

## Union Station: How to pay for ongoing operations?

Jim Kinney | [jkinney@repub.com](mailto:jkinney@repub.com) By Jim Kinney | [jkinney@repub.com](mailto:jkinney@repub.com)

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on December 08, 2014 at 6:00 PM, updated December 08, 2014 at 8:29 PM

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SPRINGFIELD — The rebuilding of Springfield's historic **Union Station** might be paid for — there is \$82 million in state and federal funding secured — but what about the money to run it on a day-to-day basis?

"You've got this great station, but then you have to pay the operation expenses," said Vicki L. Shotland, executive director of the **Greater Hartford Transit District**, which runs Hartford's Union Station.

Hartford's Union Station costs about \$300,000 a year to operate, she said. New Haven's Union Station, a larger facility with Amtrak and Metro North commuter service, is about a \$6 million-a-year operation.

Chris Moskal, executive director of the Springfield Redevelopment Authority, which owns Springfield's Union Station, said he doesn't yet know what the annual operating expenses will be here. But it will be determined soon. The station opens in late 2016.

"Your Union Station is going to lose money," said David Panagore, a former economic developer in Springfield who now runs the New Haven Parking Authority, which runs the **Union Station** there. "The parking is going to make money. Never separate the two. You have to use the parking to subsidize the station itself."

Panagore and Shotland were among the speakers Monday as U.S. Rep. Richard Neal, of Springfield, led a delegation of Springfield-area civic and business leaders to tour stations in New Haven and Hartford.

Neal is a longtime backer of the \$82 million Union Station project ongoing in Springfield. The tour ended with travelers walking from the part of Springfield's station Amtrak uses to the part it will use in the future, a long tunnel leading to what was once a magnificent grand concourse.

The space, which has not yet been renovated, is similar to the Jazz Age grandeur of New Haven's station.

"A Union Station with a grand concourse is going to be a reality," Neal said. "I believe in selling projects. And we are taking people on this trip today to sell people on the possibilities of this project."

Neal helped get \$73 million in federal stimulus money to repair the rails from Vermont to New Haven. The first trains run on the new line, which reroutes them back to Holyoke and Northampton, later this month.

By late 2016, Connecticut and Massachusetts officials hope to have added more commuter service, as many as 16 trains to Springfield a day, up from about seven now.

Neal said Springfield's Union Station was once a center of civic and commercial life. It was where generations of service members left for war and where those lucky enough to survive returned.

"Union Station has a hold on all of us," he said.

In Hartford, the operations budget comes from rent. Shotland said it's at full occupancy now. Tenants in the station itself include Peter Pan Bus Lines, Subway and Dunkin' Donuts. Hartford's regional transit agency is coming soon once a **\$35 million renovation is completed.**

The rest of the building is occupied by the Hot Tomato Restaurant, Capital Workforce Partners, which is like the Regional Employment Boards in Massachusetts, and business like Propark, which runs the parking facilities in Hartford, and Crosskey Architects.

"The idea is to, regardless of what the space looks like, tell people you have a Class A building," Shotland said. "Sit down with these prospective tenants and let them know that they are welcome, but that someone else is looking at the space if they don't take it."

It is a balancing act, she said. Could they make more money by renting to someone other than Dunkin'? But what do train passengers want to see?

In New Haven, Panagore said he's frustrated that there aren't enough vendors with local flavor. New Haven is known as the home of great pizza, but the station has a rather pedestrian Sbarro franchise that can be found at any mall.

The plan in New Haven is to one day expand the building and replace benches in the central concourse with restaurant seating tables, Panagore said.

In Springfield, Neal said local development officials have leads. Besides Peter Pan and Amtrak, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority will move in. MGM Springfield has agreed to take space.

"I'm sure there are other tenants out there," Neal said. "It's their job to go out and identify them."

Moskal said it will be easier to sell tenants on space once it is nearing completion.

The Springfield Union Station will have four stalls, like mall food-court spaces, of 1,000 square feet each. There will also be an additional 66,000 square feet of office and retail space located elsewhere in the building.

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