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As five towns wait for Hartford Line train stations, transit-oriented developments move forward



RENDERING | CONTRIBUTED A rendering of a proposed train station along the Hartford Line in Windsor Locks.

By [Sean Teehan](#)

Gov. Ned Lamont's 10-year, \$21-billion transportation plan announced in early November included funding for two new Hartford Line train stations in

Windsor Locks and Enfield, which are seen as key to driving transit-oriented developments in those two northern Connecticut towns.

But while funding for those stations could be in jeopardy after Lamont failed to garner political support for wide-scale tolling, those communities and others hoping to one day land a train station have already kick-started plans to build apartments and other mixed-use developments that could thrive with easy access to rail service.

“We’re actually doing things,” said Chris Bromson, town manager of Enfield, which plans to spend up to \$4.2 million for a train platform if state funding for a \$50-million train station doesn’t materialize. “We’re not waiting, we’re not sitting on our hands with our hand out.”

Lamont’s CT2030 transportation investment plan, which included tolling cars and trucks in 14 locations, was soundly rejected by Republicans and Democrats, forcing the governor to support a scaled-down, trucks-only tolling option he says would raise \$187 million in annual revenue, helping to finance \$19.4 billion in transportation improvements over a decade. A spokesman for Lamont said the administration still views the train stations as a critical investment, but stopped short of guaranteeing funding for them under the trucks-only tolls plan.

Lawmakers could vote on that plan in January during a special session.

The Hartford Line currently has eight stops — seven in Connecticut, and one in Massachusetts — which have already spurred various developments along the 62-mile Springfield-to-New Haven route.

Investments in new mixed-use developments near existing or proposed Hartford Line rail stations have totaled approximately \$430 million, according to Judd Everhart, spokesman for the state Department of Transportation.

Those projects, which encompass 1,400 residential units and 242,000 square feet of commercial and office space, date back to at least 2010, years before the Springfield-to-New Haven line expansion debuted, but in anticipation of its potential impact.

In Berlin, for example, there is an \$18-million plan to build a mixed-use village with 76 apartments and 19,000 square feet of medical office and commercial space on a four-acre parcel near the town's recently built train station at 51 Depot Road.

However, there wasn't enough funding to build train stations in five other communities: Enfield, West Hartford, Windsor Locks, Newington and North Haven.

In recent years those towns have quietly put together development plans near potential train-station locations, hoping that would get them to the front of the line when state funding becomes available.

Lamont's transportation plan originally chose Windsor Locks and Enfield as winners, though that funding now remains uncertain.

Regardless, most of these towns are still moving forward with transit-oriented development plans, hoping that stations or platforms will one day be built in their backyards.

Enfield has long lobbied for a train station in its Thompsonville section, Bromson said. That desire played a large role in recent development in the area, like the conversion of the former Bigelow-Hartford Carpet Mills factory on North Main Street into a 471-unit apartment complex adjacent to where the train station or platform will go.

The luxury apartments are about 95 percent occupied, Bromson said, adding that such living units with close proximity to rail service attract older individuals who are downsizing, and younger people fond of public transportation.

“There isn’t this love affair as much today, especially among young people, with cars,” Bromson said. “They use mass transportation like my parents and grandparents did; so that’s a remarkable change.”



Kristen Gorski, Economic Development Specialist, West Hartford

West Hartford was hoping for a train station near its CTfastrak busway stop on Flatbush Avenue, said Kristen Gorski, the town’s economic-development specialist.

A rail stop would bolster efforts the town has made to attract developers to the New Park Avenue corridor, and make the area less car-centric, Gorski said.

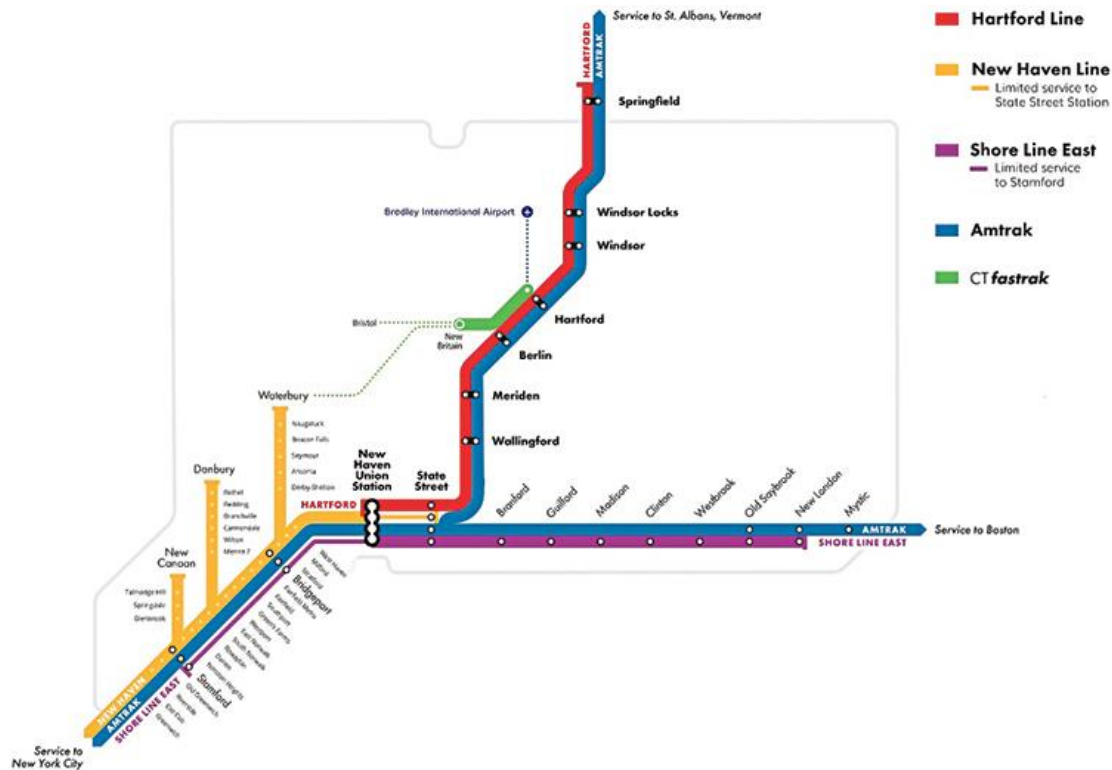
In 2015, the town amended zoning regulations to allow for mixed-use development in the New Park Avenue district, which is home to several key manufacturers like Colt, to allow for residential as well as industrial development.

Three years later, Trout Brook Realty Advisors completed the \$20-million 616 New Park mixed-use development, which includes 54 apartment units and 3,000 square feet of retail space, Gorski said.

The developer has already proposed a similar 52-unit mixed-use apartment project nearby, Gorski said.

West Hartford and Department of Transportation officials were relatively early in the planning stages for the train station when funding was cut, Gorski said. But she believes development that has already occurred near the CTfastrak station at the intersection of New Park and Flatbush avenues demonstrates the likelihood of further development benefiting Hartford as well as West Hartford if the train station were built.

“We were incredibly disappointed as a community to find out that funding was cut,” Gorski said. “I think the Fastrak stations have helped us a great deal in terms of increasing transit-oriented development and having conversations with prospective developers who may now have interest in that area where they may not have before.”



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Planning ahead

Windsor Locks already has a Hartford Line rail platform, but the town wants to build an actual station on Canal Bank Road.

That station would sit next door to the \$64-million, 160-unit Montgomery Mill apartment redevelopment that debuted in August.

Windsor Locks Director of Planning and Development Jennifer Rodriguez said the project was partially meant to encourage DOT to build a train station nearby, but it's demonstrating other benefits.

“The Montgomery Mill is a perfect example of a transit-oriented development project, a catalyst site,” Rodriguez said. “We’ve had an uptick in small businesses on Main Street, we have more inquiries than we have

space right now, so we're hopeful that more new construction proposals will come in the near future.”

Additionally, the town recently selected a development group — Windsor Locks TOD LLC, led by project manager Todd McClutchy of Stamford-based JHM Group of Cos. — to lead the conceptual planning of a mixed-use development on Main Street near where the train station would be built. The area is known as Windsor Locks Commons.

The development group proposed a multi-phased project that would include construction of one or two four-story buildings with 15,000 to 20,000 square feet of commercial space and up to 70 residential units.

The town also proposed fixing a retaining wall and developing a parcel across the street from the Commons into another mixed-use building and parking garage, but no developer has officially expressed interest in that project.

Meantime, the town of Newington recently created a 64-acre mixed-use overlay zone north and south of Cedar Street, where a \$55-million train station would go.

The zone would make transit-oriented development possible, said Andrew Brecher, the town's economic-development director.

Brecher said a train station in Newington would be good for the town, and the Hartford Line.

“This Newington station has the greatest potential for any [proposed station] along the Hartford Line,” Brecher said

Waiting game



Michael Freda, First Selectman, North Haven

North Haven First Selectman Michael Freda said his town is an attractive place for a train station because of recent development that’s been done near the proposed site off the Route 40 connector, which is also accessible to Hamden and Cheshire residents.

The spot abuts a 144-unit apartment building, and medical facilities that employ about 400 people, Freda said.

The train station could also be a catalyst for redeveloping the vacant Pharmacia and Upjohn Company LLC site on Stiles Lane, but without state funding, North Haven can’t muster the funds necessary for the project, he said.

“The unknown is when the state transportation fund will have enough funding in it to get this project under construction,” Freda said. “So where it leaves us right now? We’re in a pause phase, we’re on hold.”