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## OLR Bill Analysis

### sSB 237

#### **AN ACT CONCERNING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION.**

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*Requires DOT, by July 1, 2026, to increase Shore Line East rail line's service frequency and number of runs based on specified considerations*

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*Requires DOT, when doing any statewide bus service study during 2026, to (1) assess increasing service frequency on the bus transit route between the Naugatuck Valley region and New Haven at peak times and (2) give the study to the Transportation Committee within 30 days of completing it*

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##### §§ 5 & 9 — FREE BUS PASSES FOR VETERANS

*Requires DVA to buy passes for state-owned or -controlled public buses and distribute them without cost to Connecticut veterans; appropriates \$1 million for these purposes to DVA from the General Fund for FY 27*

##### § 6 — TRANSIT DISTRICT OPERATING SUBSIDIES

*Requires the DOT commissioner to (1) give operating subsidies to transit districts that provide up to a 50% fare discount to veterans, seniors, youth, and people with disabilities and (2) establish eligibility criteria, an application process, and reporting requirements*

#### **SUMMARY**

This bill makes various changes in public transit-related laws. A section-by-section analysis follows.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, except the provisions on the (1) Shore Line East rail line and Department of Transportation (DOT) bus service study are effective upon passage and (2) mass transit fare increase notices are effective October 1, 2026.

### **§ 1 — SHORE LINE EAST RAIL LINE SERVICE**

*Requires DOT, by July 1, 2026, to increase Shore Line East rail line's service frequency and number of runs based on specified considerations*

The bill requires DOT, by July 1, 2026, to increase Shore Line East rail line's service frequency and number of runs to levels comparable to those that existed before the service reduction due to the governor-declared COVID-19 public health and civil preparedness emergencies. In doing so, the department must consider ridership data, connectivity with other rail lines and public transportation services, workforce commuting patterns, employer hiring activity and feedback, and seasonal tourism demands.

The bill specifies that the goal of the increase is to reduce passenger waiting times and increase service reliability.

### **§ 2 — DOT STATEWIDE BUS SERVICE STUDY**

*Requires DOT, when doing any statewide bus service study during 2026, to (1) assess increasing service frequency on the bus transit route between the Naugatuck Valley region and New Haven at peak times and (2) give the study to the Transportation Committee within 30 days of completing it*

The bill requires DOT, when doing any statewide bus service study during the 2026 calendar year, to (1) assess the feasibility of increasing service frequency on the bus transit route between the Naugatuck Valley region and New Haven at peak times and (2) include related recommendations for ensuring service meets public demand and reduces passenger waiting times.

Under the bill, within 30 days after DOT completes any such study, the department must send the results to the Transportation Committee.

### **§§ 3 & 7 — DOT MASS TRANSIT FARE INCREASE NOTICE**

*Specifies that current law's notice requirements for DOT mass transit fare changes only apply to fare increases and modifies the way in which the department must advertise the notice*

The bill specifies that (1) a provision of current law requiring DOT to follow a notice process before changing fares for mass land transportation (rail and bus services) only applies to fare increases and (2) the notice must include both the date and time the increase will take effect, rather than just the date as under current law.

The bill also modifies the way in which DOT must advertise this notice by requiring the department to do so in one or more newspapers with circulation in all areas that would be affected by the proposed fare increase. Under current law, DOT must do so in at least one newspaper with general circulation in all areas of the state that may be affected by the fare change. As under existing law, unchanged by the bill, DOT must advertise this notice at least once.

The bill specifies that the advertised notice must include the date (in addition to the time and place as current law requires) that a public hearing will be held on the proposed fare increase.

Additionally, the bill makes a technical change by specifying that the Uniform Administrative Procedure Act (UAPA) does not apply to the law on mass land transportation fare changes (§ 7). Existing law on these fare changes already exempts them from UAPA.

### **§§ 4 & 8 — FREE BUS PASS PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS**

*Requires SDE to administer a program providing grants to school boards to (1) buy passes for state-owned or -controlled public buses and (2) distribute them without cost to public school students in grades 9-12; appropriates \$3 million for the program to SDE from the General Fund for FY 27*

The bill requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to administer a program providing grants to local or regional boards of education ("school boards") for (1) purchasing passes for state-owned or -controlled public buses (CTtransit buses) and (2) distributing them without cost to public school students in grades 9-12 under participating school boards' jurisdiction. The bill appropriates \$3 million for the program to SDE from the General Fund for FY 27.

The bill authorizes SDE to develop guidelines and grant criteria needed to administer the program, including setting the application process. Each school board that receives a grant must submit to SDE any reports and financial statements the department requires. If SDE finds that any grant is being used for purposes not allowed by the bill, the department may require the school board to repay the state.

The bill requires SDE, starting by July 1, 2027, to annually report on the program to the Education and Transportation committees, including on the number of grants it awarded during the prior year and the program's impact on student outcomes.

### **Background**

**Related Law on School Board Bus Passes.** PA 25-65 (§ 37) allows school boards to (1) purchase passes for state-owned or -controlled public buses at a discounted rate and (2) distribute the passes at no cost to public school students in grades 9-12 under their jurisdiction or sell them to these students at cost or for a reduced cost (codified at CGS § 13b-38j(c)).

### **§§ 5 & 9 — FREE BUS PASSES FOR VETERANS**

*Requires DVA to buy passes for state-owned or -controlled public buses and distribute them without cost to Connecticut veterans; appropriates \$1 million for these purposes to DVA from the General Fund for FY 27*

The bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to purchase passes for state-owned or -controlled public buses (CTtransit buses) and distribute them without cost to Connecticut veterans. It relatedly (1) appropriates \$1 million for these purposes to DVA from the General Fund for FY 27, (2) requires veterans to apply to DVA for the bus passes, and (3) allows DVA to develop guidelines and criteria needed to distribute the passes, including setting the application process.

The bill requires DVA, starting by July 1, 2027, to annually report to the Veterans' and Military Affairs and Transportation committees on the number of passes it purchased and distributed during the prior year and the impact on veterans.

Under the bill, a “veteran” is anyone honorably discharged or released under honorable conditions, or released with an other than honorable discharge based on a qualifying condition, from active service in the armed forces (the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Space Force, Air Force, and any of their reserve components, including the Connecticut National Guard when under federal service) (CGS § 27-103).

**§ 6 — TRANSIT DISTRICT OPERATING SUBSIDIES**

*Requires the DOT commissioner to (1) give operating subsidies to transit districts that provide up to a 50% fare discount to veterans, seniors, youth, and people with disabilities and (2) establish eligibility criteria, an application process, and reporting requirements*

The bill requires the DOT commissioner to give an operating subsidy to any transit district that provides a fare discount, not exceeding 50%, to: veterans (as defined above), seniors (people age 65 or older), youth (people age 18 or younger), and people with disabilities. The subsidies are to offset a transit district’s revenue losses from providing these fare discounts. Under the bill, the DOT commissioner must establish related eligibility criteria, an application process, and reporting requirements. (By law, a transit district is responsible for setting its own passenger fares and other rates (CGS § 7-273d).)

PA 25-65 (§ 37) (a related law) generally requires the DOT commissioner to give up to a 50% fare discount for state-owned or -controlled public buses (CTtransit buses) to the same groups discussed above (veterans, seniors, youth, and people with disabilities) (codified at CGS § 13b-38j(a)).

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Transportation Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 35 Nay 1 (03/16/2026)