

## The History of Railroads in Westbrook

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Westbrook has a long history with the railroad that goes back over a century. Today, the Northeast corridor, Amtrak's busiest, runs through the center of Westbrook with trains roaring at speeds over 100 MPH carrying over 12.1 million people between Washington and Boston yearly (Abrams). Locally Westbrook is served by the Shore Line East which has run between New Haven and New London since 1990. Westbrook has a long history with the railroad from its inception in the 1850s, to a second station at Grove Beach, to nearly becoming the terminus for the Connecticut Valley Railroad. Westbrook's history with the railroad runs deeper than meets the eye.

In 1850 construction started on the New Haven and New London railroad and two years later in July, 1852, the first train came through Westbrook (Karr, 84). That same year the station was built and opened in Westbrook. The original Westbrook station is actually still standing. It has been moved back from the track and is now the site of The Highliner Restaurant. They did build a second building at the station in 1906 but it has long been destroyed, possibly a victim of the 1938 hurricane (Stations: W-WE [Westbrook]). Westbrook station has a deep history but, it was not the only station in the town.

There was a second station established within the borders of Westbrook on the western edge of town at Grove Beach by 1873. In 1884 a reporter remarked that he was impressed by, "a large excursion of twelve carloads... from New London." In 1899 the station did get a new building similar to the one at the main Westbrook station. Over time the Grove Beach ridership numbers declined and the station became only a flag stop. Eventually in 1938 the Grove Beach stop was removed as an official stop on the line (Stations: G [Grove Beach]). Even though the

Grove Beach station was eventually closed, it showed the importance Westbrook had for the railroad and led to Westbrook almost playing the important role in another critical railroad line for the state.

In the late 1860s a group of Hartford businessmen and the state were looking to put a railroad line from Hartford to The Shoreline that went through the Connecticut Valley. The company they would form was called the Connecticut Valley Railroad (Miller, 2-3). Westbrook and Old Saybrook were the two options for the terminus of the railroad on the shoreline. Ultimately, it was decided that Old Saybrook would be the shoreline terminus for the CVRR (Connecticut Valley Railroad). Old Saybrook was chosen over Westbrook because Old Saybrook already had the docks to accept the freight from the boats, and because Westbrook's breakwater would make it a challenge to build the docks needed (Miller,4). Even though Westbrook did not end up as the terminus for the CVRR, being a final option showed how important the town was to the railroad.

Westbrook has a rich town history, but one lesser-known part is the railroad even though it cuts through the center of the town. From the stations, to a near miss with CVRR, to being part of Amtrak's busiest rail line today, it is certainly clear that Westbrook's history also extends to the history of the railroad. Hopefully, the railroad continues to be a part of Westbrook well into the future.

## Bibliography

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