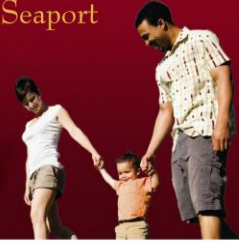




# Mystic Mobility Study



## MEETING MINUTES

**Client:** Stonington and Groton, CT  
**Project Name:** Multi-Modal Transportation Study for the Mystic Seaport Area  
**Location:** Mystic, Connecticut  
**Project Number:** 36938369  
**Prepared by:** Sam Eisenbeiser (FHI)  
**Issue Date:** February 23, 2011

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## Study Advisory Committee Meeting #5

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**MEETING DATE:** February 23, 2011  
**TIME:** 7:00 PM  
**LOCATION:** Hoxie Fire House, Mystic, CT

### ATTENDEES:

Name	Affiliation	E-mail Address
Stephen Gazillo	URS Corporation	<a href="mailto:Stephen_Gazillo@urscorp.com">Stephen_Gazillo@urscorp.com</a>
Stephen Mitchell	URS Corporation	<a href="mailto:Stephen_Mitchell@urscorp.com">Stephen_Mitchell@urscorp.com</a>
Jenna Nichols	URS Corporation	<a href="mailto:jenna_nichols@urscorp.com">jenna_nichols@urscorp.com</a>
Sam Eisenbeiser	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.	<a href="mailto:skeisenbeiser@fhiplan.com">skeisenbeiser@fhiplan.com</a>
Jim Butler	Southeastern CT Council of Governments (SCCOG)	<a href="mailto:jbutler@seccog.org">jbutler@seccog.org</a>
Peter Glankoff	Sea Research/Mystic Aquarium	<a href="mailto:pglankoff@searesearch.org">pglankoff@searesearch.org</a>
Kevin Ng	Connecticut DOT – Traffic Engineering	<a href="mailto:yiun.g@ct.gov">yiun.g@ct.gov</a>
Bob O’Neill	Town of Groton – Zoning Commission	<a href="mailto:oldbob59@aol.com">oldbob59@aol.com</a>
Ken Wilson	Mystic Seaport	<a href="mailto:ken.wilson@mysticseaport.org">ken.wilson@mysticseaport.org</a>
Mark Jalbert	Electric Boat	<a href="mailto:mark.jalbert.ctr@navy.mil">mark.jalbert.ctr@navy.mil</a>
Peter Roper	Mystic Co-op Task Group	<a href="mailto:ptroper@gmail.com">ptroper@gmail.com</a>
Brian Kent	Kent & Frost	<a href="mailto:bkent@kentfrost.com">bkent@kentfrost.com</a>
Steve White	Mystic Seaport	<a href="mailto:steve.white@mysticseaport.org">steve.white@mysticseaport.org</a>
Jim Giblin	Mystic Seaport	<a href="mailto:jngiblin@sbcglobal.net">jngiblin@sbcglobal.net</a>

The meeting began at 7:00 PM. Steve Mitchell discussed the purpose of the meeting and handed out a printout of the presentation slides and the Summary of Mystic Trolley Service Technical Memorandum. Then he began discussing the agenda items and the slides. The attendees asked questions as the presentation proceeded and there was also a general discussion period at the end.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

- Mark Jalbert noted that the proposed route doesn’t seem like it will be possible to have 20 minute headways. He wondered if someone could rent a bus and time it out during the peak season.

- Steve Mitchell stated that it could be done, and that the estimates were determined based on driving the route during an afternoon peak hour (not in a bus, in a mini-van) but not during the peak season and factoring in a certain trip time percentage increase to account for the increased congestion during the peak season.
- Bob O’Neill asked: What is the typical capacity of these vehicles? Is it enough to handle the usual group size that arrives all together via a tour bus?
  - Steve Mitchell says more vehicles could be allocated if we knew a large group of visitors were coming all at once.
- Mark Jalbert asked about the earlier idea of a single large transportation center with a central parking lot and a boat to shuttle people from this location up near the interchange down to the Downtown, 100 people at a time.
  - Steve Mitchell says a similar idea was mentioned a while ago and in general it is not cost effective to use water transportation in that way.
- Steve Mitchell indicated that it will cost around \$350,000 to operate the shuttle system for one year based on the assumptions stated in the technical memorandum.
  - Mark Jalbert asked why the earlier systems failed. Steve Mitchell indicated that in the past the systems had horrible headways and poor service, so the service was not as attractive as driving, and didn’t provide the necessary convenience to potential users. In addition, the fares were expensive. Ridership then disappeared because headways were so bad and trip length was extremely long; in addition, funding wasn’t secured, so, ultimately, there was no way to pay for continuing service. Lastly, there was no cohesive branding or “selling” of the service as a reasonable alternative to driving.
  - The recommendation is to eliminate fares to increase ridership
- Bob O’Neill noted that SEAT doesn’t have the mechanism to get funding for this initiative
- Jim Butler noted that the nine member SEAT Towns contribute to SEAT for service
- Jim Butler noted that the service could be operated by a private contractor such as the Chamber of Commerce or Mystic Businesses
- Mark Jalbert asked if operators of comparable transit systems were consulted. Steve Gazillo noted that thorough research was conducted by Jim Wensley (from Transystems), including using the National Transit Database.
- Steve Mitchell noted that for the success of the service, there need to be disincentives for using the car, primarily. This could include making parking hard to find and no longer free of charge.
  - Parking revenue can be used towards trolley system
- Bob O’Neill noted that New London has imposed 2-hour parking limits which are unpopular with local businesses
  - Jim Butler noted that New London also has parking garages people can use for long term parking
  - Brian Kent noted that Mystic Arts Center parking lot charges for parking so the idea is not without precedent
  - Bob O’Neill noted that the parking spaces in the Mystic Arts Center parking lot are routinely cited as available supply for local businesses, potentially resulting in double-counting and an ultimate underestimate of the actual parking demand in the area
- Mark Jalbert noted that government surplus vehicles may be available through the Defense Revitalization Management Office (DRMO)
- Mark Jalbert asked what the purchasing options would be
  - Steve Mitchell noted that there are many ways to defray the initial purchase cost, and that the more crucial issue is the ongoing operating cost

- Jim Butler noted that the area receives no support from the state of Connecticut for tourism
  - He indicated that the entities paying for the trolley system should be those who benefit from it, including the businesses and attractions
- Jim Butler noted that the most likely mechanism for a long term sustained source of funding for the trolley is to have a consensus from the majority of businesses that they want this and then create a Special Services District for tax revenue
  - He also noted that few years ago there was a regional transportation study conducted, including participation from the Casinos and an economist developed a projection as to how much money a bus system would generate
  - The study indicated that a trolley would increase tourism
- Peter Glankoff wanted to know how to find out what the ROI (return on investment) would be; the business owners would need to see some estimated ROI values to feel comfortable with investing in a trolley system
- There was general discussion that there is an overall a decrease in attendance at the Aquarium and the Seaport and that these facilities would need to rebuild the attendance to make this trolley system successful.
- Steve Gazillo noted that a comprehensive plan for economic development for the region is needed to realize a return on this type of investment, and that a trolley system alone will not increase tourism traffic, but it could play a part in an overall plan
- Bob O'Neill asked if the proposed street improvements were still a possibility, and the URS team noted that they remain part of the overall recommendations
- Steve Gazillo asked if tour groups visit the Mystic attractions. It was noted that tour groups are popular in the Fall but only at Mystic Seaport – only the Seaport actively markets to tour groups
- The question was asked: Shouldn't URS be gaining the community consensus and a decision from the AC stakeholders to move forward with a way to secure the earmarked funds?
  - The URS team noted the local match needed to get full earmark amount is approximately \$233,000, and that gaining community consensus for the local match is beyond the scope of this project
- It was noted that the government is looking favorably at public/private partnerships, so if the major attractions make monetary contributions, it would provide an incentive for the Town to meet the 20% local match
- Brian Kent asked if the earmarked funds could be taken away if the local match is not made
  - The URS team noted that there is no guarantee that the earmarked funds will be available indefinitely, especially once the 5-year term of the SAFETEA-LU legislation expires
- There was general discussion about the value of the mobility hubs if the trolley system remains an uncertainty. Bob O'Neill noted that the hubs can and should be phased in as necessary. The URS team indicated that a number of the hubs are located at existing transportation interfaces so they provide value even before the trolley system is in service. Steve Mitchell indicated that a more precise cost estimate for the hubs will be included in the final report.
- Peter Glankoff noted that for a master parking plan to be effective, an agreement between Olde Mistick Village, Mystic Seaport, and Mystic Aquarium needs to be reached.
- Peter Roper noted that the local bike sharing program has been a success, and could the trolleys carry bikes on them? Steve Mitchell indicated that there are trolley vehicles that can carry bikes and that the mobility hubs are designed for bike storage as well.
- Mark Jalbert asked if all of the trolley stops involved pulling off the main roadway; Steve Mitchell noted that all but two of the stops include pull-offs.

- Peter Roper asked how many cars the trolley will get off of the road; Steve Mitchell noted that the consultant team was not tasked with estimating ridership.
- Steve White indicated that the trolley system calls for a large investment, but starting the trolley service is not necessarily the first step that needs to come out of this study
- Jim Giblin noted that he read the results of a pedestrian intercept study regarding tourist dwell times across the State that asked tourists/pedestrians how much money they spend and how much time they spend in places and the finding was that the typical visit duration was 3.5 hours. He went on to note that this type of behavior will not result in high trolley ridership since people will not typically visit more than one attraction in a day.
- Peter Glankoff noted that Mystic is lacking a vision for a model destination so the State needs a model. He went on to state that Mystic needs to attract repeat business in addition to the current small “22 mile” radius and that they want people to stay over the weekend or for a multiple night stay.
- Steve White asked: Can the Trolley become a site-seeing attraction too? Is that counter-productive or productive? Steve Mitchell says it is productive from the retail point of view since it gets people traveling past the stores and restaurants and they will tend to explore and spend money.
- Peter Roper noted that the Amtrak link to the trolley might help increase train travel to the area; he also noted that there are no hubs near the marinas.
  - Steve Mitchell responded that having the trolley travel to the marinas extended the routes of the trolleys in the past, increasing headways and leading to the eventual end of the service; he hoped that marina shuttles might be used to bridge the gap
- Mark Jalbert said that he went somewhere and there was an information screen on the inside of the bus showing area’s attractions; he suggested we have those on these trolleys.
- Peter Glankoff noted that today, Mystic doesn’t have a beginning, a middle, and an end and that the first sign that indicates that you are in Mystic off of Exit 90 is the Olde Mistick Village sign; there is nothing cohesive and welcoming from the Mystic community as a whole.
- The question was asked: Are there any dollars set aside for marketing in the trolley operations cost estimate provided?
  - Steve Mitchell responded, no, that will have to come from the community and attractions including it in their marketing of Mystic
  - Peter Glankoff responded that we realize that people don’t travel to a place to get a really great bus ride and that the seamless transit experience is an added benefit of the area; if the trolley is implemented, Mystic needs to advertise the fact that you don’t need to drive once you get here

**NEXT STEPS:**

- URS will post the technical memorandum regarding the trolley service to the website
- The next major event is the public meeting scheduled for Wed. March 2 at 7 PM at the Hoxie Fire House

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Signed: Sam Eisenbeiser

Sam Eisenbeiser, FHI