URS

The U.S. DOT Federal Transit Administration and the Connecticut Department of Transportation

In cooperation with
The South Western Regional Planning Agency and
The Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials

Study Advisory Committee Meeting
Project No. 302-008
Ridgefield, Connecticut

June 23, 2009

PURPOSE and AGENDA

This meeting is a part of the NEPA/CEPA Process.

Agenda

- Introductions
- Project Update
- Current Activities
- Next Steps
- Discussion

Project Purpose

- Improve mobility options for the traveling public in the South Western and Housatonic Valley regions of Connecticut.
- Maintain and improve existing commuter rail service on the Danbury Branch as well as improve its feeder system and intermodal connections on the Branch.
- Help reduce congestion in the Route 7 corridor between South Norwalk, CT and New Milford, CT.

Alternatives Identified in Phase 1*

- No Build Alternative
- Transportation System Management (TSM)
- South Norwalk to Danbury Improvements
- Extension from Danbury to New Milford
- Improvements from South Norwalk to Merritt 7

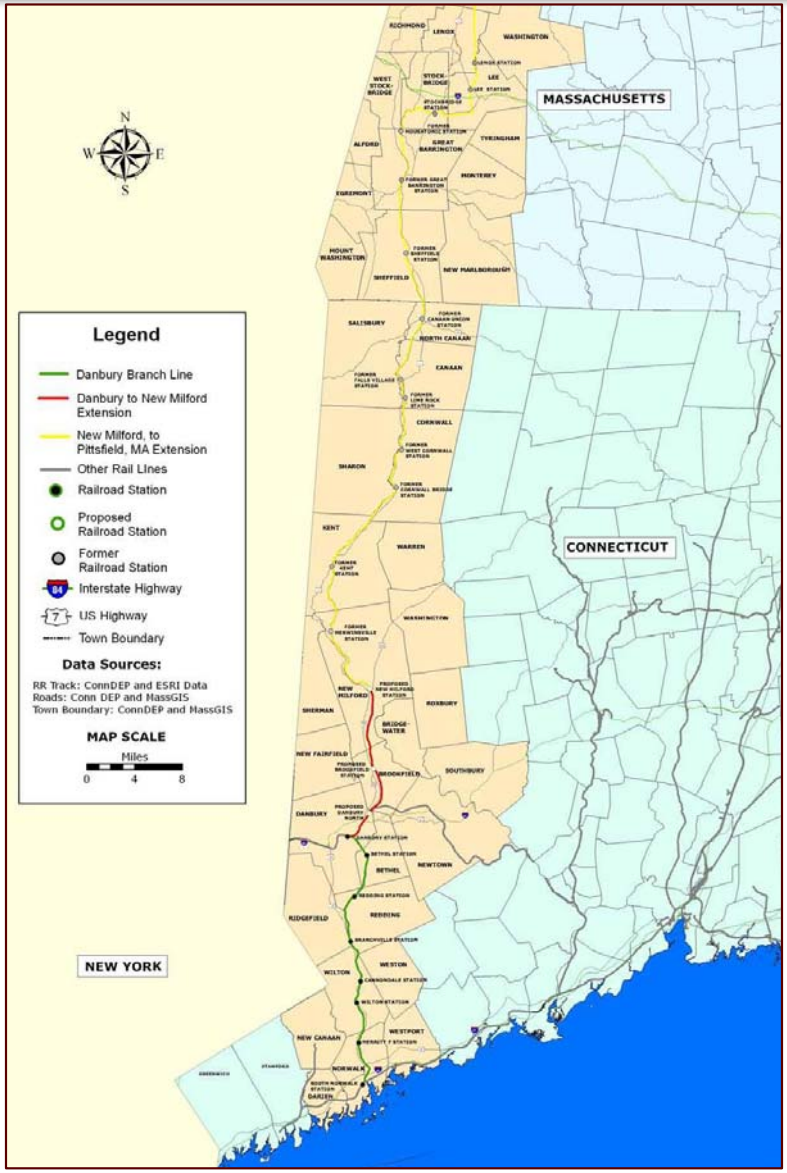
*Alternatives resulted from the 2006 Feasibility Study

Scope of Phase 2

	Est. Completion
• Task 1 Project Management	*Duration*
• Task 2 Coordination	*Duration*
• Task 3 Public Outreach	*Duration*
• Task 4 Mapping and Graphics	*Duration*
• Task 5 Environmental Data Collection and Evaluation	*Fall 2009*
• Task 6 Transportation Alternatives Development and Evaluation	*Fall 2009*
• Task 7 Conceptual Engineering and Evaluation	*Fall 2009*
• Task 8 DEIS	*Fall 2010*
• Task 9 FEIS	*Spring 2011*

Scope of Phase 2

- The following tasks were added during the Scoping Process:
  - Consideration for future rail passenger service to Massachusetts
  - Addition of an electrified option between Danbury and New Milford



Completed Phase 2 Activities

- Updated Study Website
- Task 2: Coordination Meetings
- Task 3: Scoping Meetings and Scoping Report
- Task 4: Base Mapping
- Task 5: Environmental Data Collection
- Task 6: Existing Transportation Systems Report
  - Rail Passenger Surveys
  - Baseline Train Performance Model
- Task 7: Existing Rail Infrastructure Report

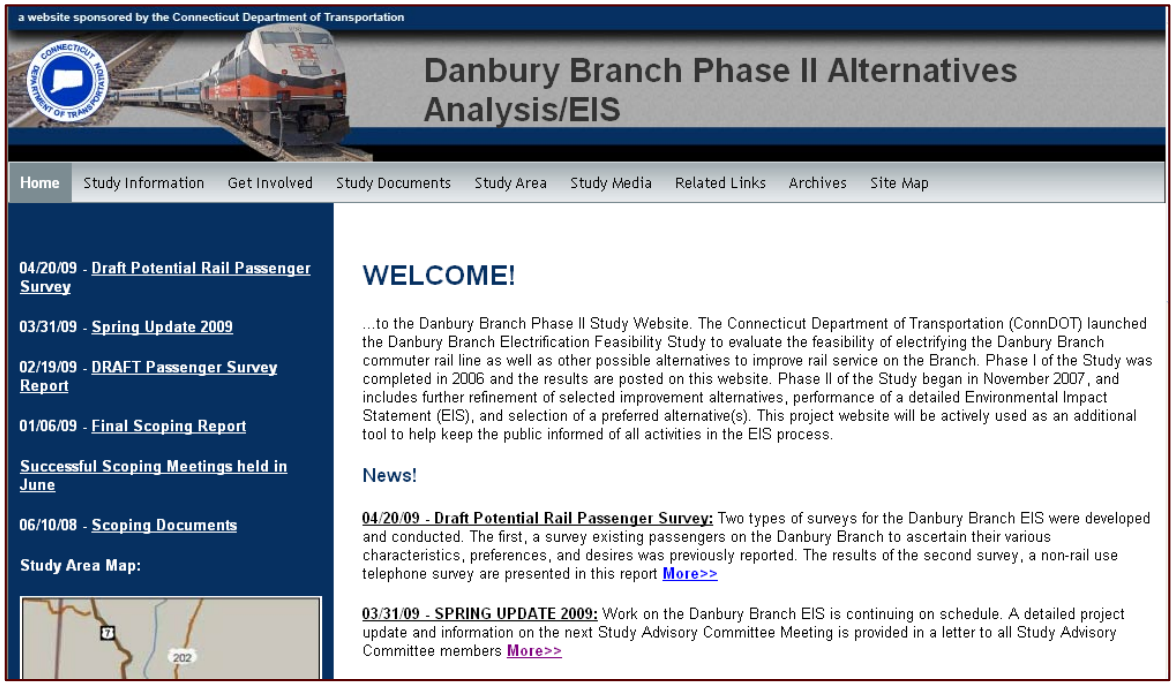
Updated Study Website

Recently Added

Phase 2 Documents

Coming Soon

Public Comments Form



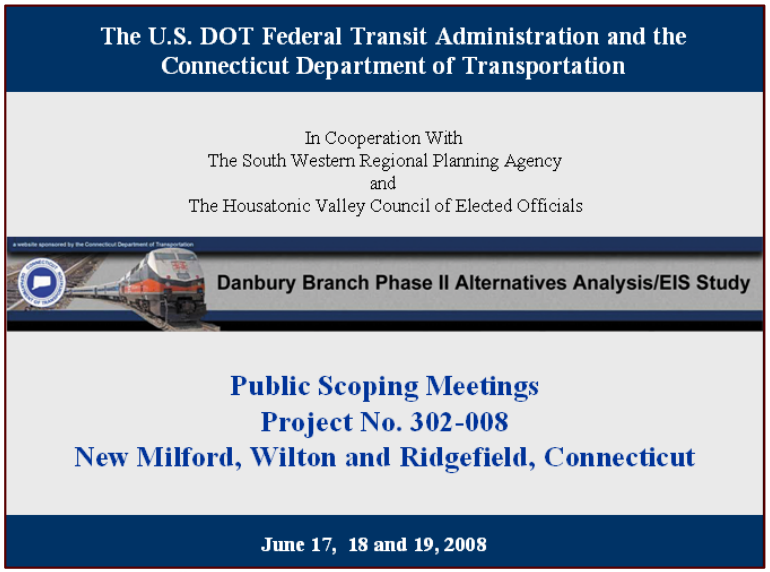
http://www.danburybranchstudy.com

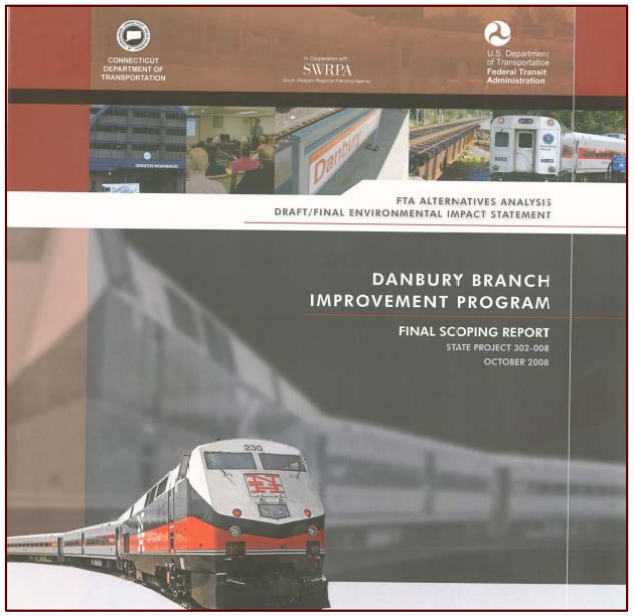
Task 2: Coordination Meetings

- To date there have been more than 40 meetings with:
  - Railroads
  - State and Federal Officials
  - Representatives from the 10 municipalities in the corridor
  - Regional Planning Agencies
  - Transit Districts
  - Other Stakeholders
- Coordination with these groups is ongoing.
- There will be a total of approximately 60 coordination meetings during this study.

Task 3: Scoping Meetings and Scoping Report

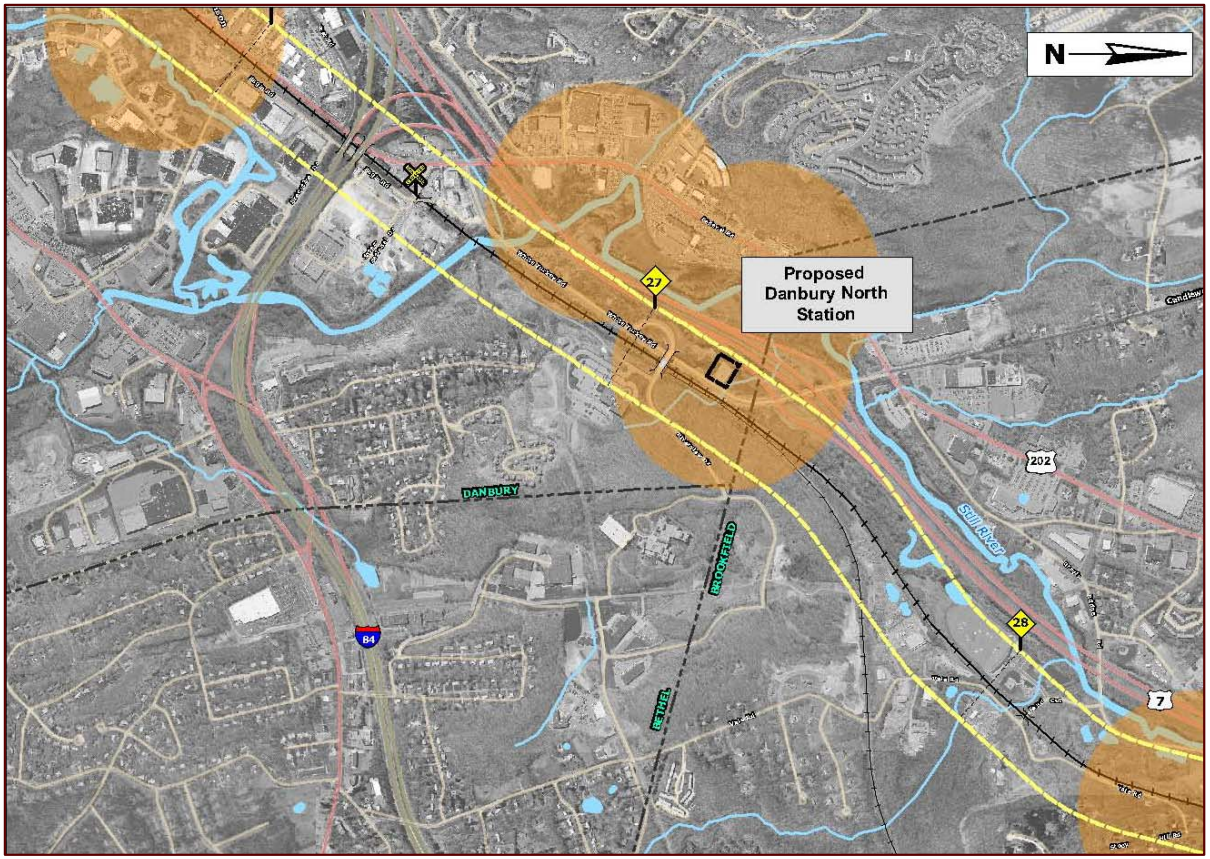
- Three Public Scoping Meetings: June 17-19, 2008
- Agency Scoping Meeting: June 17, 2008
- Scoping Report: October 2008





Task 4: Base Mapping

- Environmental Data
- GIS Format
- 14 Sheets
- 1″=1,000′



Endangered Species Base Map

Task 4: Conceptual Improvement Layouts

- Aerial View
- CADD Format
- 82 Sheets
- 1″=200′

Task 5: Environmental Data Collection

- Baseline information on existing conditions (resources and constraints) within 500’ on each side of track.
- Used for a screening level evaluation of biological, physical, and community resources.
- 18 Technical Memoranda
- 4 Tech Memos are in progress:

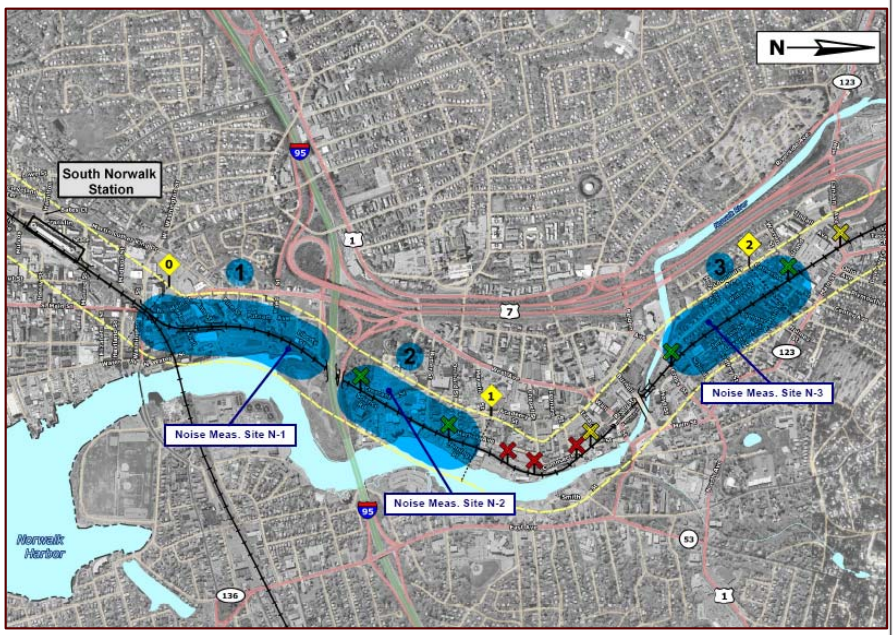
Noise & Vibration	Wetlands
Biological Diversity	Hazardous Contamination

5.2 Topography, Geology, and Soils

- Elevation varies from 6 feet to 475 feet above sea level
  - Highest Point: Redding, between Mileposts 14 and 15
  - Lowest Point: Norwalk, around Milepost 0
- Geology and Soils
  - Various Surface and Bedrock Materials
  - Predominantly loamy soil, rockier in urban areas

5.2.1.1 Noise and Vibration

- Existing noise and vibration levels have been measured:
  - Norwalk, 4 locations
  - Wilton, 3 locations
  - Danbury, 2 locations
  - Brookfield, 2 locations
  - New Milford, 2 locations
  - Redding, 1 location
  - Bethel, 1 location
  - Redding/Wilton/Ridgefield, 1 location



*The writing for this section is in progress.

5.2.1.2 Air Quality

- Corridor mostly in attainment with air quality standards
- Non-Attainment Areas
  - Danbury
  - Norwalk

5.2.1.3 Energy

- The majority of the energy used by the Danbury Branch Line corresponds to the fuel consumed by train operations.
- Weekly Diesel Fuel Consumption: 9,372 gallons
- A small proportion of energy corresponds to electricity used at the eight passenger stations and for signal, communications, and radio systems.

5.2.3 Threatened and Endangered Species

- Habitats of state-listed animal and/or plant species:
  - Brookfield, Danbury, Redding, and New Milford
- New Milford has the most state-listed species:
  - 4 Plant Species
  - 7 Animal Species

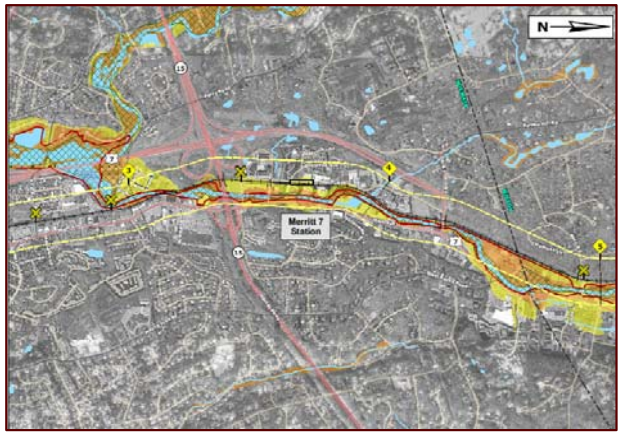
Sharp-Shinned Hawk

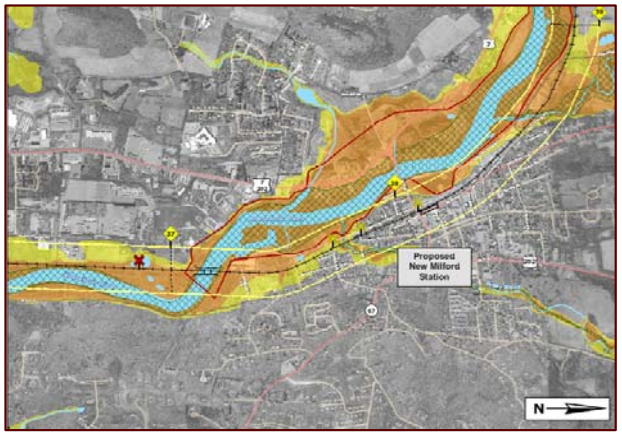
Violet Wood Sorrel

Bog Turtle

5.2.5 Floodplains and Floodways

- 31 miles of track lie over or adjacent to floodplains.
- In most places, tracks are elevated above flood elevations and cross over floodways and floodplains on bridges.
- Flooding generally does not interrupt rail service.





5.2.6 Historic Resources

- Survey done in coordination with Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- Historic resources are an important part of the character of a community.
- Resources include:
  - Buildings
  - Structures
  - Entire Properties
  - Objects
  - Districts
  - Railroads

Housatonic Railroad Station, New Milford

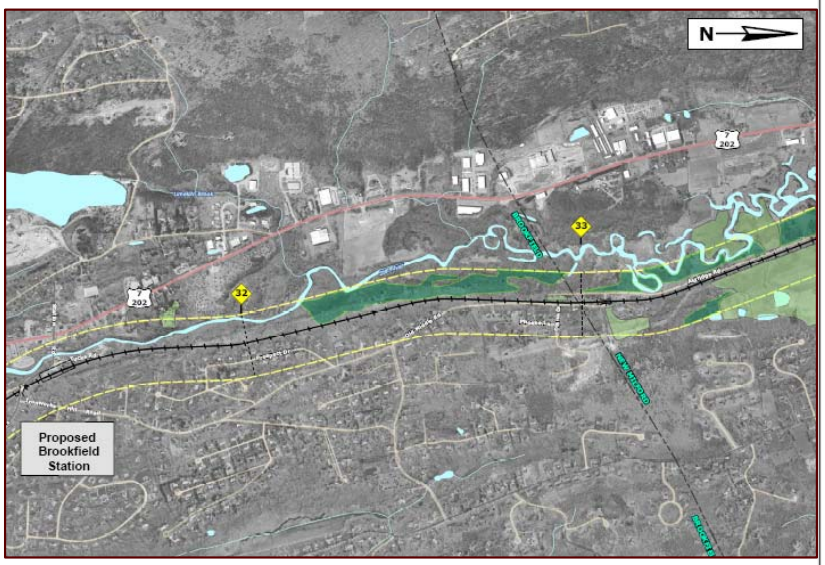
5.2.7 Archeological Resources

- Assessment of archeological sensitivity levels
- Evaluation of existing condition of previously recorded resources
- Identification of previously undocumented historic sites in Brookfield, Danbury and New Milford:
  - 6 railroad bridges
  - 3 structural foundations
  - 4 artifact clusters
  - 11 historic structural areas

Newly Documented Mill Foundation in Brookfield

5.2.8 Prime Farmland and Active Farmland

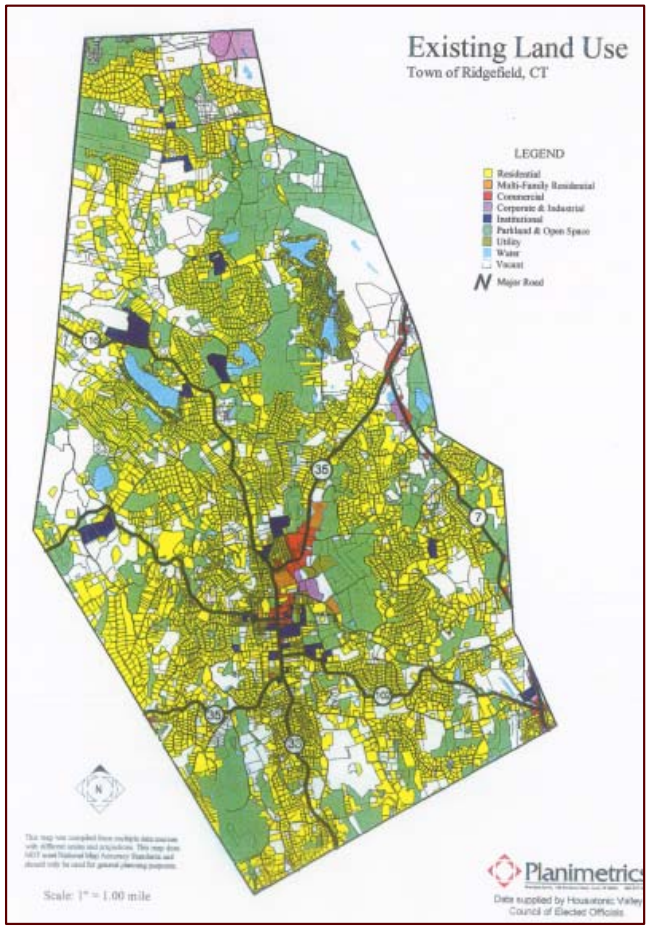
- Prime Farmland:
  - 37 Parcels, from .4 to 23 acres
  - 20 Parcels in New Milford
  - Largest Parcel in Brookfield
  - No Parcels in Norwalk or Danbury



- Active Farmland:
  - Bethel, Brookfield, and New Milford

5.2.9 Land Use

- Example Identified Land Uses:
  - Residential Development
  - Industrial Development
  - Municipal/Government Lands
  - Agricultural Land
  - Undeveloped Land
  - Parks and Open Space
  - Planned Future Development
  - Commercial Development
  - Institutional Development



- Data Sources*
  - Zoning Maps
  - Plans of Conservation and Development

*There were no GIS Databases available for most towns.

5.2.11 Surface and Groundwater Resources

- Surface Water
  - Examples: rivers, lakes, reservoirs, ponds, and estuaries
- Groundwater
  - Originates from rain and melting snow/ice
  - Is the source of water for springs, aquifers, and wells

Norwalk River

Factory Pond, Redding

5.2.12 Public Recreational Lands

- 4(f) Lands: Publically owned open space or refuges
  - Must be protected from disturbance by DOT projects
  - Numerous locations in corridor
- 6(f) Lands: Purchased or developed with funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act
  - Must be replaced if removed by development
  - Three locations in corridor:
    - Oyster Shell Park, Norwalk
    - Mathew's Park, Norwalk
    - Bogus Brook Park, Redding

Oyster Shell Park, Norwalk

5.2.13 Socioeconomics & Environmental Justice

- Environmental Justice calls for the evaluation of projects to see if there is a disproportionately high burden of adverse environmental impacts on under-represented groups
- Corridor has two relatively distinct socioeconomic sub-areas:
  - Norwalk to Danbury
    - Urban cores of economic activity
    - Surrounded by suburban areas
  - Danbury to New Milford
    - Relatively rural characteristics
    - Economic base in transition

5.2.14 Scenic Roads

- Identifies presence of and potential impact to scenic roads
- Within the study corridor:
  - 2 Town Scenic Roads
  - 1 National/State Scenic Highway

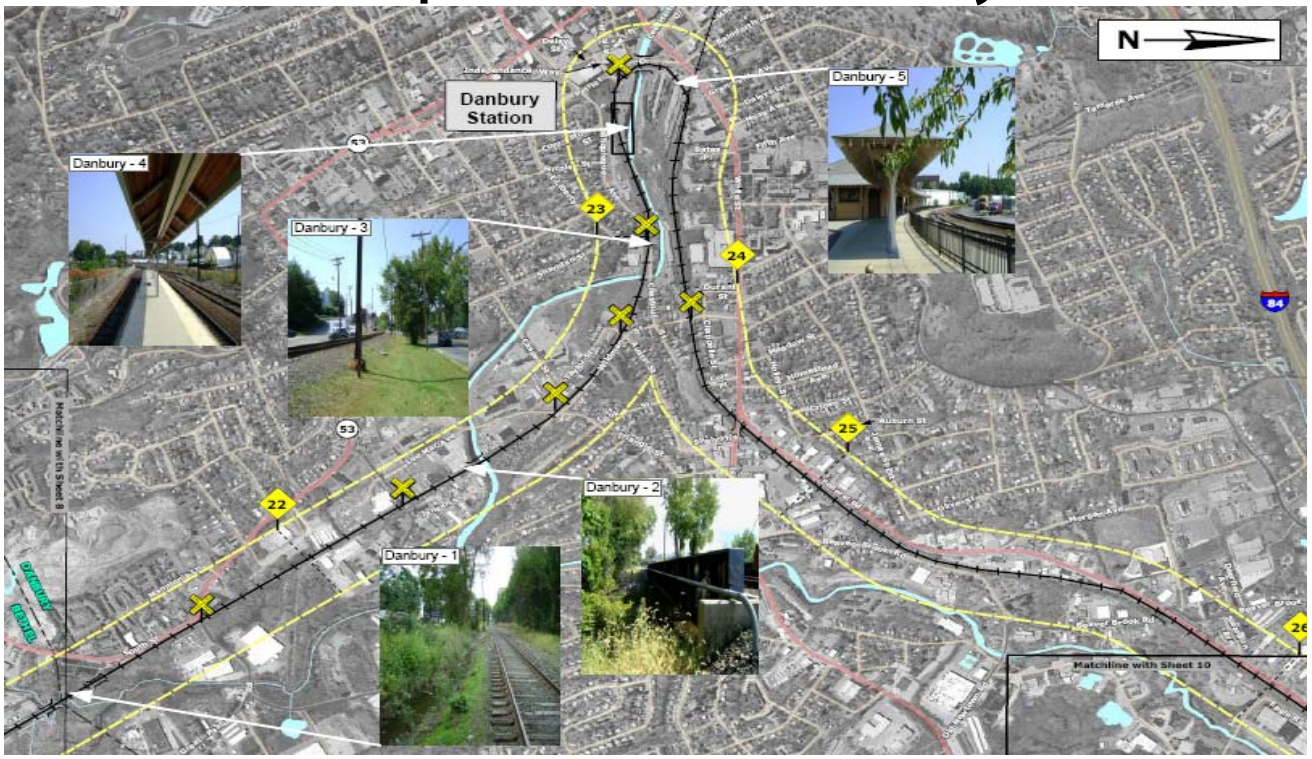
Seeley Road, Wilton

Merritt Parkway, Norwalk

Marchant Road, Redding

5.2.15 Visual Resources

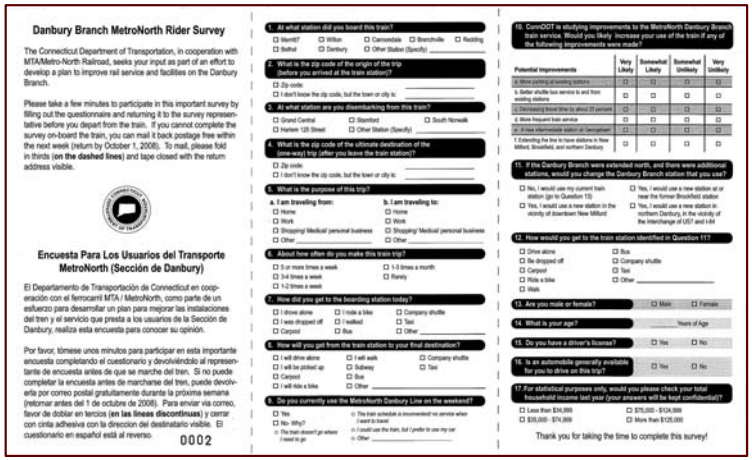
- Contribute to quality of life
- Can be natural or built elements
- Shape the aesthetic experiences of daily life



Visual Resources Map, Danbury

Task 6: Rail Passenger Surveys

- Rail Rider Survey
  - Five AM Peak Inbound Trains
  - Wednesday, September 28, 2008
  - 1,100 Surveys Distributed
  - 872 Responses (79.3%)



Danbury Branch MetroNorth Rider Survey

The Connecticut Department of Transportation, in cooperation with MTA/Metro-North Railroad, seeks your input as part of an effort to develop a plan to improve rail service and facilities on the Danbury Branch.

Please take a few minutes to participate in this important survey by filling out the questionnaire and returning it to the survey representative before you depart from the train. If you cannot complete the survey on-board the train, you can mail it back postage free within the next week (return by October 1, 2008). To mail, please fold in thirds (**on the dashed lines**) and tape closed with the return address visible.

Encuesta Para Los Usuarios del Transporte MetroNorth (Sección de Danbury)

El Departamento de Transportación de Connecticut en cooperación con el ferrocarril MTA / MetroNorth, como parte de un esfuerzo para desarrollar un plan para mejorar las instalaciones del tren y el servicio que presta a los usuarios de la Sección de Danbury, realiza esta encuesta para conocer su opinión.

Por favor, tómese unos minutos para participar en esta importante encuesta completando el cuestionario y devolviéndolo al representante de encuesta antes de que se marche del tren. Si no puede completar la encuesta antes de marcharse del tren, puede devolverla por correo postal gratuitamente durante la próxima semana (retornar antes del 1 de octubre de 2008). Para enviar via correo, favor de doblar en tercios (**en las lineas discontinuas**) y cerrar con cinta adhesiva con la direccion del destinatario visible. El cuestionario en español está al reverso.

0002

- Potential Rail Ride Survey
  - Telephone Survey
  - September 29-October 15, 2008
  - 400 Commuters Living in/near Study Corridor

Task 6: Rail Rider Survey – Results

- 48% of passengers board at Bethel or Danbury
- 90% of trips are work-related
- 74% of passengers ride five days a week
- 72% of passengers drive alone to the station
- Improvements that would encourage increased rail usage:
  - More Frequent Service (86% of respondents)
  - Decreased Travel Time by 20% (81% of respondents)

Task 6: Potential Rail Rider Survey – Results

- 86% of commuters drive alone to work
- The average commute is 29 minutes.
- 73% of commuters are aware of Metro-North service.
- Improvements that would encourage increased rail usage:
  - Lower Cost of Train Fares (37% of respondents)
  - Decreasing Travel Time by 20% (37% of respondents)

Task 6: Baseline Train Performance Model

- Computer model of the existing railroad, locomotive, and coaches between Norwalk and New Milford
  - Program: Railsim Version 7
  - Equipment Characteristic Information: Metro-North
  - Track Alignment Information: Metro-North and HRRC
- Used to evaluate the benefits (i.e. reduced travel time) of track improvements and electrification
- Model calculated trip times within four minutes of existing schedule

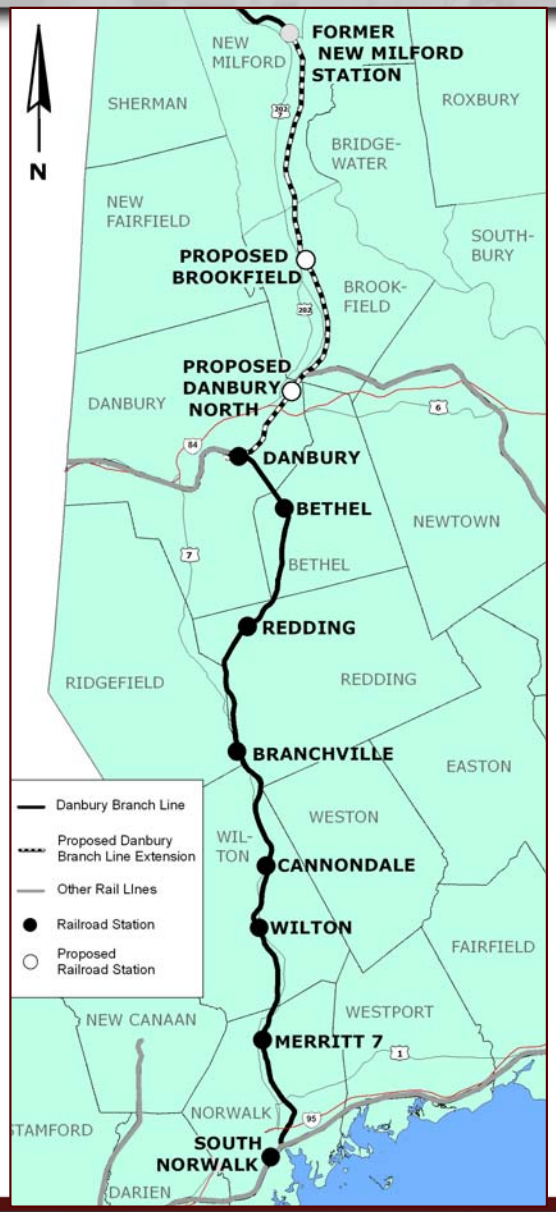
Task 7: Existing Rail Infrastructure Report

- Field Investigations
- Passenger Stations and Sidings
- Profiles and Grades
- Curvature, Superelevation, Underbalance & Track Speed
- Track Structure
- Horizontal & Vertical Clearances
- Overhead and Undergrade Bridges
- Railroad Highway Grade Crossings
- Railroad Signal System
- Traction Power: Substations and Catenary
- Drainage
- Utilities

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

- Alternative Station Sites
  - Route 15/Merritt 7 Vicinity: 3 Sites
  - North Danbury: 2 Sites
  - Brookfield: 2 Sites
  - New Milford: 5 Sites
- Existing Stations
  - Norwalk to Danbury
- Transit Oriented Development Opportunities

Station Locations



Merritt 7 Site 1: Glover/Oakwood Avenues

-Expand to Enhance Multimodal Operations

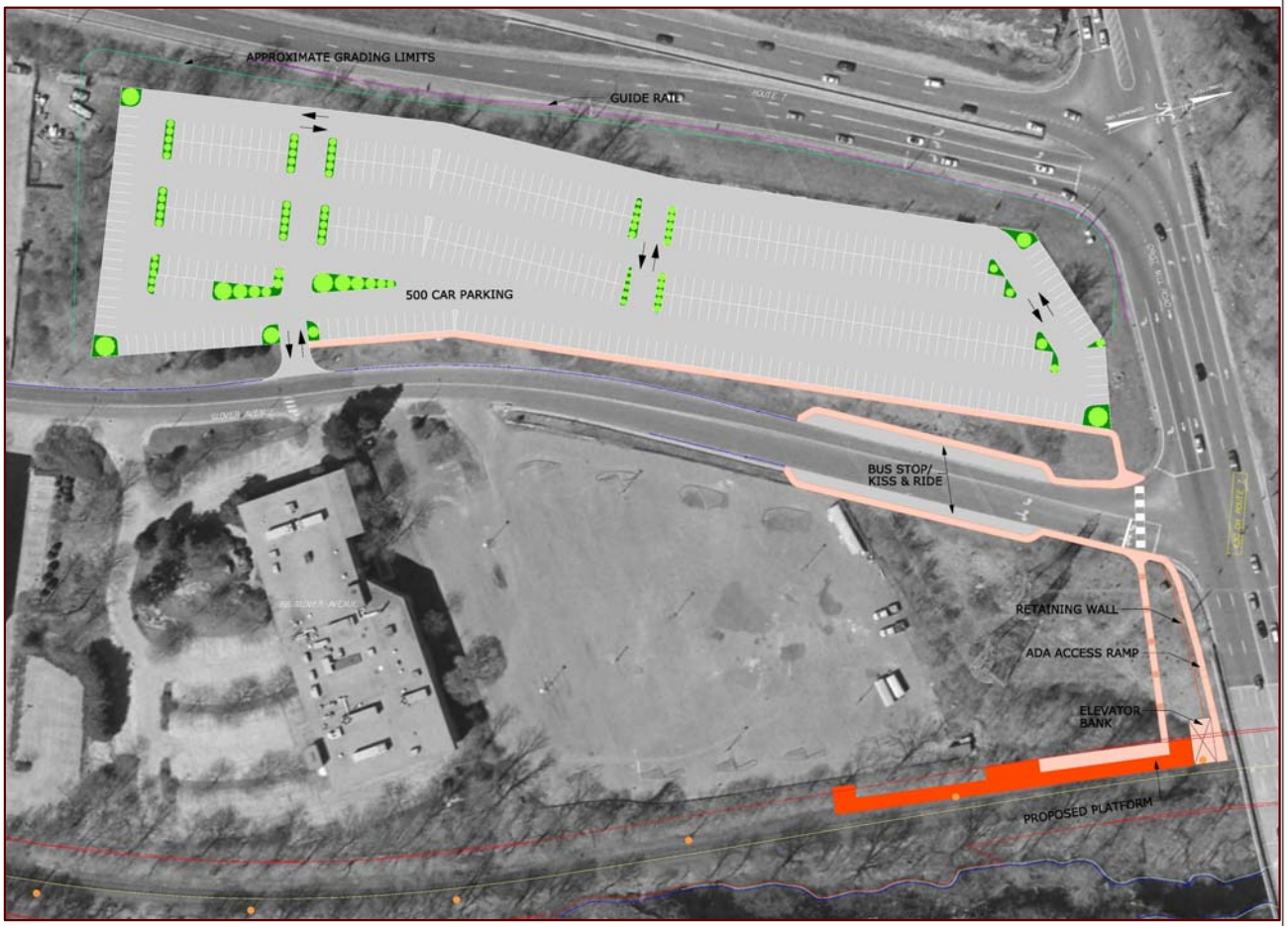
-Unsuitable Site: Existing Detention Basin

-Parking Garage

-High Level Platform

Merritt 7 Site 2: Glover Avenue (West)

- Surface Parking
- Relocated Station
- State-owned Land
- Adjacent to Rte 7
- Elevation Differential
- Distance to Tracks
- Poor Multimodal Operation



Merritt 7 Site 3a: Glover Avenue (East)

- Shared Garage
- Relocated Station
- New Site with High Level Platform
- Near Route 7
- Provision for Multimodal Operations

Merritt 7 Site 3b: Glover Avenue (East)

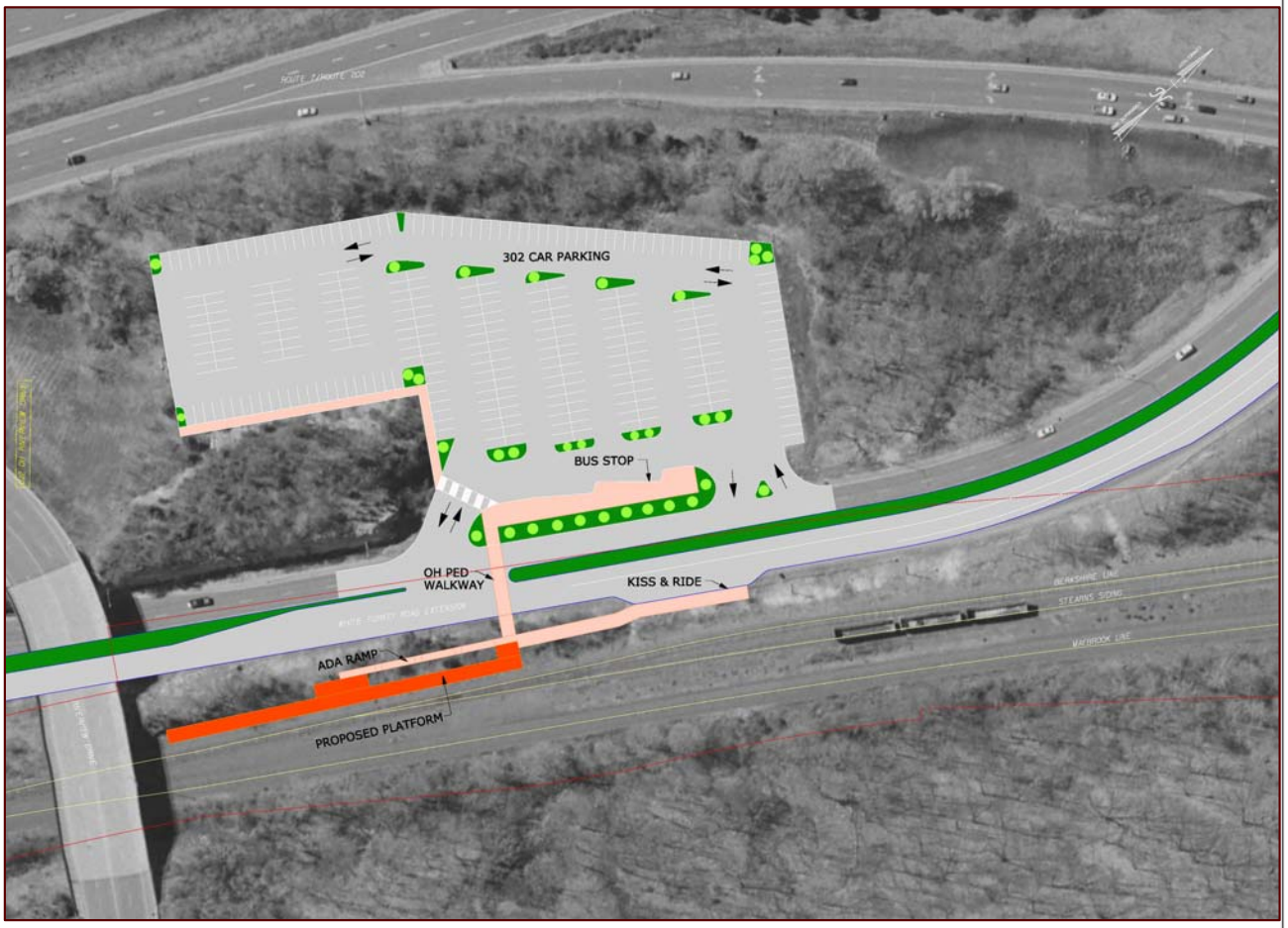
- Smaller Garage Footprint
- More levels needed to get desired number of spaces

North Danbury Site 1: Riverview Drive

- Existing Development
- Track Work Required
- All Station Activities on Site

North Danbury Site 2: White Turkey Road Ext.

- Existing Park-and-Ride Lot
- Near Route 7 Interchange
- Isolated Location
- Separation from Railroad
- White Turkey Road Traffic



Brookfield Site 1: Pocono Road

- Near Municipal Buildings
- All Station Activities on Site
- Access to Route 7

Brookfield Site 2: Whisconier Road (Route 25)

- Former Railroad Station
- Congested Area
- Historic Buildings
- Limited Transit Access
- Track on Curve

New Milford Site 1: Pickett District Road

- Industrial Area
- Near Route 7
- Surface Parking
- Transit Accommodated
- May Require Track Reconfiguration

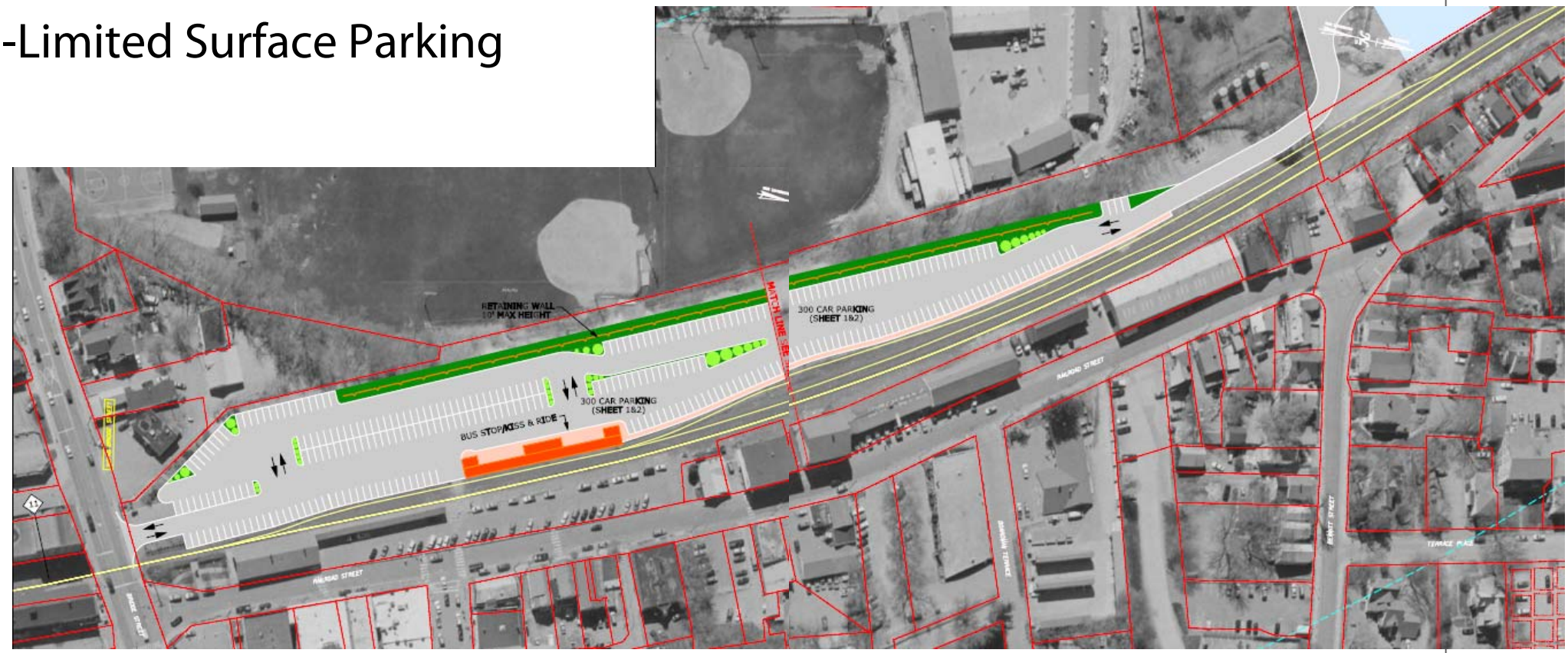
New Milford Site 2: Anderson Avenue

- Surface Parking
- Transit Accommodated
- Existing Business
- Borders Residential Area

New Milford Site 3: Bridge/Railroad Streets

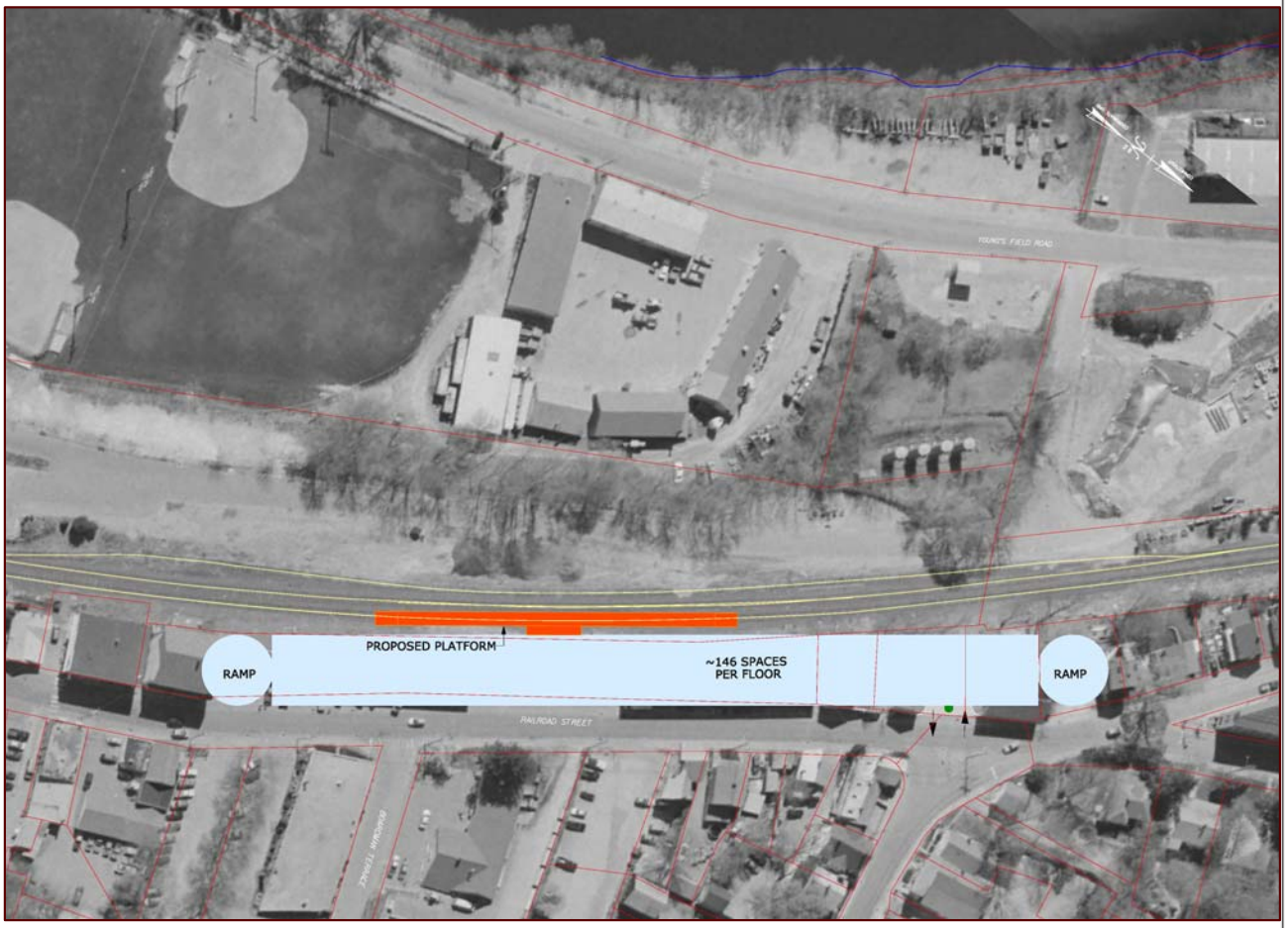
-Near Downtown

-Limited Surface Parking



New Milford Site 4a: Lumber Yard

- Borders Downtown
- Limited Garage Capacity
- No Transit
- Track Reconfiguration



New Milford Site 4b: Lumber Yard

- Borders Downtown
- Bus
- Kiss & Ride
- Limited Garage Capacity

New Milford Site 5: Public Works Site

- Room for Garage
- Bus
- Kiss & Ride
- Across Tracks from Downtown

Norwalk to Danbury

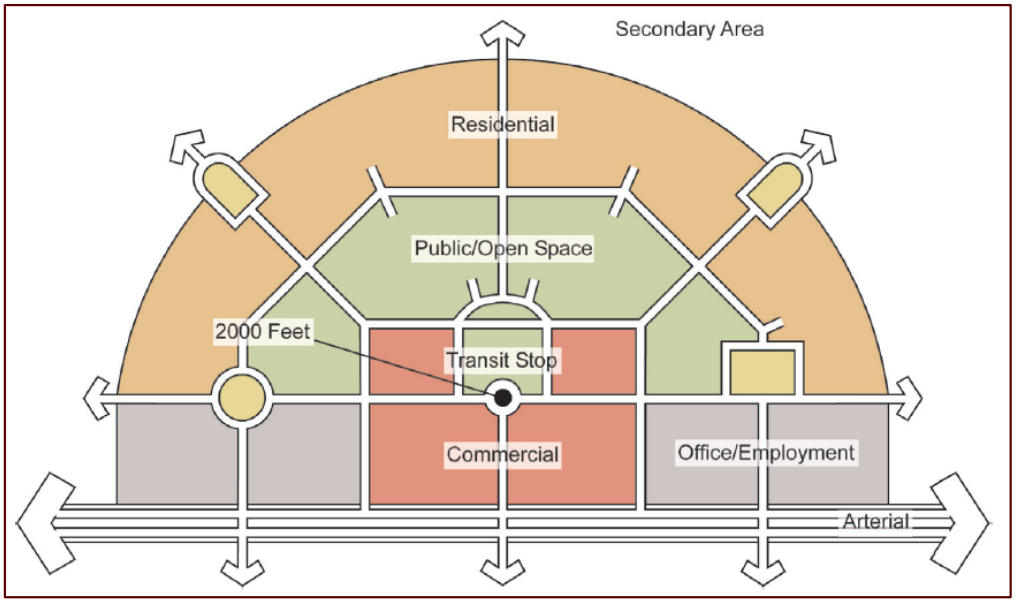
- It is expected that ridership along the entire Danbury Branch will increase.
- Some improvements being considered for the stations between Norwalk and Danbury include:
  - Increased Parking
  - Transit Services
  - Passenger Information
  - Lengthened Platforms
  - Pedestrian and Bicyclist Facilities

Wilton Station

Transit Oriented Development

- Definition: The creation of compact, walkable communities centered around high quality transit systems. This makes it possible to live a higher quality of life without dependence on cars.

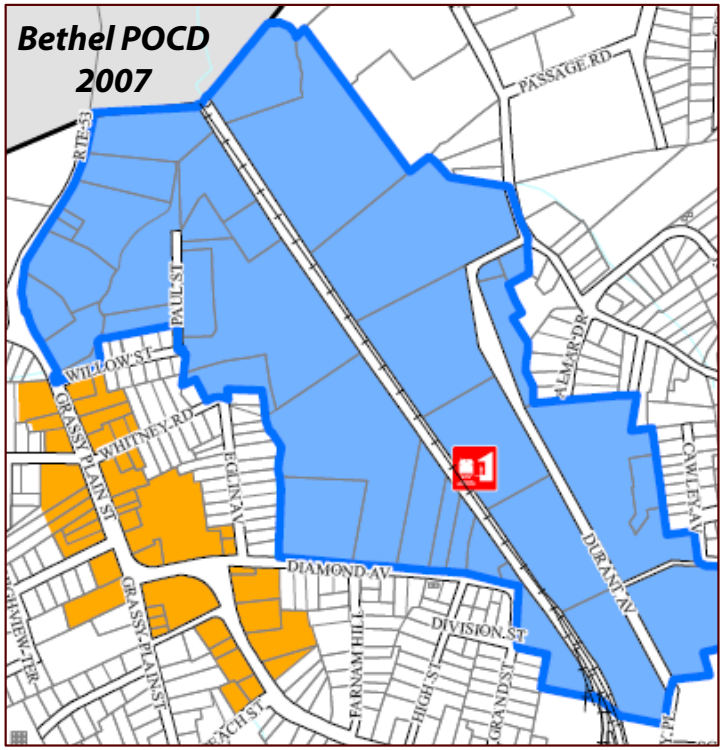
- Goals of Study:
  - Coordinate existing TOD efforts in the study Corridor
  - Evaluate TOD opportunities in the Corridor in two phases



Calthorpe, 1993

Transit Oriented Development

- First phase, Summer 2009 :
  - Identify opportunities and constraints related to TOD in potential station areas
  - Document status of station area planning efforts by local municipalities
  - Identify potential new development adjacent to the corridor and station areas



Proposed TOD (blue) and Transit Supported Areas (orange) around train station in Bethel

Transit Oriented Development

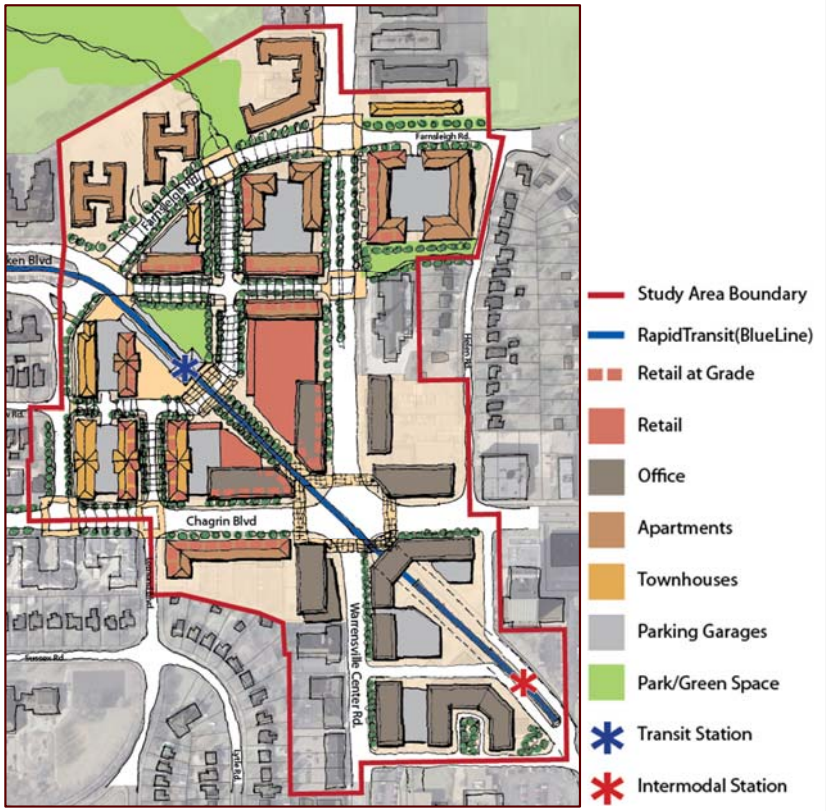
- Second phase, Fall 2009 :
  - Identify the next steps required to move station area planning at high potential stations further in the development process
  - Identify resources at the local level or elsewhere that will assist in furthering the development process as needed.

- It is expected that local jurisdictions will contribute staff and financial resources in partnership with ConnDOT as part of this process.

TOD Concept Drawing for White Plains, NY (2008)

Transit Oriented Development

- Next steps in this process may include:
  - Conceptual Planning
  - Zoning and land use regulation changes to promote TOD
  - Identification of private sector partners
  - Infrastructure Improvements
  - Financial or regulatory incentive tools for towns to encourage TOD



TOD Plan for Shaker Heights, Ohio (2008)

NEXT STEPS

- Alternatives Development
- Alternatives Evaluation
- Second Study Advisory Committee Meeting
- Pre-DEIS Public Meeting

Alternatives Development

- No Build Alternative
- Transportation System Management (TSM): Shuttle Bus Service, Enhanced AM Reverse, Metro-North 2030 Plan
- South Norwalk to Danbury Improvements, including electrification, addition of passing sidings, and minor track realignment
- Extension of Diesel and/or Electric Passenger Service from Danbury to New Milford with new stations and track upgrade
- Partial Electrification from South Norwalk to Merritt 7 with feeder bus and/or rail service to complement the new service

Alternatives Evaluation

Example Criteria:

- Operational Impact
- Fleet Impact
- Existing Roadway Conditions
- Planned Roadway Improvements
- Existing Transit Services
- Bicycle & Pedestrian Access
- Constructability
- Local Acceptance
- Existing Rail Facilities & Operations
- Travel Demand: 2015, 2025, 2035
- Environmental Impact
- Time Savings
- Existing Land Use
- Capital Cost
- Operational Cost
- TOD Potential
- ROW Requirements
- Potential for Transit

Alternatives Evaluation

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Criteria:

- Mobility Improvement
- Environmental Benefits
- Operating Efficiencies
- Cost Effectiveness
- Transit Supportive Land Use Policies and Future Patterns

Upcoming Meetings

- SAC Meeting #2: Fall 2009/Winter 2010
  - Review Alternatives
- Pre-DEIS Public Meeting: Winter 2010
- SAC Meeting #3: Pre-DEIS, Spring/Summer 2010
- DEIS Public Hearing: Summer/Fall 2010
- SAC Meeting #4: Pre-FEIS, Fall 2010
  - Review DEIS Comments and Responses

DISCUSSION

Questions/Comments?