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"Its Cargo Is People": Repositioning Commuter Rail as Public Transit to Save the New York–New Haven Line, 1960–1990

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Senior Essay

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Abstract

This essay explores the creation of the Metro-North Railroad in 1983 as a public agency to provide commuter train services on the New York–New Haven Line. The essay begins by bringing out the central role commuter rail services played in the negotiations over the New Haven Railroad's bankruptcy in the 1960s. I argue that New Haven Line's near liquidation during the bankruptcy prompted advocacy from commuters, urban planners, and politicians that pushed back against the trend towards automobile-centric urban transportation planning. In the next section, I use the New Haven Line's subsequent operation in the 1970s under subsidy arrangements with another private railroad and a federally-run carrier to show that indirect subsidy did little to improve conditions since freight railroads—public or private—did not care about investing in commuter services, which did little to help their bottom line. Lastly, I argue that Metro-North succeeded in the 1980s at improving the railroad's services because it effected the long overdue separation of commuter services from freight and intercity trains, which allowed for greater local control, customer-first management, and renegotiation of subsidies and labor rules. I go on to conclude that, despite its successes, the New Haven Line's vital implication in interests ranging from the lives of individual commuters to the national economy has ironically hampered its progress as municipalities, the states of New York and Connecticut, and the federal government have failed to cooperate and adequately fund continued progress.

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Introduction

"I have always taken the position that the maintenance of essential commuter rail service is a governmental responsibility when private industry cannot perform this function. I now reiterate that belief," testified Robert Wagner, Mayor of New York City, to the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) in April 1965.[1] Wagner's statement accompanied those of New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and commuter representatives in a show of force against the bankrupt New York, New Haven, & Hartford Railroad (colloquially known as "the New Haven"). The railroad had applied to the ICC for permission to severely curtail commuter services along the New Haven Line in an effort to improve its finances. Governor Rockefeller had reminded the Commission the day before that "rail commutation in the New York metropolitan area is not a luxury but an absolute essential [*sic*] to the economic well-being of the City of New York, the nation's business and commercial capital, and to the surrounding suburban areas."[2]

Rockefeller and Wagner's testimonies and actions helped force the bankrupt railroad to temporarily keep the New Haven's commuter line afloat. But could they save the New Haven Line? Would "governmental responsibility" step in to aid commuters where private industry did not? The New Haven Line presents an ideal case study for America's big-city commuter railroads in the latter half of the twentieth century. Its story exposes the decline faced by these services in the hands of ailing private railroads that desperately wanted to exit the passenger

[1] Robert F. Wagner, "Testimony in Relation to Proposed Discontinuances and Changes of Passenger Train Service Operated to and from New York City" (Interstate Commerce Commission, April 29, 1965), Box 44, New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Collection, Archives & Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries ("NHRR Archive").
[2] Nelson A. Rockefeller, "Testimony in Relation to Proposed Discontinuances and Changes of Passenger Train Service Operated to and from New York City" (Interstate Commerce Commission, April 28, 1965), 2, Box 44, NHRR Archive.

business, and the ways in which the federal government and the states ultimately provided more direct subsidies to keep them alive. The eventual creation of Metro-North (a division of New York State's Metropolitan Transportation Authority) to run the New Haven Line represented a seizure of control both from the federal government, which had provided poor service running the line during the 1970s, and the private sector, which had sought to discontinue commuter service altogether and deferred maintenance to disastrous effect in the 1960s and before. Metro-North's joint service of two states has brought out the challenges of coordinating regional interests between states under American federalism.

American commuter rail is heavily under-studied. There are no books that focus on American commuter rail in the latter half of the 20th century. All the major railroads in the 1960s thought of themselves as freight carriers saddled with a government obligation to carry passengers, and railroad scholarship generally reflects this emphasis on freight. Even among works focused on passenger transportation, commuter rail often merits little more than a passing mention, as it carries neither the romance and tragedy of the decline of intercity trains nor the erstwhile urban relevance—even to tourists—and iconic status of better-known public transit systems like subways and buses. Commuter rail service was traditionally provided by many of the same railroads that ran intercity services, with the New Haven Railroad as a prime example. One of the achievements won in the creation of Metro-North and similar systems around the country was recognition of commuter rail's greater kinship with municipal public transit than with intercity travel, allowing it to receive higher levels of subsidy, share operations with other transit under a central commuter authority, and focus on the experiences and desires of riders without the threat of stripping back service in pursuit of profit.

In this paper, I will argue that the plight of the New Haven railroad and its thousands of daily passengers helped bring about a shift in mindset among policymakers and taxpayers about the nature and necessity of railroad commuting. Private railroads hamstrung by outmoded antitrust regulation sought to axe essential public services in a drive for financial gain. The real threat of canceled service prompted the public to take on the burden of operating commuter rail in the name of the benefits it provided the city as an alternative to destructive and wildly expensive automobile infrastructure and the unpalatable prospect of sitting in traffic. Nascent environmental concerns also played into the public's valuation of rail commutation, at first in the name of curbing pollution and then, in the 1970s, as an economical response to the energy crises. By creating the Metro-North, the states of New York and Connecticut acknowledged the reality that commuter rail service held much more in common with urban mass transportation like buses and subways than it did with freight trains and followed the example of the local public takeover of these services that had taken place across U.S. cities earlier in the 20th century. That the Metro-North has experienced such a dramatic turnaround reflects the motivation of local governments to keep up and improve essential public services like transportation for the larger benefits they provide for quality of life and the regional economy, even if commuter rail itself is not directly profitable.

The more than twenty-year process that led from the 1961 bankruptcy of the New Haven to the 1983 creation of the Metro-North proved excruciating for riders. The New Haven Line was passed first from the New Haven Railroad to Penn Central in a 1968 merger of northeastern railroads and then to Conrail, a federal carrier Congress created to take over from the bankrupt Penn Central in 1976. The New Haven and Penn Central deferred essential maintenance on passenger equipment, hoping both to save money and discourage ridership and to prove to the

Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) that these lines were unnecessary and eligible for termination.[3] Notices announcing that commuter service would be canceled entirely and imminently (pending court approval, which never came) were posted multiple times in stations along the line, forcing riders to plan alternate ways to get to and from Manhattan. In 1980, fewer than three quarters of trains were on time.[4] As such, the takeover of the Conrail commuter lines by the MTA was met with cautious optimism: a *New York Times* editorial to "welcome" the railroad mused that "having no freight division, it may be better able to remember that its cargo is people."[5]

The preservation of the New Haven Line aimed to preserve a way of life—and an economic lifeline. New York's density and economic prosperity had climbed steadily since the line first served wealthy suburban commuters in the 1800s. Many of Manhattan's professionals continued to live in Westchester and Fairfield Counties to raise families away from the bustle of the city. Though these families probably all owned private automobiles by the 1960s, commuters continued to rely on rail travel to bypass automobile traffic, make use of the ride to read a newspaper or catch up on work, and avoid the hassle and expense of parking in New York City. Academic and think tank studies from the 1960s repeatedly emphasized what was at stake in saving suburban rail transit: eliminating commuter trains would require constructing impossibly large expressways and new parking garages that would cost well more than subsidizing rail service. Additional automobile infrastructure would also be a blight on the city and the suburbs

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[3] William D. Middleton, "How Metro-North Did It: From Faltering to First Rate in a Decade," in *North American Commuter Rail 1994* (Pasadena, CA: Pentrex, 1994), 8.
[4] Christopher T. Baer, "A General Chronology of the Successors of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company and Their Historical Context, 1980–1989" (Pennsylvania Railroad Technical and Historical Society, April 2015), 1, http://www.prrths.com/newprr_files/Hagley/PRR1980.pdf.
[5] New York Times Editorial Board, "New Neighbors, New Management: Railroad Switch," *New York Times*, January 4, 1983.

and increase air pollution.[6] The ICC and state policymakers pushing subsidies for commuter rail would cite such regional planning thinking as they sought to establish the public interest in perpetuating commuter rail service alongside other urban mass transit. While private railroads sought to eliminate all passenger service in a perennial effort to turn a profit, the ICC and state subsidy efforts prevented the death of commuter rail on the New Haven Line.

Saving commuter rail was not a foregone conclusion. One needs only to look at the streetcar, an immensely popular form of public transportation in the early 20th century which was completely removed by local authorities across the country by the end of the 1960s. Automobile interests and many planners promoted diesel buses, which integrated more easily with car traffic on both urban streets and highways and were cheaper to maintain than streetcars and their tracks, which by that point seemed like relics of a bygone era.[7] Postwar low-density suburban housing, subsidized by the government, was designed with the automobile in mind, sprawling out in a manner difficult to serve with linear transit.[8] While New York's subway was guaranteed a future through public ownership under the stewardship of Mayor Fiorello La Guardia in 1940, privately-owned streetcar lines were left to founder as the United States embraced its automotive future.[9]

In the end, political inertia seems to have played a role in the continuance of the New Haven Line. Commuters were adamant about the necessity of train service, but New York and Connecticut never leaped at the opportunity to run it and took it over only when the Reagan

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[6] See, for example, Leonard Lund, "The Commuter Problem in the New York Area: A Consideration of Past Efforts and a Proposed Solution for the Present Problem" (New York University, 1962).

[7] Brian Ladd, *Autophobia: Love and Hate in the Automotive Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 132. It didn't help that private transit companies that ran streetcar lines were viewed as predatory land speculators, making individual automobile ownership seem liberating by comparison.

[8] Mark S. Foster, *From Streetcar to Superhighway: American City Planners and Urban Transportation, 1900-1940*, Technology and Urban Growth (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 178–9.

[9] Taras Grescoe, *Straphanger: Saving Our Cities and Ourselves from the Automobile* (New York: Times Books, 2012), 58.

administration mandated that the states relieve Conrail of its beleaguered commuter services. The MTA gained increasing control over the New Haven Line as it began to administer subsidies and coordinate operations in the 1970s. Though the gradual nature of the transition from private to public ownership beleaguered riders, it allowed the agency to gain experience with commuter rail operations such that the final handover in 1983 was relatively smooth.

In its first ten years, the Metro-North garnered respect for its improved on-time performance and equipment. Ridership also jumped 20% from the Conrail days by 1990.[10] By 2013, the railroad had fully doubled its ridership and received an international prize for railroad design.[11] I attribute this turnaround to the railroad's state control under the MTA, which brought customer-oriented, experienced management to the former Conrail lines. With the railroad no longer in private hands, New York and Connecticut were directly responsible for the quality of operations, and through Metro-North they collectively undertook a series of modernization efforts and innovative approaches to expanding service that would have been impossible to imagine under the freight railroads, which were not interested in investing capital in an operation that seemed hopelessly unprofitable.

Despite these strides, the New Haven Line's difficulties both before and after its takeover by Metro-North illuminate struggles with metropolitan regional transportation policy in the United States. The federal government has retained a hands-off approach to commuter rail since the Reagan Era despite its interstate nature and consequences for the national economy.[12] The New Haven Line's joint service to New York and Connecticut has resulted in a lack of funding

[10] "A New President For Metro-North," *The New York Times*, April 5, 1991, sec. N.Y. / Region, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/05/nyregion/metro-datelines-a-new-president-for-metro-north.html.
[11] MTA, "MTA Metro-North Railroad Turns 30 Today: From Worst to Best in Three Decades," January 1, 2013, http://www.mta.info/press-release/metro-north/mta-metro-north-railroad-turns-30-today.
[12] Federal interaction with Metro-North today mostly takes the form of conflicts between it and Amtrak over funding improvements and managing operations on the New Haven Line, with overlaps with Amtrak's marquee Northeast Corridor service between Washington, DC and Boston.

as policymakers in each state point to the other as underpaying. Although the railroad's operation centers on New York City, the city itself plays a minimal role in funding and operating the railroad. I place responsibility for Metro-North's web of insufficient subsidies on the collective action problem posed by American federalism. Metro-North's huge range of stakeholders ranging from the local to the federal has begotten perennial finger-pointing leading to stagnation. While the states' formation of a public agency to run the New Haven Line was a step in the right direction, the federal government and the states Metro-North serves have failed to provide unified policy towards and sufficient support for essential commuter rail service for one of our nation's largest metropolises.

The Death of the New Haven and the Birth of Penn Central

Eastern Railroads and the Commuter Problem

Railroad commuting, which allowed bankers, lawyers, and other upper- and upper-middle-class professionals to reside in the suburbs while working day jobs downtown, spurred the concurrent growth of Manhattan into a uniquely dense American economic nerve center and the development of affluent residential communities in Westchester and Fairfield Counties. In the 1960s, this way of life—which had close parallels in a few of the United States' largest cities—came under threat as the New Haven entered into bankruptcy, due in part to the losses it incurred providing commuter service.[13] While railroads such as the New Haven would cite the obligation of providing passenger services as a principal reason for their financial insolvency, the reality was that competition from new technologies challenged both the freight and passenger businesses in the prosperous postwar years. Furthermore, the New Haven and other railroads were fond of lumping commuter and intercity trains together in their cost accounting, a practice which belied the vast differences between the two and nearly brought the end of essential commuter rail service to New York as the New Haven sought to erase its passenger deficit.

While American railroads enjoyed heavy traffic during World War II, postwar investment in motor vehicle and aviation infrastructure threatened all forms of railroad business. During World War II, American railroads thrived. Passenger ridership soared due to gasoline restrictions, and freight use exploded with the intense demands of the industry. Heavy railroad utilization during the war took a heavy toll on railroad equipment and physical plant as

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[13] In the largest U.S. cities, a wide range of major railroads provided commuter service on their lines. For example, New York City was served by the New Haven Railroad from Connecticut, the New York Central Railroad from Westchester, the Long Island Railroad, and the Pennsylvania and Erie Lackawanna Railroads from New Jersey. Boston was served by the Boston and Maine Railroad from the north, the New York Central from the west, and the New Haven from the south. Philadelphia was served by the Pennsylvania and Reading railroads. Chicago was served by the Alton, Burlington Northern, Chicago and North Western, Illinois Central, Milwaukee, Norfolk and Western, and Rock Island railroads, among others.

maintenance was deferred until peacetime.[14] Unfortunately for the railroads, the postwar years brought a steady decline in both freight and passenger miles despite the United States' economic prosperity as millions of Americans with disposable incomes pursued the dream of car-dependent home ownership in auto-centric, sprawling suburbia. Long-distance passenger trains, once the pinnacle of domestic luxury travel, were gradually supplanted by increasingly safe, fast, and affordable (thanks to government subsidy) air traffic and automobile road trips.[15] Truckers simultaneously poached shipping from the railroads as states and the federal government built out the national road network. President Eisenhower's 1956 National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, which provided a 90% federal subsidy for states to build out a network of grade-separated, limited access highways ideal for high-speed automobile travel, accelerated the diversion of freight traffic to truckers (who now could boast delivery times comparable to the railroads, even over long distances) and intercity and commuter travel to private cars (which provided convenient, expedient door-to-door service).[16]

The railroads hit hardest by the changing economics of transportation were the eastern carriers. Western long-haul railroads like the Union Pacific benefitted from superior speed and lower cost achieved over long distances. They also carried mostly raw materials and foodstuffs that were well-suited to the heavy haul capacities of freight trains. Lastly, western and southern railroads could serve emerging markets in the Sun Belt.[17] Eastern railroads operated on a raw

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[14] Maury Klein, *Unfinished Business: The Railroad in American Life* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 160.
[15] Richard Saunders, *Merging Lines: American Railroads, 1900-1970* (DeKalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 106–8, provides a concise summary of the ways the government subsidized auto and air travel in the postwar years.
[16] Donald M. Itzkoff, *Off the Track: The Decline of the Intercity Passenger Train in the United States*, Contributions in Economics and Economic History 62 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 28–9; see also Ladd, *Autophobia*, 100.
[17] Robert B. Carson, *Main Line to Oblivion: The Disintegration of New York Railroads in the Twentieth Century*, National University Publications: Series in American Studies (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971), 151–2.

materials-in, finished goods-out model that was becoming increasingly outmoded as manufacturing declined in cities like New Haven after the war. Whatever freight service that was left for them to provide was highly susceptible to truck competition due to the shorter distances involved.

The New Haven was a symptomatic eastern railroad, and its high commuter volume prompted it to look past its declining freight revenues to blame passengers, and commuters in particular, for its financial woes. The New Haven and the Long Island Railroad carried the highest proportions of passenger to freight traffic in the nation, with a large volume of commuters. Commuters, so-called for the "commuted" prices they paid on their monthly tickets, were in some ways a particular financial drain for the railroad.[18] They concentrated heavy passenger traffic into approximately four hours of the day, requiring tight timetables and many trains to accommodate weekday rushes to and from the city. For the rest of the day, a large portion of the equipment and the people that ran it sat idle. Nevertheless, the railroads hired commuter conductors for full days of work, meaning that they were paid for eight hours, plus four of overtime, despite working on trains for just four.[19] Similarly, commuter trains either had to be stored in Grand Central Terminal, where storage capacity was extraordinarily expensive, or "deadheaded" (moved without customers) to a more spacious suburban yard. Thus the low

[18] The degree to which commuter trains were a financial drain was subject to a fair amount of debate. The railroads over-exaggerated the deficit incurred in providing the service, while some commuter rail advocates and policymakers went as far as to argue that commuter rail in fact posed no deficit whatsoever. See James C. Nelson, *Railroad Transportation and Public Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1959), 284–9, 309–13, for a discussion of how railroads and the ICC estimated the financial burden of passenger service given the many overlapping costs with freight service. In stark contrast to the New Haven's claims of heavy deficits incurred by commuter service, Governor Rockefeller argued in his 1965 court appearance that expert witnesses showed that those services "operated at or near the break even point" (Rockefeller, "Testimony in Relation to Proposed Discontinuances," 3).
[19] George W. Hilton, "The Decline of Railroad Commutation," *Business History Review* 36, no. 2 (1962): 174, https://doi.org/10.2307/3111454.

utilization of equipment, which represented a fixed capital cost for the railroad, contributed to a high expense ratio for operating commuter rail.[20]

Commuter rail was also subject to regulation by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), which had controlled rates and services for railroad freight since its establishment in 1887. Congress gave the ICC control over passenger services in 1958 to provide a mechanism for railroads to drop highly under-used and unprofitable branch lines, which local politicians had forced them to preserve. The ICC evaluated these abandonments on a case-by-case basis and granted them if they determined that they were "not required by public convenience or necessity and were therefore a burden on interstate commerce."[21] The ICC's rate controls meant that the New Haven and other suburban railroads could not easily raise fares on commuters. As a result, the financial deficit of operating commuter rail deepened.[22] By preventing large-scale service abandonments and fare hikes, the ICC's regulation constrained the railroads from streamlining their services in response to increased competition in the postwar era. As a result, the fiscal woes of Eastern railroads like the New Haven quickly multiplied, and they could do little to cut back in response. The ICC presciently treated commuter rail as a public service worthy of protection. But government, federal and local, had so far failed to provide accompanying public funds in recognition of the ICC's approach, which caused the railroads to under-invest in, and attempt to cancel, commuter rail service in pursuit of financial stability.

[20] J. W. Swanberg, *North American Commuter Rail 1994: Including a Detailed User's Guide for Every System in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. William D. Middleton (Pasadena, CA: Pentrex, 1994), 2.
[21] Saunders, *Merging Lines*, 245.
[22] Lawrence Grow, *On the 8:02: An Informal History of Commuting by Rail in America* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979), 17. Despite the perennial protestations of commuters over fares, the price per mile of commuter service actually fell from 2.5 cents at the beginning of the century to 1 cent in 1930. Grow reminds us that "whether it was known or not, even the broken-down service of the postwar period was a true bargain."

Planners' Responses to Commuter Deficits

Urban planners grappling with the implications of the automobile on urban transportation in the 1960s backed up the ICC's conviction that commuter rail was an essential regional service, which helped convince the governments of New York and Connecticut to take steps toward public funding and control of commuter rail. Planners coupled the vivid imagery of downtown destruction for parking lots and freeways with studies on the economic and logistical impracticalities of transporting Manhattan's huge commuter population by motor vehicle to convince policymakers that saving commuter rail was in the public interest.

Planners persuasively argued that a wholesale shift to automobile commuting infrastructure would be prohibitively expensive and disastrous to New York's built environment. In 1961, the Regional Plan Association (RPA) prepared a report for the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee that outlined the crisis of commuter transportation in New York City's Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York suburbs. In its recommendations, the RPA noted that half of the 400,000 people working in New York's central business district took commuter rail to work and argued that the cost to transition these commuters to automobiles and buses would be "enormous." State and local governments would have to build new expressways and bridges, handle increased downtown traffic, and repurpose high-value land for parking.[23] The RPA boiled the commuter railroads' problems down to the poor condition of equipment and troubled finances, which it attributed to a cycle of reduced ridership and corresponding insufficient maintenance due to reduced revenues. Both the RPA and a 1962 report in *Business*

[23] "Commuter Transportation: A Study of Passenger Transportation in the New Jersey-New York-Connecticut Metropolitan Region with Particular Reference to Railroad Commutation," Prepared for the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce of the United States Senate (Regional Plan Association, January 31, 1961), 3–4.

History Review by University of California, Berkley business professor George Hilton noted that most of the reduction in ridership that began this cycle occurred in the off-peak periods:

> The rise of suburban shopping centers has drastically altered habits of suburban housewives, whose trips to the downtown area for shopping were once the principal source of off-hour revenue for commuter trains. Similarly, television reduced ridership in evening hours by removing much of the theater traffic. Adoption of the five-day week in the postwar period cost the railroads one day's commuter traffic.[24]

The RPA and Hilton differed on how the federal government should respond to the commuter rail crisis. The RPA emphasized Manhattan's role as the "nerve center of the nation's economy," the federal government's status as one of the region's largest employers, and public safety concerns as reasons that the federal government should provide capital funds to rehabilitate and buy new commuter rail equipment and facilities, fund equipment research, and repeal the federal passenger fares tax.[25] The RPA did not suggest that Congress subsidize any continuing losses from commuter rail service after its emergency modernization, and instead suggested that state and local budgets take up this burden, as well as cancel property taxes on commuter railroads, in exchange for the responsibility to set service standards and locations.[26] Though downplayed by the RPA in its emphasis on the possibilities created by system modernization, even the best-kept commuter railroads could not turn a profit, and the states would inevitably be required to cover what had become substantial operating deficits.

In his analysis, Hilton diverged from the RPA's preservationist approach and argued that commuter rail was destined to die and should not be subsidized. He saw the contribution of automotive traffic to downtown congestion as an argument to embrace urban sprawl and

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[24] Hilton, "The Decline of Railroad Commutation," 173–4.
[25] "Commuter Transportation," 6–7.
[26] "Commuter Transportation," 7. By arguing for federal capital grants instead of continuing subsidies, the RPA played to Congress's distaste for nationalization and mirrored the recently approved Highway Act of 1956.

decentralization, rather than propping up the outmoded radial commuter model. “The city of the future,” he wrote, “is likely to have the general characteristics of Los Angeles: an atrophied center, identifiable but no longer of great significance, surrounded by a great admixture of residential, manufacturing, and commercial areas.”[27] Though Hilton’s view fit with the popular conception at the time that railroads were a transportation mode of the past to be supplanted by cars and may have been well-suited to midwestern and western cities like Los Angeles, it did not accommodate eastern metropolises like New York, which were already heavily urbanized and had little room for expansion. As the RPA convincingly argued, the federal government could not simply stand by and let New York “atrophy” at the hand of traffic congestion were the commuter railroads to cease their service. Planners repositioned commuter rail as an essential *and cost-effective* municipal transportation service rather than an outdated technology, which provided politically advantageous economic justifications for public subsidies to perpetuate commuter rail.

The New Haven Goes Bankrupt

By the 1960s, the New Haven was in dire financial circumstances, and commuter services bore the brunt of its troubles. Since the war its commuter trains had gained a reputation for being “notoriously cold, dirty, and late,” which certainly did not help attract additional passengers.[28] The railroad was hit hard by a hurricane and flooding in 1955, which exacerbated equipment problems and the maintenance deficit. The New Haven’s bankruptcy became all but assured with the construction of the Connecticut Turnpike, today Interstate 95, which paralleled

[27] Hilton, “The Decline of Railroad Commutation,” 186–7.
[28] Saunders, *Merging Lines*, 247.

the route of the railroad and drew away both passenger and freight traffic. The earlier Merritt Parkway, which followed a parallel route inland, did not permit commercial traffic.[29]

The New Haven's bankruptcy in 1961 forced the states to decide whether commuter rail was worth saving. The railroad's new court-appointed trustees, realizing they had inherited a doomed railroad, quickly pivoted to three measures to bring solvency: maximization of state and federal assistance in the short-term, discontinuance of unprofitable passenger service to any extent possible, and inclusion in the slowly germinating merger of the two largest eastern railroads, the Pennsylvania and its archrival, the New York Central.

As early as 1960, the railroad had reported to the ICC that passenger service deficits were the cause of its financial woes. In a petition to the Commission to request approval for a passenger fare increase, the New Haven argued that its "lavish taxation," as compared to the "vast subsidies" issued by the federal government for highway and airport facilities, had increased the competition for long-distance travel and accordingly reduced its customer base, necessitating the requested fare hike.[30] Interestingly, despite its knowledge of the heavy deficits associated specifically with commuting and its imminent requests to discontinue all passenger service, the New Haven itself laid out the case for the preservation of commuter services, much in the same way the RPA would in its report a year later:

> Commuter service by rail is also essential because the abandonment of such service would result in chaotic traffic congestion in the metropolitan areas and any attempt to substitute adequate highways to provide for the transportation of the rail commuters would run into astronomical figures.[31]

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[29] John L. Weller, *The New Haven Railroad: Its Rise and Fall* (New York: Hastings House, 1969), 222. Ironically, the railroad saw a windfall from hauling materials to aid the construction of the highway that would hasten its decline in just a few short years.
[30] New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad Co., "Plan Regarding Future Operation of the New Haven Railroad before the Interstate Commerce Commission," August 22, 1960, 1, Box 35, NHRR Archive.
[31] New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad Co., 2–3.

This statement may have been an effort by the railroad to appear reasonable to policymakers and regulators evaluating the possibility of alleviating the New Haven of its commuter service burden. Even so, the New Haven's advocacy for the continuance of commuter trains by another entity despite its interest in their cancellation is indicative of the degree to which alternatives such as highway service did not appear realistic to those intimately familiar with the heavy traffic managed by commuter rail.

Residents of Connecticut and New York dependent on the line realized that the New Haven's bankruptcy put commuter services in jeopardy and spoke out for the preservation of the New Haven Line. In a hearing at the U.S. District Court of Connecticut, which presided over the New Haven's reorganization proceedings, trustee Richard Joyce Smith expressed the railroad's intention to discontinue passenger service absent public support.[32] Herbert Baldwin, First Selectman of Westport, spoke in favor of the provision of such funds, noting that a third of Westport's 20,000 residents relied on service to New York City for their livelihoods. Calling the prospect of discontinuation "catastrophic" to Westport with a "similar situation" in other Fairfield County towns, Baldwin argued that disrupting passenger service on the New Haven "would have a serious effect upon the economy of the entire state."[33] Baldwin's testimony showed the degree to which New Haven riders viewed its service as the only viable way to commute to New York, and his broad-reaching economic arguments illuminated the municipal and regional stakes of curtailing train service.

[32] In proceedings for the reorganization of a railroad, in the matter of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad Company, debtor: Transcript of a hearing held on October 17, 1961, No. 30226 (United States District Court of Connecticut October 17, 1961).

[33] *Transcript of a hearing held on October 17, 1961* at 79–81. To drive home the economic implications, Baldwin noted that "already real estate interests in Westport are feeling the effect of the threatened curtailment of the commuter service."

Despite advocacy from both the railroad's trustees and the riders themselves for government assistance to perpetuate commuter service, the states were slow to act. The Connecticut legislature created the Connecticut Transportation Authority (CTA) in 1963 to administer subsidies to the New Haven, but New York dragged its feet.[34] Meanwhile, the federal government refused to consider contributing to subsidizing the New Haven's commuter service until the states each made substantial contributions.[35] Though New York and Connecticut would eventually agree in 1965 to jointly fund commuter service in 1965, the four years of circular finger-pointing prompted the New Haven to take direct action to cancel commuter service.

In February 1965, the trustees notified the ICC of its desire to discontinue all passenger service. The government was in a bind, because the courts that presided over the bankruptcy reorganization proceedings could not compel the railroad to continue to operate a money-losing service, given the company's obligations to its shareholders. At the same time, the ICC alongside local and state authorities strongly opposed passenger discontinuance except in the cases of particularly underutilized branch lines that were deemed outside of the public necessity. In a decision of the District Court of Connecticut on February 15, Judge Robert Anderson affirmed that the New Haven ought to be allowed to make such a request, writing that the evidence in favor of pursuing discontinuance was "devastating and overwhelming. It stands completely uncontradicted."[36] Anderson made the case that although the New Haven's status as a public

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[34] Lloyd Almirall, an attorney for the New Haven's bondholders, argued that "discouraging and disastrous as it may sound, the best thing would be immediate liquidation of the whole operation" in a March 18, 1963 court appearance. Almirall specifically pointed to the "remote" prospect of subsidy from New York and argued that the state was "passing the buck, of course, to the federal government" (NHRR Archive, Box 19).

[35] Robert P. Anderson, In proceedings for the reorganization of a railroad, in the matter of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad Company, debtor: transcript of part of proceedings held on February 24, 1964, No. 30226 (United States District Court of Connecticut February 24, 1964).

[36] Robert P. Anderson, In proceedings for the reorganization of a railroad, in the matter of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad Company, debtor: Memorandum of decision re petition for Order No. 287, No. 30226 (United States District Court of Connecticut February 15, 1965).

utility meant that the public interest weighed in considering its continued operation, court precedent established firmly that the public interest (in favor of continued passenger service) must be balanced against a fiduciary duty to shareholders and creditors:

> There are strict limits to the extent to which, in reorganization proceedings, the interests of creditors… may be sacrificed to the public interest; to exceed those limits is (to say the least) to come dangerously close to the edge of unconstitutional taking of property, a line from which courts should keep away if possible.[37]

Anderson went on to condemn the states for the insufficient stopgap measures they had taken up to that point and emphatically declared that they were drawing "the last ounces of blood out of this near corpse" by continuing to tax the New Haven.[38] In light of the intense competition for traffic from air, water, and road transportation and the lackadaisical response of the relevant states, Judge Anderson saw no choice but to allow the railroad to move ahead with its request to eliminate passenger service. Congressional representatives, who neither wished to see the crippling congestion and associated economic consequences forecasted in the event of discontinuance, nor face angry constituents, found themselves in a bind.

The New Haven's plan to discontinue passenger service prompted studies of the potential consequences by urban planners in the region it served. These studies built on general regional planning literature such as that of the RPA and galvanized the federal and state interventions to preserve the New Haven's commuter services. The Southwestern Regional Planning Agency, based in Norwalk, CT, produced a study in 1965 surveying the plans made by Fairfield County residents for alternatives to commuting by rail. Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated that they would move out of the region entirely rather than endure highway traffic, indicating that the

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[37] Frank, Jerome, *In re Third Ave. Transit Corp.*, 198 F.2d 703, 707 (2d Cir. 1952), quoted in Anderson, *Memorandum of decision re petition for order no. 287*.
[38] Anderson, at 6. Such measures included tax abatements and limited capital improvement programs established by the CTA and the Port of New York Authority.

death of the commuter line would be a serious economic and social blow for Fairfield County.[39] Such commuter agitation was instrumental in motivating political activism against the New Haven's plan. The ICC would cite both sources of opposition when it denied the New Haven's discontinuance petition the next year.

M-Day: The ICC Mandates Commuter Service

The ICC decided the New Haven's passenger discontinuance case on April 5,1966, preventing an all-out abandonment of service and fully preserving commuter runs.[40] The decision was issued jointly with the commission's approval of the proposed Pennsylvania–New York Central merger, which was conditioned on the inclusion of the New Haven. Despite the protests of the two large railroads, the newly formed Penn Central would not be allowed to abandon the New Haven's passenger services. The implications of the April 27 announcement of this joint decision earned it the nickname "M-Day" (merger day) and set the stage for the biggest merger in the history of American railroading.[41]

In the decision, Vice Chairman William Tucker pointed out the railroads' concerted efforts to modernize freight service to keep up with competition from other modes, which he contrasted with their reaction to competition for passengers:

> Railroads in general seem at times to have aided and abetted in the decline of their effectiveness as passenger carriers by permitting discomfort, delay, undependability, poor scheduling, discourtesy, obsolete equipment, inadequate space, insufficient facilities, and other disabilities for which railroad passenger service has become increasingly notorious.[42]

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[39] "Suburbs Weigh Rail Line Loss," *New York Times*, September 1, 1965.

[40] William H. Tucker, "New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Co.—Trustees, Discontinuance of All Interstate Passenger Trains," Decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 5, 1966), 153, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3291571. The ICC did allow the termination of forty out of seventy-four of the New Haven's Springfield Line (New Haven, CT–Springfield, MA) and Shore Line (New York, NY–Boston, MA) intercity trains.

[41] Saunders, *Merging Lines*, 273.

[42] Tucker, "New Haven Passenger Discontinuance Decision," 157.

This damning critique of the railroads' neglect of passenger service, exhibited one of the core sources of contempt among officials for the railroads' incessant complaints about providing public transportation. While railroads could have doubled down on passenger service in the 1940s and fifties by expanding marketing, investing in equipment maintenance, or exploring new fare systems, they instead allowed it to atrophy with the hope of reducing demand to the point of its eventual self-determining elimination.[43]

The ICC's decision flatly rejected the argument, raised by Hilton and partially by the railroads, that car, bus, and air transportation could completely replace passenger trains. Importantly, the ICC affirmed the essential distinction between intercity service—which could be supplanted to some extent by motor vehicles and airplanes—and commuting, in which the railroads played an indispensable role. The Commission acknowledged that peak-period commutation in particular would greatly increase congestion, pollution, and traffic deaths, and argued that "the answer to this nation's existing and anticipated surface travel problems is not to be found in a continued over-reliance on highways."[44] Tucker cited several sources for this position, the first being a wealth of support from citizens and their representatives, and demonstrated willingness by the states concerned to subsidize service.[45] From a federal perspective, the ICC pointed to recently passed legislation calling for the Secretary of Commerce

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[43] David C. Nice, *Amtrak: The History and Politics of a National Railroad*, Explorations in Public Policy (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 5–6. There is some historiographical debate over the degree to which the decline in passenger traffic was due to active neglect by the railroads or simply the independent decisions of travelers, but regardless this sentiment was a commonly-held belief raised by many rail advocates in the 1960s. Jeffrey R. Orenstein, *United States Railroad Policy: Uncle Sam at the Throttle* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1990), 64, concurs with this assessment, characterizing the railroads as "anti-passenger" during the 1950s and 1960s. This theory is also mentioned specifically in regard to New York commuter rail in Stan Fischler, *Next Stop Grand Central: A Trip through Time on New York's Metropolitan Area Commuter Railroads* (Erin, Ont., Canada: Boston Mills Press, 1986), 125.
[44] Tucker, "New Haven Passenger Discontinuance Decision," 159–160. This is the earliest mention I have found in a government source of environmental concerns (in this case, air pollution) as a justification for commuter rail.
[45] This assumption contradicted Judge Anderson's assessment of the states as stingy in supporting the railroads.

to research the possibility of high-speed passenger rail as evidence for government support for passenger rail service.[46]

The powerful voices of Westchester and Fairfield County commuters made an impression on the ICC and lent a human touch to regulatory hearings that otherwise were often decided on dry economic terms.[47] Tucker wrote that car and bus substitution for rail traffic into New York City would be “completely inadequate, entailing much personal inconvenience and travel over circuitous routes for extended times and extra distances.”[48] He went on to emphasize the economic impact that such a measure would take on the region and even the nation, citing the high incomes of suburbanites along the line and their correspondingly expensive homes that they might abandon in the case of discontinued rail service. Testimony from commuters helped establish the immense public inconvenience that discontinuing service would cause. Thus, despite the presumed ability of Westchester and Fairfield commuters to afford the switch to auto commuting, the ICC drew on the immense public expense required to accommodate such an influx of traffic and the deleterious effects on income levels and the real estate markets in these counties to justify the necessity of continued commuter service on the New Haven Line.

In effect, the ICC’s decision put the ball back in the states’ court to find an effective and efficient plan to permanently subsidize commuter services. It validated many of the arguments for commuter rail, which at this point had been hashed out endlessly, while also making clear

[46] Robert E. Gallamore and John Robert Meyer, *American Railroads: Decline and Renaissance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 323.The New Haven Line is part of the Northeast Corridor from Washington to Boston, which was envisioned as an ideal route for an American high-speed rail line. The High Speed Ground Transportation Act of 1965 was motivated in part the 1964 debut of Japan’s wildly successful shinkansen high-speed train service.
[47] Tucker, “New Haven Passenger Discontinuance Decision,” 177. Suburban residents even went as far as to testify that suburban commuter service could regain its profitability with new high-speed equipment. Lofty predictions such as this one and Governor Rockefeller’s assertion that the New Haven Line operated close to “break even” have not panned out, even in the Metro-North era.
[48] Tucker, 179.

that its decision to force the New Haven to continue its service (under the coming banner of Penn Central) was predicated on the absorption of commuter deficits by the states involved. The ICC decision would inspire New York and Connecticut to create the appropriate agencies to administer (and eventually take over) commuter service, so that the states could seek any available federal funds for shoring up the line and to provide oversight to ensure quality of service and efficiency of operation. Unlike in later years, commuters and policymakers barely raised energy use and pollution reduction justifications for commuter rail in the discussions surrounding the New Haven's bankruptcy; instead, rail advocates focused primarily on the negative economic and spatial side effects of highway commutation. But how would New York and Connecticut go about preserving commuter rail? The states faced a decision over whether to subsidize private operation or create a new agency to operate the New Haven's commuter services.

Governor Rockefeller and the Formation of the MTA

The states responded to the dire situation of the New Haven with a subsidy established under the aegis of the newly-formed Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority (MCTA). The MCTA had been created by the New York legislature in 1965 as part of its plan to buy the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) from the Pennsylvania Railroad, which had been operating under bankruptcy protection since 1949. A nearly exclusively passenger railroad that at the time was the most heavily-used commuter carrier in the nation, the Long Island was in severe condition.[49] The MCTA, the brainchild of New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller's transportation advisor,

[49] William J. Ronan et al., "Metropolitan Transportation: A Program for Action" (New York: Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority, February 1968), 22. At the time, nearly three quarters of its cars were built before World War II.

William Ronan, was intended to rejuvenate the LIRR by harnessing federal as well as state and local funding sources.[50]

The MCTA was created with New York's other commuter railroads in mind as well, and the Rockefeller administration took steps to expand its purview. In 1965, after the New Haven's clash with the ICC, the governors of New York and Connecticut—Rockefeller and his counterpart, John Dempsey—agreed to subsidize service on the New Haven Line under an even 50–50 split.[51] The subsidy would be paid to the New Haven and its successors to cover the costs of providing service. Without this agreement, the New Haven would have discontinued its commuter services; this was the point in the New Haven Line's history where the threat of liquidation was most real and imminent.[52]

In an effort to seek a longer-term solution to the New Haven's passenger woes, the subsidy program hinged on a "federal mass transportation demonstration project" managed by the Tri-State Transportation Committee (TSTC), chaired by William Ronan, and funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development under the recent Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964.[53] The project provided a two-thirds federal subsidy for the line's deficits (with the states covering the remaining third) and called for a range of studies on improving various aspects of commuter service. In its initial report, the TSTC raised the possibility of following the

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[50] John M. Leavens, "The Cost of Commuter Transportation" (master's thesis, New York University, 1968), 75.
[51] According to Howard Permut, interview by the author, phone, December 13, 2018, this agreement was hashed out between the two men over lunch at an Italian restaurant in Port Chester. The meeting became legendary as Connecticut and New York entered arbitration multiple times in the first few decades of Metro-North service to renegotiate this split. Permut was part of the original group that created Metro-North in 1983 and was president of the railroad from 2008 to 2014.
[52] Emanuel Perlmutter, "Connecticut Joins New York in Plan to Aid Commuters," *New York Times*, February 28, 1965, 1.
[53] "New Haven Railroad Commuter Service: A Mass Transportation Demonstration Grant Project," Progress Report No. 1 (Tri-State Transportation Committee, December 1965), 3, box 22, New Haven Railroad Historical and Technical Association Collection, Archives & Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries ("NHRHTA Archive").

example of the LIRR and purchasing the line outright, although it posited this approach as "complicated" due to the New Haven's status "as an interstate, long-distance carrier as well as a commuter line."[54] Nearly twenty years before the founding of Metro-North, William Ronan's TSTC identified what would become the New Haven Line's greatest challenge: coordinating the interests of and funding from two state governments.

Heeding the advice of the TSTC, the New York legislature stopped short of including a takeover of the New Haven Line in its massive 1968 expansion of the MCTA to form the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).[55] Under the chairmanship of William Ronan, the MTA gained responsibility for overseeing operations on New York City's northern commuter lines (including the newly-subsidized New Haven Line), which would shortly be included in the Penn Central merger. The formation of the MTA represented the second step in the progression towards public ownership that began with the establishment of a subsidy in 1965.

In its final act, the MCTA prepared a "Program for Action," delivered to Rockefeller, that laid out a plan for the new MTA and called for extensive capital investment in all areas of New York City's rail services. This document was a seminal work of regional transportation planning for the New York metropolitan area, and it marked the beginning of a slow process of tangible modernization on the New Haven Line. Now that the New Haven Line was under state supervision, the MTA could make an effort to amass city, state, and federal funds—and initiate cooperation with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT)—to implement such

[54] "New Haven Railroad Commuter Service: A Mass Transportation Demonstration Grant Project," 11.
[55] Sydney H. Schanberg, "Governor Signs 2d Transit Bill; Unification Measure Names Agency to Head Operation," *New York Times*, May 3, 1967, 50. The new MTA included the New York City Transit Authority (which operated the city's buses and subways), the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, and the Staten Island Railway.

improvements as buying new, air-conditioned cars, installing high-level platforms at stations, rehabilitating tracks, and maintaining the electric power delivery system.[56]

Despite the glimmer of hope offered by the quickly-moving consolidation of New York's transportation infrastructure in the MTA under Governor Rockefeller, the states' unwillingness to purchase the entire New Haven commuter railroad outright ensured that progress would remain limited for the next decade. While the MTA, with cooperation from Connecticut, succeeded in advancing state funds and applying for federal grants for some capital improvements, the freight railroads (first Penn Central, then Conrail) that provided day-to-day operations continued to de-prioritize commuters at every opportunity. As a result, the rider experience continued to suffer, which helped provide the impetus for the creation of Metro-North nearly two decades later.

Though the gloom of the New Haven Line continued into the 1970s, the significance of Governor Rockefeller's leadership on creating the MTA with commuter railroads in mind as part of a larger regional mass transportation network cannot be overstated. When the time came at last in 1983 to hand control over to the MTA, the transition was simple thanks to the MTA's ample experience managing commuter rail by that point.[57] By formally aligning commuter rail with more conventional forms of public transit that were already well-understood as needing subsidies, Rockefeller's creation of the MTA helped save the New Haven Line from oblivion. Moreover, it laid the groundwork for an eventual transition of the line to full public ownership and operation.

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[56] Ronan et al., "Metropolitan Transportation: A Program for Action," 32.
[57] The MTA gained commuter rail experience both directly through running the Long Island and indirectly through its increasing role in New Haven operations.

No Rest for the Weary: The Stagnant ’70s under Penn Central and Conrail

With the ICC-mandated inclusion of the New Haven’s commuter lines in the newly-merged Penn Central, talk of discontinuance temporarily abated. The Penn Central experiment was a colossal failure, and upon its bankruptcy in 1970 the federal government faced an even larger reorganization proceeding. From the ashes of Penn Central, Congress created the government-owned railroad Conrail in 1973 to continue freight and commuter service in the Northeast. The death of Penn Central also spurred Congress to create the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) in 1971 to operate intercity passenger services, at last freeing the freight railroads of the burden they had complained of endlessly for the past half-century. The inclusion of Penn Central’s commuter lines in Conrail meant that little changed for New Haven Line commuters in the 1970s, except that the ever-greater drive to turn a profit meant that the capital investments needed to reverse the years of deferred maintenance on the New Haven Line were never prioritized as freight considerations continued to rule investment decisions. As a result, commuter service maintained its downward trajectory despite new ownership and the MTA subsidy arrangement.

Penn Central Does Not Live up to Expectations (to Put It Lightly)

On February 1, 1968, Penn Central formally began operating the trains of the former New Haven, New York Central, and Pennsylvania Railroads, and the railroad industry and regulators alike cautiously watched the new super-railroad for its anticipated $100 million in expected annual savings.[58] The executive director of the Connecticut Transportation Authority, Samuel Kanell, prophetically told the *New York Times* that the New Haven section of the system might

[58] Saunders, *Merging Lines*, 379.

never be profitable, but the railroad as a whole must succeed financially or else "transportation in this country" would not "go on as a free enterprise."[59] Instead, they witnessed the complete collapse of two of the nation's most storied railroads in just over two short years. Instead of saving $100 million a year, Penn Central lost one million dollars a day.[60]

Penn Central failed for a multitude of reasons, most of which did not have to do with its passenger services. Many books have been written on this subject; the failure was covered contemporaneously by journalists Joseph Daughen and Peter Binzen in *Wreck of the Penn Central* (1971) and revisited in impressive detail by railroad veteran-cum-history professor Richard Saunders, Jr. in *Merging Lines* (2001). Historians Robert Gallamore and John Meyer pointed to a litany of factors behind the failure: high labor costs, state and local taxation, highway competition, ICC regulation, continued mandatory absorption of passenger service losses, and managerial greed and "diseconomies of scale."[61] Even though planning for the merger stretched back to 1957, the three merged railroads did a poor job coordinating operations. Shippers would send loaded cars from their plants only to have them return full of the same goods several weeks later.[62] The NYC and PRR computer systems, *which the railroads bought after they had decided to merge*, were incompatible, and auditors noted that patrons of the railroad were frequently not billed for service as a result.[63]

Despite the numerous failures of Penn Central, the most public criticism was reserved for its passenger service, as a quarter-million daily commuters to Philadelphia, New York, and

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[59] Associated Press, "Profit Envisioned for Penn Central," *New York Times*, February 12, 1968, 60, quoted in Robert Holzweiss, "Penn Central Reconsidered," *Railroad History*, Fall-Winter 2017, 24.
[60] Saunders, *Merging Lines*, xvii.
[61] Gallamore and Meyer, *American Railroads*, 149–54, pointed to the Senate's 1972 "Barber Report" on the disaster as confirmation that the collapse could not be blamed on a single factor but rather a deadly confluence of mismanagement and negative external conditions.
[62] Michael Gartner, *Riding the Pennsy to Ruin: A Wall Street Journal Chronicle of the Penn Central Debacle* (Princeton, N.J: Dow Jones Books, 1971), 4.
[63] Saunders, *Merging Lines*, 389.

Boston suffered rides on often-filthy cars up to 60 years old. Penn Central acknowledged the further decline of passenger service but argued that its heavy deficits made adequate maintenance impossible.[64] The states made some highly-publicized improvement efforts through their capital programs for the line, such as the highly-publicized delivery of 144 new M2 railcars in 1973 to replace the pre-World War II cars that made up two-thirds of the New Haven Line fleet as late as 1968.[65] Yet these efforts did little to address chronic delays and overall poor service by Penn Central; in a cruel twist, commuters trapped in a tunnel under Park Avenue due to a third-rail malfunction watched the first of the new M2 cars, carrying Governor Rockefeller and other officials, roll by on its way to Grand Central Terminal on April 17, 1973. Even the new train, with its VIP cargo, was twelve minutes late.[66]

Amtrak: Passenger Panacea?

The Penn Central debacle brought about the creation of Amtrak to relieve the freight railroads of the burden of operating intercity passenger rail service. President Nixon's Secretary of Transportation, John Volpe, prepared a plan for rail passenger service that Congress enthusiastically adopted in 1970. Despite the national decline of intercity train travel, many members of Congress believed in the necessity of government preservation of a basic national passenger railroad network.[67] Amtrak garnered bipartisan support for its market-based provisions which avoided direct subsidy while preventing the complete abandonment of a well-liked

[64] Gartner, *Riding the Pennsy to Ruin*, 5–6.
[65] Plans for the new cars dated back to the MTA's founding document, Ronan et al., "Metropolitan Transportation: A Program for Action," 32.
[66] Frank J. Prial, "Trapped Commuters on Hand to Greet New Train Arriving at Grand Central," *New York Times*, April 17, 1973.
[67] Lloyd D. Musolf, *Uncle Sam's Private Profitseeking Corporations: Comsat, Fannie Mae, Amtrak, and Conrail* (Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1983), 50.

alternative to intercity air, bus, and car travel.[68] The profit-minded idealism of the Amtrak legislation belied a fundamental problem with the system that has persisted to this day: Congressional representatives, beholden to their constituents, have consistently required Amtrak to maintain its loss-inducing long-distance trains while attempting to turn a profit.[69] Nevertheless, the basic premise of Amtrak was that it could reverse decades of declining passenger service through a focus on providing for passengers as its primary customers.[70] The establishment of Amtrak set a precedent for public sector management as a path to an improved rider experience that would resurface in the promises of Metro-North's management a decade later.

The creation of Amtrak brought to light the awkward position of commuter rail in a neglected middle ground between urban mass transit and interstate, national transportation services. Amtrak did not take on the commuter services operated by Penn Central in cities along the Northeast Corridor. Commuter rail service was instead left with Penn Central as it waded through bankruptcy proceedings and the federal government pondered how to handle the Northeast railroad fiasco in a lasting manner. Amtrak was available to operate commuter services under contract with local commuter authorities like the MTA, but its intended focus was national, interstate service rather than all-encompassing management of all domestic train routes. Even though commuter trains often served multiple states (as in the case of the New Haven Line) and were of clear import for the functioning economies of the nation's largest cities, the federal government had no interest in managing them. The cities these trains served were left out of the

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[68] Gallamore and Meyer, *American Railroads*, 314–15. Amtrak appealed to rail enthusiasts for its provisions for experimentation and innovation in service, which at this point lagged far behind nascent high-speed systems abroad. Unions appreciated its preservation of railroad jobs.
[69] Nice, *Amtrak History and Politics*, 9.
[70] Musolf, *Uncle Sam's Private Profitseeking Corporations*, 51.

picture for the same reason, and instead states were forced to subsidize service and enter into compacts when necessary to coordinate multi-state funding.

Although the railroad's bankruptcy prompted the states served by Penn Central's commuter services to take further steps toward full ownership, the states remained content to continue to contract out operations due to the additional budgetary and bureaucratic burden of ownership and the difficulty of coordinating interstate funding and management. The federal demonstration grant had expired in 1968, so in 1969 the two states enacted the Connecticut–New York Passenger Compact that formalized a continuing program of subsidy and provided for the states to acquire related assets from the railroad.[71] The Penn Central bankruptcy provided an opportunity for the states to take a major step toward public ownership: in 1970, they concluded a Service Agreement with the railroad wherein the MTA bought and the CDOT leased trackage and associated properties along the New Haven Line.[72] The MTA heralded this achievement as the end to "years of intensive efforts by both states to develop the means to improve the ailing line" and specifically celebrated a special note it had put out to riders in collaboration with the CDOT on the day of the takeover that signaled, "We know what you've been going through. Help is on the way."[73]

Despite this optimistic language, the states did not elect to assume full control of the line from Penn Central, likely due in part to the difficulties of coordinating continued Penn Central freight service and Amtrak intercity service.[74] Even so, the two states had achieved the third

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[71] "Analysis of the Amended and Restated Service Agreement for the Operation and Subsidization of the New Haven Rail Line, as Called for in Public Act 00-129" (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Department of Transportation, May 2001), 1, https://www.cga.ct.gov/olr/Documents/Misc/PA00-129.pdf.
[72] "Analysis of the Amended and Restated Service Agreement," 2. The Service Agreement went into effect on January 1, 1971.
[73] Metropolitan Transportation Authority, "1971 Annual Report" (New York, 1972), 38.
[74] Robert Holzweiss, interview by the author, email, February 24, 2019. Holzweiss is President of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society (2010–present) and wrote his PhD dissertation in American History at Texas A&M University on the Penn Central bankruptcy and the creation of Conrail.

major step in the two-decade progression towards public ownership on the New Haven Line: in addition to contractual control over standards of service through the MTA, the states now held physical title to the infrastructure that had been allowed to deteriorate badly up to that point. State ownership of the New Haven Line laid the groundwork for publicly-funded upgrades to the railroad's physical plant in the name of commuter passenger service.[75] Though ownership of the infrastructure undoubtedly represented progress, New York and Connecticut's continuing unwillingness to fully take over commuter operations spelled out further woes for daily commuters as they were handed off from one unforgiving freight railroad to another in the replacement of Penn Central with Conrail in 1976.

Uncle Sam Steps In: The Coming of Conrail

The failure of Penn Central made clear that more drastic steps were needed to address the Northeast rail service problem. The creation of Amtrak had done little to reverse the fortunes of the now-bankrupt Penn Central, despite years of protestations from the railroads that passenger services constituted the source of all their losses. A one-day strike by Penn Central employees in February 1973 spurred Congress into action to come up with a new approach for railroad service in the region.[76] Yet the Nixon administration had no interest in pursuing a full European-style nationalization, which would symbolically mark a defeat for capitalism.[77] The other option, liquidation, was rejected out-of-hand; shutting down Penn Central would affect nearly half the United States' factories and cause an estimated 2.7% decline in the gross national product.[78]

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[75] Today, the New Haven Line remains the only part of the Northeast Corridor (the passenger rail line from Washington, DC, to Boston) that is not owned by Amtrak, and Metro-North's ownership is the subject of ongoing disputes as each railroad accuses the other of underfunding improvements and prioritizing their own traffic and objectives.

[76] Timothy Scott Doherty and Brian Solomon, *Conrail*, MBI Railroad Color History (St. Paul, MN: MBI, 2004), 21.

[77] Orenstein, *United States Railroad Policy*, 77. Part of the motivation for approving the Pennsylvania–New York Central–New Haven merger in the first place had been to avoid nationalization at any cost (Saunders, *Merging Lines*, 251).

[78] Doherty and Solomon, *Conrail*, 21.

Defense concerns also played a role in the government's unwillingness to consign Penn Central to death by market forces.[79] Truck transportation was inherently less fuel efficient, and America's petroleum was supplied in large part by unpredictable foreign nations.[80] Congress sought to find a middle ground between the extremes of nationalization and liquidation, much as it had for Amtrak.

The result was the Regional Rail Reorganization (3R) Act, passed in December 1973, which called for the creation of a private corporation owned by the United States, like Amtrak. Conrail would receive funds from the federal government to build a pared-down, core freight network for the Northeast that would eventually become financially self-sustaining. It was an ambitious goal, and the 3R Act provided for the creation of the United States Railway Association (USRA) to study several options and from these prepare a plan for such a network.[81] Notably, the 3R Act included in its findings an explicit articulation by the legislature of the advantages of rail transportation, with particular attention to environmental considerations, which were and are still relevant to both passenger and freight service:

> Rail service and rail transportation offer economic and environmental advantages with respect to land use, air pollution, noise levels, energy efficiency and conservation, resource allocation, safety, and cost per ton-mile of movement to such extent that the preservation and maintenance of adequate and efficient rail service is in the national interest.[82]

This finding expanded the government's interest in continued rail service beyond the prevailing economic considerations to include environmentalist concerns such as pollution and land use.

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[79] Liquidation of Penn Central's network would have caused enormous disruption to the national rail freight network, which still relied on connections in the Northeast.

[80] Saunders, *Merging Lines*, 417–18. This fear was validated during the negotiations for the 3R Act, when in October 1973 the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries declared an embargo on selling oil to nations sympathetic to Israel, including the United States.

[81] The negotiations that went into the Final System Plan for Conrail are beyond the scope of this project, but they are described in detail in Gallamore and Meyer, *American Railroads*, 171–83, Doherty and Solomon, *Conrail*, 21–5, and Musolf, *Uncle Sam's Private Profitseeking Corporations*, 72–85.

[82] Regional Rail Reorganization Act, 45 U.S.C. §701 (1973).

The mention of land use especially affirmed the motivations of the state and local governments (such as New York and Connecticut) that had begun to reject highways in favor of railroads for the management of urban commuting.

In a House of Representatives hearing on the USRA's Final System Plan for Conrail in 1975, the new railroad's commuter service obligation was one of the primary topics the committee members discussed. Arthur Lewis, Chairman of the USRA, expressed his belief that Amtrak and commuter service authorities were inadequately compensating Conrail's predecessor railroads for their passenger operations, and feared that this deficit would cause Conrail losses in excess of $1.65 billion in the next decade and prevent its freight services from achieving profitability for the railroad if not addressed.[83] The USRA noted that the state legislatures responsible for appropriating funds to cover commuter service costs frequently underspent in this area, forcing Conrail's predecessors to pick up the difference as losses; however, it singled out Penn Central's contracts with the MTA and CDOT as examples of adequately compensatory arrangements.[84]

Conrail's Chairman and CEO, Edward Jordan, highlighted the Final System Plan's recommendation that Amtrak and the commuter agencies take over routes primarily dedicated to passenger service, implying that the Northeast Corridor route (including the New Haven Line) was increasingly irrelevant for freight movements and could soon sustain direct operation by Amtrak and local authorities..[85] The Preliminary System Plan had further advocated that "to minimize freight–passenger conflict, Conrail through-freight service should be moved, insofar as

[83] *Supplemental Railroad Appropriations: Final System Plan and Financing for Conrail: Hearings Before a Subcomm. of the Comm. on Appropriations, House of Representatives*, 94th Cong. 2 (1975) (statement of Arthur D. Lewis, Chairman of the United States Railway Association), 6.
[84] *Conrail Final System Plan Hearings* (1975) (statement of Arthur D. Lewis), 15.
[85] *Conrail Final System Plan Hearings* (1975) (statement of Edward G. Jordan, Chairman and CEO of Conrail), 90. Jordan also noted that, to the extent Conrail covered the difference between subsidies and the actual losses incurred by providing passenger service, it would amount to a "cross-subsidy" paid for by the railroad's freight customers.

possible, to a separate right-of-way."[86] New York and Connecticut had stopped short of fully acquiring the New Haven Line's commuter operations in 1971 due to the ease of contracting with Penn Central, but now Conrail formally requested that the states completely relieve it of this obligation.

The hearing reveals that even before it entered revenue service, Conrail's top leadership expressed concerns that including commuter operations would hinder the freight railroad from achieving its profitability objective and encouraged their takeover by local authorities. At the same time, they acknowledged that the subsidies paid for the New Haven Line were sufficient. Lewis and Jordan's comments foreshadowed the continued neglect of commuter service under Conrail as it strove, under Congressional mandate, to improve freight operations to the point of turning a profit. Their comments also outlined many of the arguments Conrail would make to a more sympathetic Reagan administration in the early 1980s.

Conrail was formally inaugurated on April 1, 1976 to take over from Penn Central and a number of other regional railroads after Congress passed the Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform (4R) Act to implement the USRA's Final System Plan. Signing the 4R Act into law, President Ford optimistically commented that "we expect that within five years Conrail will overcome the unprofitable legacy of the bankrupt lines," in an eerie echo of the false optimism that surrounded the Penn–Central merger eight years before.[87] Commuter service was

[86] Gallamore and Meyer, *American Railroads*, 178–80, term this the "USRA Principle" and argue that it has positively guided federal passenger rail policy since. The Nixon and Ford administrations saw Amtrak ownership of the Northeast Corridor as an opportunity to end years of complaints from Amtrak and commuter authorities of inadequate track maintenance by Penn Central and its predecessors. Given the high federal investment in the line for passenger purposes, with further improvements planned, it would make sense for the taxpayers to own it. The USRA principle reflects the approach of many other nations (such as France and Japan), which seek to completely separate freight and passenger trackage wherever possible, allowing high-speed passenger service and a clear, conflict-minimizing division of management and funding.
[87] Musolf, *Uncle Sam's Private Profitseeking Corporations*, 73.

little mentioned in both the 3R and 4R acts, indicating federal unwillingness to address the thorny problems it posed.

As commuters would soon find out, their practical omission from the legislation was reflected in their experience on the railroad. After seven years of deteriorating service from Penn Central and decades of neglect from the New Haven, the transition to Conrail on April Fool's Day, 1976, "changed little except train crew hat badges;" they would now be subject to the vicissitudes of yet another freight carrier actively trying to rid itself of the very passenger trains they relied on to get to and from work every day.[88]

Conrail Quality: Last Straws for the MTA

Under Conrail, commuter service on the New Haven Line continued to deteriorate. Yet it would be the action of Conrail executives coupled with the permission of the federal government alongside agitation from disgruntled commuters, rather than initiative on the part of the MTA or CDOT, that would finally spark the last steps toward public ownership that resulted in the creation of Metro-North in 1983.

Conrail's "Metropolitan Region" service—a continuation of Penn Central's commuter operations on the New Haven Line as well as the former New York Central Harlem and Hudson Lines to the west—quickly garnered the same unfavorable press from its riders as its predecessors had. A *New York Times* article from 1979 characterized on-time performance as "erratic," with "frequent breakdowns in air conditioning, improper lighting, and shortened trains."[89] Commuter action groups like the Permanent Citizens' Advisory Committee (PCAC) to

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[88] Middleton, "How Metro-North Did It: From Faltering to First Rate in a Decade," 10.

[89] Edward Hudson, "Conrail Commuter Lines Found Declining With Bad Equipment," *New York Times*, September 17, 1979. The general collapse of good service progressed to the point where the New York Department of Transportation (NYDOT) commissioned a study of the problem. NYDOT found that most delays were caused by equipment failures and inadequate maintenance. This implied that the money the states had invested in buying new cars for the lines was going to waste as Conrail did not bother to provide them adequate maintenance.

the MTA noted that despite its service contract with Conrail, the MTA did not assess penalties for poor service. The problems with Penn Central had carried over to Conrail, as the states blamed the railroad for poor service while the railroad washed its hands of responsibility by pleading a lack of funding. The *Times* article also mentions a suggestion from "some commuters" that the MTA take over the railroad, to which the MTA Executive Director, John Simpson, responded only softly, suggesting that the idea be "explored" but distancing himself from a direct endorsement.[90]

The persistence of Conrail's problems despite the MTA's various stopgap measures revealed the fundamental ineffectiveness of the subsidy scheme and laid out the case for the MTA to take over the line. In 1980, it came time to renew the service contract with Conrail. Commuters' suggestion of an MTA takeover was once again considered as the contract renegotiations neared, but it was again jettisoned in favor of the status quo. The PCAC continued to sound warnings about the dire state of Conrail service, with its chairman emphasizing that "every single performance indicator dropped significantly over the past year."[91]

Conrail's good-faith effort to improve service with new management proved fruitless and further affirmed the need for new ownership. In August 1980, after a summer of broken air conditioning and delayed trains, Conrail named a new general manager for its Metropolitan Region: Joseph Spreng was a Penn Central veteran who claimed to grasp that commuter railroading was "50 percent public relations." Accordingly, he ordered all Conrail supervisors to ride two Conrail trains a day for his first month on the job.[92] Despite Spreng's strong credentials, he too betrayed the all-too-familiar disdain for commuters, whom he called "gutter urchins when

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[90] Hudson.
[91] "Panel Cites 'Near Crisis' In Conrail Maintenance," *New York Times*, June 8, 1980.
[92] David A. Andelman, "Ex-Marine in Conrail Job: Joseph Francis Spreng," *New York Times*, August 18, 1980; David A. Andelman, "Conrail Chief Takes a Ride and a Ribbing," *New York Times*, August 21, 1980.

they get upset."[93] That the MTA, under the new leadership of Richard Ravitch, had not been informed beforehand of Spreng's appointment indicated the degree of disconnect it held with Conrail despite their professed shared goal of improved service.[94]

By the end of 1980, Conrail had neither made the profits wished for by optimistic members of Congress, nor had it reversed the fortunes of New York's commuter rail lines. As such, change was afoot as both the federal government and New York and Connecticut sought alternatives to the status quo. The historic Staggers Rail Act, passed in October 1980, opened the door for the substantial deregulation of the railroads and the end of the iron grip of the ICC; Conrail's inability to turn a profit had at last helped members of Congress see the burdens of ICC rate controls on railroads as they struggled to compete with other transportation modes despite their natural advantages for freight service.[95]

Meanwhile Spreng, despite his early optimism, had declared the New Haven Line in "crisis" by December and called (like countless others before and after) for additional state funds toward modernization.[96] New York State began the motions of seeking alternative options to Conrail service, including the possibility of spinning off the LIRR and the Conrail commuter lines into a unified commuter agency separate from the MTA (which was viewed as bloated).[97] These actions were long overdue; the poor state of service had been well-known since the 1960s and New York had experienced success operating the LIRR directly. I attribute New York and

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[93] David A. Andelman, "Conrail's Chief Orders Supervisors To Ride 2 Commuter Trains a Day," *New York Times*, August 19, 1980.
[94] David A. Andelman, "Conrail Names New Chief For Troubled Lines Here," *New York Times*, August 16, 1980. Ravitch was a real estate developer who had made a name for himself heading New York State's Urban Development Corporation.
[95] L. Stanley Crane, *Rise from the Wreckage: A Brief History of Conrail* (New York: Newcomen Society of the United States, 1988), 16–9.
[96] Diane Henry, "Conrail's Chief Gloomy on Plan To Improve Line: New Haven's Modernizing 3 Years behind Schedule," *New York Times*, December 3, 1980.
[97] Irvin Molotsky, "State Considers A New Agency For 2 Rail Lines," *New York Times*, November 25, 1980.

Connecticut’s failure to take the New Haven Line over earlier to the difficulties of coordinating interstate service and subsidy, bureaucratic predisposition towards the status quo, and unwillingness to spend additional funds to properly operate and rehabilitate the line. Fortunately, the MTA’s hand would shortly be forced by the new presidential administration: Ronald Reagan, elected in November 1980, took aim at large government programs. Conrail was a soft target, and the period from 1981 to 1983 would result in the creation of Metro-North as American freight and passenger rail service at long last became completely separated.

New Beginnings: Metro-North Takes the Reins

The creation of Metro-North was federally initiated. The Reagan administration forced Conrail to accelerate its return to the private sector or face liquidation, and Conrail turned to Congress to request that it at last be relieved of the burden of providing commuter services. Despite decades of rider complaints, New York and Connecticut had never initiated a plan to fully take over the New Haven Line. There is no particular reason that this step could not have been taken years earlier than 1983. Metro-North did not receive increased subsidies upon its creation nor did the transition require some exceedingly large capital outlay.[98] In fact, the transition to Metro-North operation was almost exclusively a management shift, and yet it produced a profound turnaround in the next ten years for commuters, who had not received good service since the Second World War. That remarkable improvement, then, is attributable to the hard work of Metro-North's new officers to strike a better deal with labor, change the culture of the organization, and renegotiate subsidies with New York and Connecticut. By the mid-1990s, Metro-North was a poster child for the accomplishments that a public agency could make in improving service where the private sector, even with copious subsidy, had failed.

Conrail Refresh in 1981 Jettisons Commuter Services

The original intention of Conrail was to pour government dollars into a rehabilitation of a pared-down version of the Northeast freight rail system so that it could return to profitability and become private again. As the Reagan administration took power in 1981, Conrail had spent $3 billion in federal aid without profits to show for it, and fears swirled again over the fate of the

[98] In a phone interview (March 7, 2019), Richard Ravitch remembered that he leveraged his acquiescence with Reagan officials' plans for Conrail to drop its commuter services into receiving $70 million in funding from the federal government to cover the costs of the transition. This does not explain why the states delayed creating Metro-North until they were forced into it. There is no clear reason beyond budgetary constraints that the states could not have covered these costs at an earlier date themselves or through a request for federal funding.

railroad industry as a whole.[99] Despite impressive improvements in the state of its fixed plant, ICC regulations had still limited the railroad in its ability to compete, and its unions continued to enforce inefficient work rules that resulted in the railroad spending a far higher portion of its operating budget on labor than its industry peers.[100]

Conrail's first president, Edward Jordan, who retired at the end of 1980, was replaced with L. Stanley Crane, who was instrumental in bringing Conrail to profitability.[101] Crane believed that the deregulation of the Staggers Act, allowing further honing of the railroad's sprawling network, along with further negotiation with labor, could allow the railroad to achieve its original goal in a few more years. Reagan administrators, particularly Secretary of Transportation Drew Lewis and Federal Railroad Administrator Robert Blanchette, were skeptical of this argument and sought to dismantle Conrail over Crane's protestations, selling its lines off piecemeal.[102]

Congress was more optimistic, and in a compromise with the administration passed the Northeast Rail Service Act (NERSA) of 1981. This key piece of legislation set up a profitability test as advocated by Crane. The bill allowed Crane to keep the railroad intact for an eventual return to the private sector if he could realize the return to the black as he promised by 1983.[103] To facilitate the turnaround, NERSA included a provision relieving Conrail of its commuter

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[99] Doherty and Solomon, *Conrail*, 35.
[100] Doherty and Solomon, 33–4.
[101] See Saunders, *Merging Lines*, 288–306. Crane was a veteran of the Southern Railway, which was respected in the industry for its high labor efficiency. The Southern's president, Bill Brosnan, was notoriously uncompromising but also has been credited with "creating the modern American high-tech labor-productive railroad" (291).
[102] Gallamore and Meyer, *American Railroads*, 192. Blanchette was a former Penn Central trustee who had previously worked on the New Haven bankruptcy.
[103] Crane, *Rise from the Wreckage: A Brief History of Conrail*, 27, 31. The threat of liquidation gave Crane bargaining power with the railroad Brotherhoods; union interests would have been hurt more with the piecemeal liquidation of the railroad, and as such the unions agreed to key cuts requested by Crane (Doherty and Solomon, *Conrail*, 41; Gallamore and Meyer, *American Railroads*, 201). Congress did its part by including further provisions for deregulation in NERSA, which accelerated Conrail's ability to de-duplicate many of its routes and abandon unprofitable branch lines (Musolf, *Uncle Sam's Private Profitseeking Corporations*, 89).

service obligations, effective January 1, 1983.[104] Crane reflected in retrospect that "Conrail's responsibility for commuter service, on which we'd lost upwards of $250 million in five years, was one thing that clearly had to go," and Lewis and Blanchette were more than happy to devolve government services to the states where possible.[105] Conrail's story would quickly become one of success: Crane managed to post the company's first-ever profit in 1981, and the railroad returned to the private sector as promised in 1987, with a huge initial public offering that netted $1.65 billion. Could the shakeup of NERSA have a similar effect on the New Haven Line?

Ravitch Sets the Stage, 1981–1983

On the MTA side of things, chairman Richard Ravitch negotiated the Congressionally-mandated handover by demanding additional funds and appointing experienced commuter rail leadership to manage the transition away from Conrail. Ravitch described the MTA's assumption of the Conrail commuter lines as an "unsought opportunity" presented to him over lunch by Drew Lewis; in other words, the MTA (or Ravitch, at least) had not seriously considered the prospect of taking over the lines, despite agitation from commuter groups tired of being subject to the whims of larger railroads.[106] Lewis's "opportunity" was of course less a suggestion and more a warning. Regardless, it set the wheels in motion for the MTA to take over the lines.

Ravitch's first step was to assemble a team to manage the transition. To this end, he brought in Peter Stangl, who was Assistant Commissioner of Public Transportation for New Jersey, to lead the group, along with Howard Permut, a transit executive from Chicago, and Donald Nelson, an experienced northeast railroader, among a few others.[107] Stangl had

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[104] Northeast Rail Services Act, 45 U.S.C. §1113 (1981).
[105] Crane, *Rise from the Wreckage: A Brief History of Conrail*, 26.
[106] Richard Ravitch, *So Much to Do: A Full Life of Business, Politics, and Confronting Fiscal Crises* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014), 155.
[107] "N.Y. MTA Metro-North Railroad Turns 30," Metro Magazine, January 2, 2013, http://www.metro-magazine.com/rail/news/289696/n-y-mta-metro-north-railroad-turns-30.

recommended the creation of New Jersey Transit to take over from the bankrupt railroads and bus companies that served commuters in that state. One of his first recommendations to Ravitch was that the MTA operate the Conrail lines directly, as opposed to contracting out operation to Amtrak or another private entity.[108] Stangl figured that the MTA would be held accountable for the railroad's performance regardless, and, given the precedent set by its longstanding operation of the LIRR, it would make sense to bring the northern lines in-house as well.[109] Stangl was also keenly aware of Amtrak's shortcomings: in his view Amtrak was inadequately funded by the federal government, which prevented it from attracting the best management, and it also had an interest in providing high-speed intercity service along the Northeast Corridor that could run counter to prioritizing commuter operations.[110]

Fearful of the additional costs of a transition to MTA ownership, Ravitch pressed Congress to provide funding to ensure that the MTA would not incur additional debt in taking over the railroad. He testified that the MTA and CDOT would need an additional $70 million to prevent fare increases attached to the takeover, and firmly stated that "It would be irresponsible for us to undertake operation of these lines in the absence of appropriate funding and we do not intend to do so."[111] Ravitch also requested unsuccessfully that Congress allow the MTA to place its future railroad employees under state labor protections rather than federal protections, which had cost Conrail large sums. Like Stangl, Ravitch shot down the argument that the MTA could avoid the costs of transition by opting for Amtrak, since Amtrak's burdensome labor agreements

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[108] Permut, interview. Boston's Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) elected to contract with Amtrak Commuter from 1987 until 2003, when relations strained to the point where the MBTA canceled its Amtrak contract and bid out operations to a private firm.
[109] Peter Stangl, interview by the author, phone, February 28, 2019.
[110] Stangl.
[111] *Commuter Rail Transition: Hearings Before the Subcomm. on Commerce, Transportation, and Tourism of the Comm. on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives*, 97th Cong. 2 (1982) (prepared statement of Richard Ravitch, Chairman of the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority), 511.

and low prospects for attracting top-shelf management made it highly unlikely to provide good service.[112]

The new Metro-North Commuter Railroad was inaugurated on New Year's Day, 1983, with Peter Stangl as its first president. Ravitch's activism before Congress had won the MTA funding from the federal government to defray the costs of transition.[113] Stangl emphasized the commuter-as-customer focus of the new railroad. In a flyer distributed to riders, he acknowledged that "Metro-North has no magic wand to undo the years of financial neglect that have left their mark on the quality of service you experience daily," but promised that it was a "challenge that those of us at Metro-North welcome and to which we are committed."[114] Despite the lack of ceremony—other than a visit by Stangl and his wife to Grand Central Terminal at midnight to quietly mark the switch—the change was momentous: in the coming decades, Metro-North would double its ridership with remarkable service improvements.[115] The creation of the new railroad provided an opportunity for Metro-North's management to renegotiate labor rules and subsidies, gaining it a stable financial footing as the railroad undertook the project of reversing decades of neglect.

Labor Rules Clash Halts the "Subway North"

On March 7, 1983, just two months after Metro-North came into being, its workforce went on strike, forcing 90,000 daily riders on the Harlem, Hudson, and New Haven Lines to struggle to find alternate ways to work. New Jersey Transit (NJT) had just experienced the start of a similar strike; NJT had attempted to cut pay for mid-day idle time while Metro-North sought

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[112] *Commuter Rail Transition Hearings* (1982) (statement of Richard Ravitch), 503.
[113] Ravitch, *So Much to Do*, 155.
[114] Peter E. Stangl, "Introducing Metro-North Commuter Railroad," 1982, Metro-North Railroad Collection, New York State Historical Documents, New York Transit Museum Archives ("Metro-North Archive").
[115] Ari L. Goldman, "State Agencies Take Command of Conrail Lines," *New York Times*, January 3, 1983.

unilateral control over train crew sizes in an effort to cut jobs (union work rules required as many as three trainmen—not counting the conductor—on commuter trains, even though only one was needed to operate the train).[116] Commuters interviewed were generally sympathetic to the MTA's demands, and the *New York Times* editorial page endorsed Ravitch's attempt at "shedding expensive customs and inexpensive habits."[117]

The strike illustrated just what life might have been like had the New Haven succeeded in dissolving commuter operations. Even with a large number of commuters taking buses provided by the MTA and CDOT and some opting to stay home, New York's northern highways were immediately "clogged" with "bumper-to-bumper traffic," and trip times doubled in length.[118] Five weeks into the strike, the *New York Times* doubled down on its position, asking, "Does anyone believe that a few hundred conductors have the right to damage the city's economy, inconvenience 90,000 commuters and put thousands of fellow rail employees out of work for no good reason?"[119]

The Metro-North strike ended on April 16, when the union agreed to enter binding arbitration with the railroad. In August, the arbitrators gave Metro-North additional power to determine train crew sizes while reserving consultation rights to the union; the settlement was mutually agreeable to both parties.[120] Stangl noted that while Metro-North did not get all the work rule changes it wanted, its management felt it had received enough concessions to justify the strike.[121] In retrospect, the degree to which the MTA resolved the strike to its advantage is much less clear. As the trains began rolling again, Ravitch revealed that he hoped to replace train

[116] Damon Stetson, "Railroad Workers Walk off the Job on 9 Jersey Lines," *New York Times*, March 1, 1983, 1.
[117] New York Times Editorial Board, "Paying, and Not Paying, for Transit," *New York Times*, March 8, 1983.
[118] Robert D. McFadden, "Rail Strike Clogs Traffic on Roads in New York Area," *New York Times*, March 8, 1983, 1.
[119] New York Times Editorial Board, "How Not to Conduct a Strike," *New York Times*, April 12, 1983.
[120] Damon Stetson, "Ruling Made on Metro-North Crew Sizes," *New York Times*, August 27, 1983.
[121] Stangl, interview.

conductors with a futuristic, magnetic stripe-based automatic fare collection system (a union negotiator pejoratively declared Ravitch's plan the "subway north").[122] Yet to this day, Metro-North continues to employ conductors to collect fares despite multiple attempts at implementing such a system (and widespread phasing-out of commuter rail conductors across the globe in favor of automatic payment). Though Metro-North may not have achieved the full victory over labor it had sought, its hardline approach demonstrated to the public a strong desire among the new leadership to streamline inefficiencies in the name of improving service.

Renegotiating Subsidies: Arbitrators Demand Connecticut Pay More

Metro-North achieved further financial stability when a new manager initiated renegotiation of its subsidy arrangement. It is almost impossible to imagine Conrail or Penn Central taking the same step in the name of its customers; they were more apt simply complain about their obligation to provide service to begin with. The MTA entered into voluntary arbitration with Connecticut in 1983 to renegotiate the subsidy split. New York and Connecticut had split costs for the New Haven Line evenly ever since Governors Rockefeller and Dempsey's agreement in 1965. Howard Permut, a member of the original Metro-North team, had argued during planning for the new railroad that the 50–50 split did not reflect the fact that Connecticut had more passengers riding the railroad than New York and that they were generally traveling farther.[123] The arbitration was not resolved until June 1985, when Connecticut was ordered to assume 56.29% of the total operating deficit under the so-called Amended and Restated Service Agreement (ARSA).[124]

[122] Ari L. Goldman, "Metro-North Plans Automatic Fare Setup," *New York Times*, April 18, 1983.
[123] Permut, interview.
[124] Paul Frisman, "Update of OLR Report 2005-R-0345 Regarding the Metro North Contract Analysis" (Connecticut Office of Legislative Research, 2015), https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/rpt/2015-R-0004.htm. Connecticut paid 60% for the first year after arbitration; this amount was reduced to 56.29% after calculations were made of the main line operating deficit for that first year.

The question of equitable subsidy would continue to nag Metro-North. In 1995, the states entered arbitration again, which this time further increased Connecticut's share of the deficit to 65%.[125] A Connecticut Department of Transportation report analyzing the ARSA characterized the MTA's leadership role in operating Metro-North service as the origins of the inequality between the two states, noting that before 1983 CDOT and MTA, "on more or less equal footing, dealt with an independent third party that ostensibly favored neither subsidizer."[126] Connecticut's gloss on this issue served to explain the increasingly inadequate funding the state had been giving Metro-North; from the late 1990s through the 2000s, Connecticut seriously "disinvested" in the New Haven Line.[127]

Metro-North at Ten: Reflecting on a Remarkable Turnaround

In 1993, Metro-North was almost unrecognizable from its condition ten years earlier. Its management boasted extraordinarily high performance metrics on a railroad formerly known for such stories as "the time the 4:08 arrived at 8:04."[128] The darling subject of such articles as "How Metro-North Did It: From Faltering to First-Rate in a Decade," Metro-North had improved its on-time performance from 80.5% to 96%, reduced costs (as measured by the percentage of the budget made up by fare revenues) from 63.2% to 47.3%, and lifted ridership by 17%.[129] By most accounts, Peter Stangl's businesslike approach to treat commuters as "customers" had worked. The states' capital programs had at last allowed the railroad to reach a level footing after years of deferred maintenance, labor had backed off its most arcane work rules, and the inclusion of the railroad in the MTA gave citizens and legislatures alike a greater sense of ownership in and

[125] Permut, interview.
[126] "Analysis of the Amended and Restated Service Agreement," 3.
[127] Permut, interview.
[128] "Topics: Helpful Conrail and Other Surprises," *New York Times*, October 9, 1980.
[129] Middleton, "How Metro-North Did It: From Faltering to First Rate in a Decade," 8–9.

responsibility for the line. Undoubtedly, public ownership of the railroad contributed significantly to this success, even if the push that led to the MTA's takeover came not from Albany or Hartford but from Capitol Hill and the White House. Subsidies and serious capital programs had failed to turn around deteriorating service on the New Haven Line for the two decades prior to 1983 as it was shuffled between three freight railroads equally uninterested in its success; it was not until the MTA assumed control of the line that its commuters' fortunes changed—rapidly—for the better.

Conclusion: Metro-North in the 21st Century and Beyond

Up until the 2010s, Metro-North's upward trajectory continued, albeit on a gradual slope. By its thirtieth anniversary, the railroad had fully doubled its ridership since inception, and in 2011 Metro-North became the first American railroad to win the Brunel Award for Overall Excellence in Railroad Design.[130]

Age has revealed some of the cracks in the railroad's formula. Connecticut and New York remain antagonistic about relative subsidy levels. The railroad has yet to implement basic upgrades like an automated fare collection system.[131] Despite extensive capital investments, the fastest ride times over the length of the New Haven Line are two minutes *slower* today than they were on the eve of the First World War.[132] A 2013 crash in Fairfield injured 65 and exposed inadequacies in Metro-North's track inspection procedures.[133]

One current Metro-North project merits mention in closing; it highlights some of the agency's strengths and pitfalls. Penn Station Access is a proposal dating as far back as 1999 for Metro-North to build stations in the Bronx along the so-called Hell Gate Line, Amtrak's route between Penn Station and the New Haven Line, which it meets at New Rochelle.[134] Penn Station Access would drastically improve transit service for this area of the East Bronx, halving the Manhattan commute time for more than 100,000 residents. The expansion would also give Metro-North more flexibility in routing trains and would dovetail with the MTA's East Side

[130] "N.Y. MTA Metro-North Railroad Turns 30," 30.
[131] The MTA announced on February 23, 2019, that it would implement a new contactless payment system, OMNY, for its subways and buses that would be expanded to commuter rail "over several years."
[132] Frank Juliano, "Train Ride to NYC Was Faster 100 Years Ago," Connecticut Post, September 16, 2014, https://www.ctpost.com/news/article/Train-ride-to-NYC-was-faster-100-years-ago-5757193.php.
[133] "Derailment and Subsequent Collision of Two Metro-North Passenger Trains," Railroad Accident Brief (National Transportation Safety Board, October 24, 2014), 1, 7, https://www.ntsb.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/RAB1409.pdf.
[134] "Watching as the Trains Pass, Then Having to Take the Bus," *New York Times*, June 26, 2002, https://nyti.ms/2ELUIUr; "Getting Back on Track: Unlocking the Full Potential of the New Haven Line" (New York: Regional Plan Association, January 2014), 24, http://library.rpa.org/pdf/RPA-Getting-Back-on-Track.pdf.

Access project to bring LIRR trains to Grand Central Terminal. Twenty years later, the $1 billion Penn Station Access project has at last been approved, as Amtrak and Metro-North resolved a months-long fight over access to the rail line, which Amtrak owns.[135]

Penn Station Access illustrates the best and worst of Metro-North. As a public agency, Metro-North is devoted to improving transportation access for all, including some lower- and middle-income Bronx residents, rather than simply serving the wealthy suburban white-collar workers living in Westchester and Fairfield counties. The Penn Station Access project is also demonstrative of a desire on the part of Metro-North to improve the customer experience, by expanding service on the New Haven Line to enable service to both Manhattan's East and West Sides. However, the delays on the project are indicative of the continued de-prioritization and underfunding of transit in the United States, even in a city as transit-rich as New York. Amtrak's bickering with Metro-North evinces the curious place of commuter rail in many American metropolises, particularly in the Northeast. While Metro-North is operated as part of a metropolitan transit agency, it must battle with Amtrak for priority on shared lines, and the two endlessly point to each other for under-investing in the infrastructure. The situation on the New Haven Line is further complicated by its bi-state nature; even Metro-North itself is continually underfunded due to perennial infighting.[136]

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[135] Thomas C. Zambito, "Penn Station Access Project Gets Green Light, Will Open West Side to Westchester Commuters for First Time," *Westchester Journal News*, January 22, 2019, https://www.lohud.com/story/news/transit/2019/01/22/penn-station-project-gets-green-light-opening-west-side-commuters/2643817002/. Amtrak sought to have Metro-North pay access fees for the line and finance a bridge repair in exchange for rights to operate along the Hell Gate Line.

[136] One might contrast the difficulties of creating and maintaining Metro-North with Paris's Réseau Express Régional (RER) commuter train system, which was built with heavy investment from the French government in the 1960s. RER is fully integrated with the Paris Métro, allowing it to serve city residents as an express alternative to the subway just as New York envisions Metro-North serving the Bronx along the Hell Gate Line. The French followed a European trend of investing national funds in urban mass transit in the 1960s, seeking to avoid the total collapse of transit witnessed in the United States. See Ladd, *Autophobia*, 134–5, for a further discussion of the divergence of American and international approaches to urban transportation. Today RER is the busiest urban rail line outside of Asia ("Regional Rail for Metropolitan Boston," TransitMatters, Winter 2018, http://transitmatters.org/appendix-a/).

The foresight of Governor Rockefeller saved the New Haven Line—and saved New York City from further destruction for automobile facilities—in the 1960s, just in time for the nascent environmental movement and the energy crises to give Americans another reason not to drive to and from work each day. As a gradual process of public acquisition and increasing subsidy culminated in the formation of Metro-North in 1983, commuting by rail became desirable again for residents of New York and Connecticut living near the New Haven Line. Recognizing commuter rail for the public transit that it is—a common good deserving of government subsidy in exchange for wide-ranging economic and quality-of-life benefits—set the New Haven Line up for success as Metro-North began to chart its own path in 1983.

(12,466 words)

Timeline

1848 New York & New Haven railroad is completed.

1949 Long Island Railroad (LIRR) enters receivership (bankruptcy), operation is subsidized by the State of New York.

1961 New Haven Railroad enters receivership; Interstate Commerce Commission mandates that it continue operating passenger services.

1965 New York State buys out the LIRR from the Pennsylvania Railroad and establishes the Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority (MCTA) to operate it. New York and Connecticut jointly subsidize the New Haven Line's commuter operations in equal shares.

1968 MCTA merges with the New York City Transit Authority, which operated buses and subways, and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority to form the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). The MTA also begins to oversee commuter rail operation north of the city on the New Haven Line and the New York Central Railroad.

1968 The New Haven, New York Central, and Pennsylvania Railroads are merged into the new Penn Central system, which takes over operating the New Haven's passenger services the next year.

1970 Penn Central declares bankruptcy; the federal government scrambles to deal with what was then the largest bankruptcy in American history.

1971 The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), formed by Congress the year prior to relieve railroads of unprofitable passenger operations, takes over all U.S. intercity passenger rail traffic. The MTA buys and the Connecticut Department of Transportation leases their respective portions of the New Haven Line from Penn Central.

1973 Congress passes the Rail Reorganization (3R) Act, which creates the United States Railway Association (USRA) to develop a plan to preserve rail service (which Congress still viewed as vital to industry) in the Northeast.

1976 Congress passes the Rail Revitalization and Regulatory Reform (4R) Act, which implements the USRA's plan for a new, government-owned Northeast rail carrier—the Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail)—to take over the freight and commuter services of the former Penn Central and achieve financial self-sufficiency. Commuter services were to be fully subsidized by the relevant regional commuter transportation authorities.

1981 The Reagan Administration targets Conrail, which had yet to turn a profit, as an unacceptably expensive government service and seeks its liquidation. Congress passes the Northeast Rail Service Act, which creates a profitability test for Conrail and allows it to transfer commuter operations (which were a clear money-loser) to local authorities.

1983 The newly-formed Metro-North Railroad, a division of the MTA, begins operating commuter service on the New Haven and former New York Central lines. After a crippling six-week strike, the railroad began continuous operation in April.

1985 An arbitration panel increases Connecticut's share of funding for the line from 50 to 60%. Connecticut buys its portion of the New Haven Line from the Penn Central trustees, securing complete control of the line to Metro-North.

Bibliographic Essay

Secondary Sources

Writing my essay about the Metro-North has posed several sourcing challenges but has also been a highly rewarding research experience. The secondary source base for writing on twentieth-century U.S. railroads is rich; however, most of these books tend to focus on the railroad industry on the whole (with an emphasis on freight rail) or, occasionally, on passenger rail. I have not found a scholarly treatment of commuter railroads in particular and how they weathered the demise of private passenger railroading in the mid-1900s.

As you will know from reading my essay, the history of the mergers, bankruptcies, and litigation surrounding the Northeast railroads in the 1960s–80s is extraordinarily complicated, and several key books have helped me get a grasp on this period. These include Richard Saunders's *Merging Lines: American Railroads, 1900–1970* (2001) and Robert Gallamore and John Meyer's *American Railroads: Decline and Renaissance in the Twentieth Century* (2014). Saunders's book gives an extraordinarily detailed window into the characters and issues that drove the often-fickle politicking that led to the mergers and failures of the 1960s. Both books provide an excellent overview of railroad regulatory history and help to draw out the longer saga of various attempts at nationalization and deregulation as the railroads lost their monopolistic edge in the twentieth century.

To supplement the broader scholarship I mentioned above, I drew on railroad journals for their detailed treatment of more specific issues. These articles were well-sourced and sought to shed new light on particular vignettes related to my project. The journal *Railroad History* has provided some excellent articles on the specific problems of the New Haven Railroad and an in-depth retrospective on the case of Penn Central in Geoffrey Doughty's "What to Do with the

New Haven" (Fall–Winter 2013) and Robert Holzweiss's "Penn Central Reconsidered" (Fall–Winter 2017), respectively. Another source in this genre, and the only secondary source I could find that centered Metro-North, is "How Metro-North Did It: From Faltering to First Rate in a Decade" by William Middleton in a special edition of *Passenger Train Journal* entitled *North American Commuter Rail 1994*. This article provides statistics showing the rapid turnaround the railroad accomplished in its first ten years of operation, arguing that New York and Connecticut's aggressive modernization programs and the total focus on commuters enabled the railroad to drastically improve service.

Another class of sources that informed my paper were popular histories. These books, usually replete with railfan photographs and anecdotes, were useful for getting a clearer sense of the culture surrounding the railroad as well as a sort of insider view of the issues that agitate the many railfans who cherish the industry and know its ins and outs. Such titles as *On the 8:02: An Informal History of Commuting by Rail in America* by Lawrence Grow (1979) and *Next Stop Grand Central: A Trip through Time on New York's Metropolitan Area Commuter Railroads* by Stan Fischler (1986) gave some excellent vignettes in the history of the New Haven but were generally frustratingly vague and informal in their sourcing. *Conrail* (2004), by Timothy Doherty and Brian Solomon, was a helpful resource for understanding that railroad's creation and operational history and made the argument that although the railroad eventually split up, it was a success. Unfortunately, *Conrail* did not contain much information on its commuter services (a perhaps unsurprising if disappointing fact given how marginal they were in comparison to Conrail's freight business).

While the source base for commuter rail was quite limited, I found a wide range of supplementary reading on the history of public transportation, suburban development, and the reign of the automobile that helped inform my broader thinking about the project. Sam Bass Warner's seminal work on commuting patterns along streetcar lines in Boston, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900* (1969) helped motivate the project and explained how radial railroad lines extending from a major metropolis dictated urban and suburban development. *Getting There: The Epic Struggle between Road and Rail in the American Century* by Stephen Goddard (1996) was an excellent resource for comparing the favorable treatment given by the government to private automobiles and truckers to the burdensome regulation and taxation experienced by the railroads (due to legacy antitrust fears). *Autophobia: Love and Hate in the Automobile Era* by Brian Ladd (2008) helped provide international perspective on the U.S.'s comparative disinvestment in public transit in the mid-20th century.

Primary Sources

In my project, I have encountered a rich and varied primary source base with some frustrating gaps. My first discovery was the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad archives at the University of Connecticut Library's Archives and Special Collections in Storrs. The library has extensive holdings related to the railroad, including corporate records, photographs, and ephemera as well as the records of the New Haven Railroad Historical and Technical Association. These archives include extensive documentation of the railroad's final bankruptcy in 1961 and preparation for the merger with the Pennsylvania and New York Central Railroads in the 1960s. Over the course of three research visits, I consulted these documents with the help of Laura Smith, a librarian who specializes in UConn's railroad history collection.

Finding material related to Conrail and Metro-North was much more difficult. I found a single finding aid for a Metro-North collection held by the New York City Transit museum in Brooklyn. Unfortunately, this collection contained only a smattering of documents from the first ten years or so of Metro-North's operation, including a handful of annual reports and capital improvement programs. The most useful items from this collection were ephemera including several issues of *The Commuter*, the MTA's commuter relations pamphlet from the 1970s, and a 1982 flyer by Peter Stangl, Metro-North's first president, announcing the railroad's coming transition as a departure from "poor and uncomfortable" Conrail service. I was also able to find an incomplete set of MTA annual reports from the 1970s at the Science, Industry, and Business Library of the New York Public Library.

Beyond these archival visits, I found the remainder of my primary sources online or in print through the Yale Library and inter-library loans. Many of these sources were judiciary, Interstate Commerce Commission, and state and congressional documents, which provided a first-hand look into the federal- and state-level testimony and legislative thinking during these periods of restructuring for the railroads. I also made extensive use of the *New York Times*'s digitized archive to examine newspaper coverage of the experience of commuters on the New Haven Line as well as factual details on the day-by-day progress of mergers, subsidy negotiations, and management changeover.

Another set of sources I made use of were a handful of studies conducted by outside consultants and academics on commuting in the 1960s. These works bridged the gap between primary and secondary sources because they were used contemporaneously by lawmakers, judges, and the railroads as scientific support for their agendas, even though they frequently drew wildly different conclusions. *Future Highways and Urban Growth*, a 1961 report by New Haven-based Wilbur Smith and Associates centered the automobile and in the fashion of its time called for urban freeway construction while admitting the necessity of transit for peak-period trips. *Commuter Transportation: A Study of Passenger Transportation in the New Jersey–New*

York–Connecticut Metropolitan Region with Particular Reference to Railroad Commutation, a 1961 publication prepared by the venerable Regional Plan Association of New York for the United States Senate, posited the necessity of commuter rail more forcefully. "The Decline of Railroad Commutation," a 1962 *Business History Review* article by influential urban historian George Hilton imagined car-oriented Los Angeles as the city of the future, showing the wide range of responses from planners to what was known as the "urban transportation problem" during the height of the automobile era.

Finally, I conducted oral interviews with four former MTA employees, which helped me understand many of the issues—both contemporary and past—occupying the minds of the railroad's public transit management and gave me a better sense of the arc of the Metro-North's now 36 years of service. These were with Lee Sander, MTA executive director from 2007 to 2009, Howard Permut, Metro-North president from 2008 to 2014, Peter Stangl, Metro-North president from 1983 to 1991 and MTA chairman from 1991 to1995, and Richard Ravitch, MTA chairman from 1979 to 1983. Permut, Stangl, and Ravitch were part of a small group that built the Metro-North in the early 1980s. They provided valuable insights on the planning for Metro-North, the varying level of cooperation between New York and Connecticut in running and funding the New Haven Line, and Metro-North's experience renegotiating labor rules with its unions.

Conclusion

It was a pleasure to compile such a broad source base for this project, although it was at times overwhelming to try to maintain a comprehensive grasp on such a variegated and beleaguered history as that of commuting on the New Haven Line, even in just a three-decade period. The main gap in my sources lies with the MTA; it was difficult to determine why Metro-North was not created until 1983 (beyond the action of Congress and the Reagan Administration to relieve Conrail of its commuter obligations) when service on its lines had been poor for over two decades and the MTA had run the Long Island Railroad since 1965.

Though the gap in secondary source coverage of the privatization of commuter railroading in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s was frustrating because I had to piece together bits of information from many sources, it was satisfying to feel like the work I produced brought to the foreground an under-sung but vital part of the daily life of American railroading as it suffered the most major crisis in its history.

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