additional spaces would be required for adequate parking at the West Redding Station by 2030. Other alternatives for expansion on the line provide estimates of 43 to 89 additional spaces, depending on the scenario.

**West Redding Station Development Issues**

Although there is some directional signage, the location is not well marked and must be accessed by crossing an ungated, at-grade railroad crossing. Local views towards the provision of a station sign at the driveway entrance should be evaluated.

The north side of the station along Long Ridge Road is the most likely location for any TOD efforts. There are floodplains and wetlands to the south, east and west of the station. The lack of public water and sewer limits the potential for future development here.

ConnDOT’s current plans for expansion of the station initially proposed an additional 100 spaces. The presence of earlier referenced wetlands on the southern side of the property led to a reduction in the planned expansion shown in the illustration to 75 spaces. The area around the existing West Redding station is a focus area, as is Georgetown, for the town’s preliminary studies in planning Incentive Housing Zones (affordable housing) using TOD. Redding received a technical assistance grant for a location study at the West Redding Station under the Housing for Economic Growth program in January 2010.

In 2011 the State Bond Commission approved limited funding for expansion of parking at both Bethel and West Redding Stations. By mid-2012 the design process at ConnDOT for these improvements was in its early stages, with final design projected for late 2015 and construction to start in mid-2016.



***ConnDOT parking expansion plan for West Redding Station. Existing parking layout is in dark gray, with proposed expansion shown as light gray.***

However, ConnDOT found that the need for additional parking at Bethel was clearly demonstrated while at West Redding the currently ample reserve capacity was projected to continue. After consultation with Redding officials, ConnDOT elected to use these bond funds for Bethel parking expansion as the priority and to defer expansion plans in West Redding.

### **Non-Rail Mobility Options to West Redding Station**

The non-rail analysis for this station is not strongly supportive of a scheduled fixed route shuttle service for rail passengers. Further, with a parking lot that is currently under capacity, there is little incentive to encourage shuttle usage until the parking supply is exceeded.

As for the potential for reverse commute, major employment locations with good access to the West Redding station within a five mile radius include Lee Farm Corporate Park,

Barden Corporation, B.F. Goodrich, and the Apple Ridge Road Office Park, all to the north via Route 7 in Danbury.

There may be some potential for worksite shuttles to these locations if rail expansion plans move forward. The 2012 Danbury Branch Line DEIS recommended worksite shuttles between the West Redding Station and major employment locations in the area of Danbury Airport.

### **3. Bethel Railroad Station**

#### **Physical Setting**

The Bethel Railroad Station is located just north of Downtown Bethel, CT, on Durant Avenue, opposite Bishop Curtis Homes. Bethel's station is 20.6 rail miles north of the main line at the South Norwalk Railroad Station and 3.3 miles north of the West Redding Station.

Bethel is the most used stop, even more than Danbury, of the four rail stations in the Housatonic Valley Region. At 197 spaces, Bethel Station has the greatest parking capacity.

Based upon a 1986 HVCEO station relocation study, a new Bethel Railroad Station was built on Durant Avenue and opened for service in January of 1996. This project was 100% State funded at an approximate cost of \$4.3 million. The architectural detailing is the same as for Danbury Station. New facilities included a new station building and high level platform.

The old station to the south on Greenwood Avenue was built in 1910 to replace an earlier passenger railroad station on the site dating from 1852. It still stands and is now the home of Bethel Cycle.

The 1996 facility remains in excellent condition, and features pedestrian access, permit and metered parking, bicycle racks, a station building housing the Daily Fare Café, restrooms, outdoor tables, a high-level platform with a lighted canopy, and benches and ramps for persons with disabilities. Metro-North Railroad and HARTransit bus schedules are available.

The station is served by the [HARTransit 5 Bethel Center Route](#). The current parking capacity was an increase of over 100% in comparison to the historic station on Route 302 - Greenwood Avenue to the south. The lot is signed and directional signage is in place.



***Bethel, CT, Railroad Station***

A 1996 HVCEO report estimated commuter boardings by home town of riders from Danbury and Bethel stations combined. The totals were Bethel 128, Danbury 84, Newtown 48, Brookfield 18, New Milford 9, New Fairfield 5 and Bridgewater 4. Many of the Newtown residents use this station.

In 2000, ConnDOT estimated that the percentage of riders boarding at Bethel and bound for Stamford was 23%.

### **Bethel Station Parking**

Parking at the Bethel train station is managed through the town clerk's office which sets policy, issues permits and maintains waiting lists. Parking enforcement and security are the responsibility of the Police Department. Lot maintenance is provided by the Bethel Public Works Department.

Annual parking permits may be purchased for \$250. At the time of publication, there was a 25 person one year waiting list; the town issues about 250 permits annually. Metered spaces are available for \$0.25 per hour with a 24 hour maximum for more casual users.

A historical summary of recent parking lot usage is described below:

***Bethel Station Parking Utilization History***

Year	Total Spaces	Empty Metered Spaces	Empty Disabled Spaces	Empty Annual Permit Spaces	Empty Non-Metered Spaces	Total Empty Spaces	Utilization Rate
2003	197	10	5	38	0	53	73.1%
2009	197	11	3	ND	ND	42	78.7%
2010	197	11	3	48	1	63	68.0%
2011	197	2	4	53	1	60	69.5%
2012	197	4	4	39	0	47	76.1%

2003 data collected by Urbitran, 2009 by SWRPA. 2010-2012 data collected by HARTransit. ND = No data.

**Bethel Station Development Issues**

The existing station parking layout was designed to be further expanded in the future to accommodate another 100 spaces.

In 2011 the State Bond Commission approved limited funding for expansion of parking at both Bethel and West Redding Stations. By mid-2012 the design process at ConnDOT for these improvements was in its early stages, with final design projected for late 2015 and construction to start in mid-2016.

However, ConnDOT found that the need for additional parking at Bethel was clearly demonstrated while at West Redding the currently ample reserve capacity was projected to continue. After consultation with Redding officials, ConnDOT elected to use these bond funds for Bethel parking expansion as the priority and to defer expansion plans in West Redding.

The state purchased a 5 acre parcel adjacent to the station in 1990 that will allow for the expansion. The Danbury Branch DEIS suggests that 160 additional spaces on the north side of the existing lot are now needed. HVCEO released a detailed TOD (Transit Oriented Development) Feasibility Study in March 2010 centered on this station. There are floodplains, wetlands and watercourses north, northeast and west of the station. New regulatory structures are necessary given the variety of land uses and zoning around the station to fully realize TOD here.

Several TOD concept plans for redevelopment in the vicinity of Bethel Station have been developed. The town has expressed an interest in the construction of a west side platform at the station; riders currently board on the east side of the tracks. The proposal is to expand parking to the west side and to add a pedestrian bridge over the tracks to allow for access to the platform.

Wastewater treatment is another development issue here. Danbury provides wastewater treatment services to Bethel, so one option for railroad station area development is to



**ConnDOT plan for expanding Bethel Station parking to the north of and adjacent to the existing lot.**

renegotiate the total sewerage allowance with Danbury. However, recent data indicates that the additional capacity needed for TOD may be found within underutilized sectors of the current allocation, a simpler process for the municipality that would speed TOD.

### **Non-Rail Mobility Options to Bethel Station**

A Bethel Station based subscription shuttle may be warranted on implementation of Danbury Branch expansion. Projected parking deficits will support a shift from auto use to shuttle services. Such a program could help mitigate anticipated parking deficits.

The Danbury Branch DEIS estimates that even under the no build and TSM scenarios, 101 additional spaces will be required at this station by 2030. Under the expansion proposals, as many as 215 additional spaces would be required.

As for the potential for reverse commute, considering the less than ideal train schedule connections, and existing direct HARTtransit bus service between most major employers in the vicinity and Bethel Station, reverse commute van shuttles from this location may not be warranted.

## **4. Danbury Railroad Station**

### **Physical Setting**

Danbury Railroad Station is accessible via Patriot Drive in Downtown Danbury, CT. It is opposite the Danbury Ice Arena and the Patriot Parking Garage, a municipal facility.

The station is 23.6 rail miles north of the main line at the South Norwalk Railroad Station and is currently the end of the line in terms of passenger service.

As in Bethel, the Danbury Station was opened to the public in 1996 and is in excellent condition. It replaced the 1903-vintage Union Station just to the north, an attractive building which is now the headquarters of the [Danbury Railway Museum](#).

The Union Station was built on an L-shaped plan to serve passengers on the two rail lines that met right at the station. This configuration constrained parking expansion there, leading to the 1996 relocation.

The current railroad station site was obtained by ConnDOT in a land exchange with the Danbury Redevelopment Agency. It includes an 1800 square-foot station building constructed for \$2.5 million, a high-level boarding platform for easy access to and from trains, new track and formal at-grade crossing protection with appropriate warning devices and other various improvements.



***Danbury, CT, Railroad Station***

The site features a covered platform and enclosed waiting area. There are restrooms, newspaper vending machines, waste receptacles, bicycle racks (in use during a HARTransit survey), and exterior lighting. Timetables are available in the waiting area, although there was no special display area for them. There is no staff in the building, having been discontinued in 2002 in favor of ticket vending machines.

There is pedestrian access to the Danbury Railroad Station, which is within walking distance from Downtown Danbury's [CityCenter Dining and Entertainment District](#).

The [HARTransit 2 Stony Hill Bus](#) serves the location with a stop on Patriot Drive. The facility is also within walking distance of the HARTransit Pulse Point (approximately 1/3 mile distant). The [HARTransit 7 New Milford Bus](#) passes within a quarter mile of the facility on White Street with stops near the historic Union Station, and the [HARTransit 5 Bethel Center Bus](#) can be accessed less than a quarter mile away on Main Street.

In 2000, ConnDOT estimated that the percentage of riders boarding at Danbury and bound for Stamford was 40%, the highest percentage of the seven stations on the Branch Line.

### **Danbury Station Parking**

Access to parking at the Danbury Station is by permit from the Danbury Parking Authority or via parking meters. A yearly parking permit is \$250, and daily is \$9. Metered parking was formerly available, but discontinued in the summer of 2012.

#### ***Danbury Station Parking Utilization History***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Metered Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Disabled Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Annual Permit Spaces</b>	<b>Empty Non-Metered Spaces</b>	<b>Total Empty Spaces</b>	<b>Utilization Rate</b>
<b>2003</b>	147	2	4	54	2	62	57.8%
<b>2009</b>	147	13	0	ND	ND	70	52.4%
<b>2010</b>	147	11	3	65	2	81	44.9%
<b>2011</b>	147	7	4	46	4	61	58.5%
<b>2012</b>	147	NA	4	78	2	84	42.8%

2003 Data collected by Urbitran, 2009 by SWRPA, 2010-2012 by HARTransit. ND = No data. NA = Not applicable.

Policy is set by the Mayor's office and implemented by the Danbury Parking Authority. The Parking Authority is responsible for permit sales, maintenance of waiting lists and parking enforcement. Maintenance of the lot and structure is the responsibility of the Public Buildings Department and Department of Public Works. Security is provided by the Police Department and the Parking Authority.

The Danbury Branch DEIS projects that under the no-build and TSM scenarios, the station will have a surplus of 25 spaces by 2030. Depending on the service expansion scenarios, a deficit of 59 to 197 spaces is expected.

### **Danbury Station Development Issues**

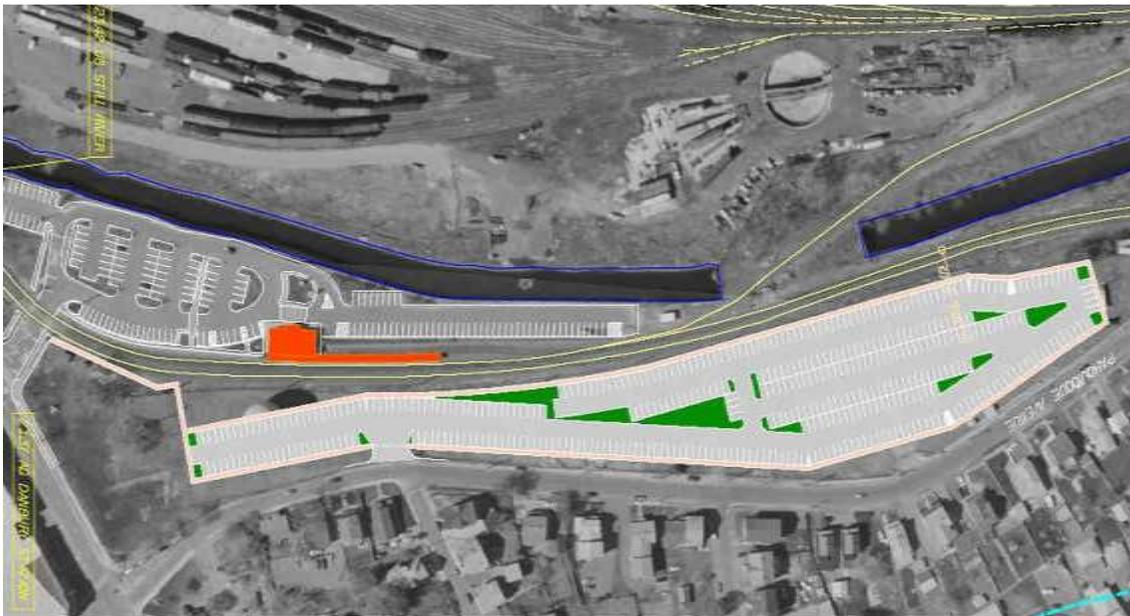
It will eventually need to be determined if land is available for on-site parking expansion. In terms of future parking needs, the relationship between the Danbury Station parking lot and the City's nearby Patriot Parking Garage will need to be defined. ConnDOT

developed plans in 2010 for expansion of parking south of the existing lot adjacent to and accessed via Pahquioque Avenue.

The limitation on future TOD potential at this site is due to the lack of developable land in the vicinity that could be linked with pedestrian uses to the station, and that could support the full range of TOD uses. From another perspective, the vicinity is already a TOD, for the station is amidst a built-up central area.

### **Non-Rail mobility options to Danbury Station**

The area around the Patriot Drive station is accessible to pedestrians, bus users and cyclists, and bicycle parking is available at the station. The location of the station in the heart of Downtown Danbury naturally lends itself to these alternative commute options.



***ConnDOT 2010 plan for expanding Danbury Station parking to the south.***

Analysis shows that a subscription shuttle/HARTransit Pulse Point connector may need to be implemented here with expansion of the Branch Line. The Route 7 Travel Options Implementation Plan recommended the creation of a connector service that would operate between the HARTransit Pulse Point and the Metro-North Station.

As for the potential for reverse commute shuttles, major employment locations within a short distance of the Danbury Railroad Station are located within Commerce Park. Such a shuttle service is recommended in the Danbury Branch Study DEIS of 2012.

### **III. PROPOSED HOUSATONIC REGION RAILROAD STATIONS**

This section provides a planning narrative for three station stops proposed as the Danbury Branch Line rail service is expanded. Georgetown, on the Wilton-Redding Border, is located on the existing Branch Line. Brookfield and New Milford are on the Berkshire Rail Line, north of Danbury.

A fourth station stop referenced in earlier planning work, Danbury North, is no longer considered viable. Analysis completed through the Danbury Branch study documented low potential usage here.

#### **1. Georgetown Railroad Station**

##### **Physical Setting**

Georgetown is located at the juncture of the towns of Redding, Ridgefield, Weston and Wilton, with a central district in Wilton and Redding, near the intersection of Routes 7 and 57. Georgetown is between the existing stations at Cannondale and Branchville, 9.2 miles north of The New Haven Mainline.

The 556 acre Gilbert and Bennett wire mill site in Georgetown featured a nearby passenger station stop that was serviced from the early days of the rail line on up until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.



***Postcard image of the Georgetown, CT, Station, circa 1920. The building is gone, but a restored station stop and TOD development is planned here.***

The historic station building was torn down long ago, but Redding is working to convert the former mill into a mixed use development, and plans to reinstitute a station stop and create a transit hub as part of this project. The restored station site has been formally approved by ConnDOT and is now integrated into expansion plans for the Branch Line.

There have been preliminary discussions with staff of HARTransit and Norwalk Transit to deviate the Danbury-Norwalk Route 7 LINK bus, which is operated by the two agencies, off nearby Route 7 to service the transit hub.

### **Georgetown Station Parking**

Consultants at Fitzgerald and Halliday (FHI) completed an assessment in 2008 to estimate the number of parking spaces required at the new facility. Based on data from the Danbury Branch Line Electrification Study, ConnDOT and others, FHI determined that between 350 to 450 spaces would be necessary to meet projected demand at Georgetown station by 2020.

Redding applied for \$28 million in federal TIGER funds for a 570 vehicle parking garage here, but has so far been unsuccessful.



***Proposed Georgetown Transportation Center***

The facility design is part of a U.S. EPA award winning Smart Growth and TOD project, and is a public investment of interregional transit benefit in conformance with the Danbury Branch Line improvement plan.

### **Georgetown Station Development Issues**

The redevelopment of the wire mill site would be one of the largest and greenest transit-oriented development projects in Connecticut. The proposed project includes over 400 housing units, small retail, more than 300,000 square feet of commercial space, a performing arts center, health club, and a bed and breakfast. Other innovative plans include alternative energy generation, making use of the existing dam.

The state legislature created the Georgetown special taxing district, encompassing the mill site and enabling the district to issue bonds secured by future district taxes and fees.

Redding received a federal small cities grant in February 2006 for \$600,000 to begin necessary site remediation. That same year, the US Department of the Treasury designated the Georgetown Special Taxing District as a qualified green building and sustainable design project. The district was then eligible to issue \$72 million in tax-exempt private activity bonds. The US Department of Agriculture provided \$5 million to finance the expansion of the municipal wastewater treatment plant here.

Unfortunately, the economic downturn has stalled implementation of plans. In September of 2011, Ridgefield and Redding completed a joint application for state funds to support transit oriented development in the geographically close Georgetown and Branchville areas. The projects would work off of the recently completed Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study. The application was ultimately not successful, but the two towns plan to resubmit under another funding program.

### **Georgetown Station Non-Rail Mobility Options**

The Danbury-Norwalk Route 7 LINK bus provides service to nearby Route 7. It is anticipated that when the intermodal center is constructed, the bus route will deviate to serve this facility. The Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study recommended that the 7 LINK service be studied for needed expansion, both in service area and service span.

A second bus service recommended for further study would be a Branchville-Georgetown–Ridgefield shuttle route. The proposed route would link the three population centers and restore local transit service to downtown Ridgefield. Detailed service plans are yet to be developed.

As noted above, the Georgetown train station is slated to include a new parking structure. The structure will service the proposed train station and on-site parking demand. The structure is expected to provide 200-300 spaces for commuters and an additional 300 spaces for other uses.

The TOD development is planned with walkability in mind. All buildings and public spaces will be connected by pedestrian pathways. No one in the development would be more than a 10-minute walk from the railroad station.

Five-foot wide paved shoulders with striping are recommended for the entirety of Route 7 from Georgetown north to Danbury. The construction of bicycle pockets at Route 7 and 107, to facilitate bicycle travel through the intersection and on into Georgetown, were a further recommendation of the corridor study. Bicycle racks are planned at the station.

## **2. Brookfield Railroad Station**

### **Physical Setting**

Located 31.2 miles north of the South Norwalk Station and roughly 7.5 miles north of Danbury Station is the historic Brookfield Railroad Station building at 273 Whisconier Road. The station is on Route 25 just east of the intersection of Route 25 and Route 7, an area often referred to as the Four Corners. This is just a short distance from the [HARtransit 7 New Milford](#) and [New Milford LOOP](#) bus routes. The former station building is owned by the Brookfield Craft Center.



***Historic Railroad Station Building on Whisconier Road in Brookfield, CT.***

The planned station stop would be at approximately the same location as the former station building. Several options for stations in Brookfield were evaluated as potential locations for a reinstated Brookfield stop in the ongoing Branch Line Study. The location of the historic stop was deemed most appropriate and will reinforce adjacent village development.

### **Proposed Brookfield Station Parking**

There has been some discussion about parking to the east of the track accessible via a pedestrian walkway down to the station. Demand projections indicate that 97 spaces



Brookfield Plan of Conservation and Development states: "While this service will go through Brookfield, it is not initially scheduled to stop in Brookfield. Brookfield should support the establishment of this rail service and seek a rail station in Brookfield. A location in or near the Four Corners is the most logical location although finding an appropriate site may require additional study."

The Town of Brookfield recently embarked on a Four Corners Brookfield Town Center Revitalization Plan. The purpose of the plan is to develop a clearly visualized scenario for the Four Corners area. As of July 2012, the draft plan concludes: "If and when passenger service becomes a reality, the Four Corners area should be well positioned to take advantage of land development opportunities around the station."

### **Non-Rail Options to the Proposed Station**

An express bus rail connector from Danbury to Brookfield and New Milford is contemplated as Option D of the Danbury Branch Line DEIS, in lieu of rail extension.

The process for improvement of the Four Corners area will include the development of a complete streets plan including modifications to roadways, circulation patterns, accommodations for transit bicyclists and pedestrians.

According to the 2012 Danbury Branch Line DEIS, Brookfield railroad station enhancements would include construction of high level platforms with canopies, waiting shelter, access stairs and ramps, bicycle lockers, and bus/car drop offs. A sidewalk at Brookfield station, from the station site westerly to Route 202 along the north side of Route 25 would be constructed to improve pedestrian access. Additionally, a new pedestrian bridge over the Still River would be constructed.

## **3. New Milford Railroad Station**

### **Physical Setting**

Located in downtown New Milford, 37.9 miles north of the South Norwalk Station and 6.7 miles north of the Brookfield Station site is the historic New Milford, CT, Railroad Station. It is near the intersection of Route 202 and Railroad Street. Two tracks exist through the station area.

As part of HVCEO and SWRPA transportation plans a restored station stop near the historic location would become the new end of the Branch Line, rather than Danbury Station 14.3 miles to the south.

The proposed station site is located on the east side of Railroad Street, well north of the historic station building. The site consists of several adjoining properties on the north side of Boardman Terrace and the south side of Bennitt Street.



***The former New Haven Railroad train station in New Milford, CT, now the home of the Greater New Milford Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber's tourist information center.***

### **Proposed New Milford Station Parking**

A 1996 HVCEO rail report envisioned that the existing parking lot of 230 spaces would be rehabilitated and expanded slightly to accommodate 250 parking spaces, the additional 20 spaces and some current spaces to service rail users.

It was presumed in 1996 that additional spaces could be created by expanding the parking lot to the west. An issue here is use of the current parking lot for access to nearby merchants and services, and the extent to which all-day rail station parkers would tighten the supply for these current parking lot users.

Current estimates are that with rail diesel expansion to New Milford, 108 spaces would be required by 2030. If all electric rail service is extended to New Milford, 134 spaces would be required by that time.

The DEIS of the Danbury Branch Line recommends construction of a 110 space surface lot perpendicular to the proposed station location on the corner of Boardman Terrace and Railroad Street. Access would be via Railroad Street. Disabled parking, bus bays and a kiss and ride would be provided in a narrow lot between the tracks and Railroad Street.



### **Non-Rail Mobility Options to the Proposed New Milford Station**

Projected demand via a shuttle does not appear high enough to implement such a service. There is, however, nearby HARTransit service via the 7 New Milford and

New Milford LOOP routes in place that would allow for passengers to access the station by bus.

As for the potential for reverse commute, a 7:00 a.m. train arrival and afternoon departure at 4:55 p.m. in New Milford would provide the best timing for workers traveling to Kimberly Clark from points south.

An express bus-rail connector from Danbury to Brookfield and New Milford is contemplated as Option D of the Danbury Branch Line DEIS, in lieu of rail extension.

The proposed station stop is well situated from the standpoint of pedestrian and bicycle access. The vibrant town center of New Milford grew around the former station, and is a highly walkable environment for those within a short distance.

According to the 2012 Danbury Branch Line DEIS, New Milford station would include construction of high level platforms with canopies, waiting shelter, access stairs and ramps, bicycle lockers, and bus/car drop offs.