



March 3, 2008

GENERAL ASSEMBLY TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Senator Donald DeFronzo, Co-Chair
Representative Antonio Guerrero, Co-Chair
Room 2300, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

GENERAL ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

Senator Gayle Slossberg, Co-Chair
Representative Christopher Caruso, Co-Chair
Room 2200, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Public Hearing on HB 5041: AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, AVIATION AND PORTS AND A DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS.

Members of the Transportation and GAE Committees:

As public service employees working for the State of Connecticut and members of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, we share the Governor's goal of improving public transportation options and directing more resources to our members who work in rail and mass-transit, but we feel that more is needed than simply the creation of new agencies.

Re-organization for the sake of re-organization will do little to remake the Department of Transportation (DOT) into an efficient, quality-first provider of public services. We believe the state needs an inter-modal approach that integrates highways, rails, ships, and airports, and empowers the entire workforce to work together to solve transportation problems. Simply dividing up the existing agency and existing resources does not guarantee more resources to meet our state's needs or that existing resources will be used wisely.

Right now in the DOT, we don't have a clear vision or quality leadership for one agency; how are we going to have vision and leadership in two or three?

Right now we don't provide enough resources to establish a quality mass transportation system; how will we get more money to mass transportation by splitting the department?

Right now we don't have a coherent and integrated vision on how to develop a transportation policy that will spur economic development with one agency; how are we going to have a coherent plan with two or three agencies?

Nowhere in the many reports, meetings and budgets issued in the last two years since DOT's systemic failure on I-84 has anyone articulated what that vision should be. So far, the only vision we've seen is more demand for flexibility for consultants and more outsourcing.

Michael J. O'Brien
President

Patrice Peterson
Secretary/Treasurer

Robert D. Rinker
Executive Director

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For example, if this was a well thought through answer to our transportation problems, why didn't the Governor's hand-picked task force – her Commission on the Reorganization of the DOT – recommend de-centralization as a solution?

Last August, our members presented our "5-Point Plan for Reforming the DOT: 'Safety, Security, and Savings'" to the Governor's Commission. Four of the five proposals had been shared with then-Commissioner Ralph Carpenter eight months earlier. We had advocated for our first recommendation, reforming the way the department contracts-out transportation projects, for more than a decade.

Copies of the plan were submitted to your committees with our testimony, as well.

But just don't just listen to us. Dean Pagani, a former Rowland Administration official said in a recent news article:

"Connecticut needs a transportation vision with legislative and executive branch power behind it over the long term."

The perception is that mass transit is the enlightened approach to our transportation future. If that is the direction we want to head in as a state, then the political leadership of the state must commit to making it happen. Plans must be made, revenue needs to be generated, and political leaders need to follow through to make sure the work is done.

Re-organization on its face is a neither a good, nor bad, idea. Nor does it guarantee that the steps Mr. Pagani lays out will be carried out. Most importantly, it misses the opportunity to address the DOT's main problem:

The Department of Transportation has devolved from an agency that, in the wake of the Mianus bridge disaster, was dedicated to quality, to one that is an ATM for politically connected consultants to get fat contracts.

Once the goals of quality are developed, leadership is in place, and consultants reigned in, then the front-line workers that we represent will roll up their sleeves and get to work on rebuilding Connecticut's transportation infrastructure for the needs of the next century.

Thank you for taking time to hear us. We hope this is the year that the Administration will begin to listen to us, as well. After all, we are committed to the same outcome; reforming the culture at the State Department of Transportation.

Michael J. O'Brien

Supervising Sanitary Engineer, CT Dept. of Environmental Protection
CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 Executive Council President

John A. Vitale

Property Agent, CT Dept. of Transportation
President, P-4 Council, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001

cc: Members, Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee
Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell
Connecticut Lieutenant Governor Michael Fidele
Acting Department of Transportation Commissioner Emil Frankel

Memo

To: Governor M. Jodi Rell's Commission on the Reorganization of the Department of Transportation
From: CSEA/SEIU Local 2001
Date: 8/9/2007
Re: Five-Point Plan for Reforming the Culture at the Connecticut DOT

"Safety, Security, and Savings"

1. Reform the Policy of Contracting-Out Public Transportation Projects

Passage of AN ACT CONCERNING CLEAN CONTACTING STANDARDS, legislation that is supported by the Governor, non-profit service providers, a majority of lawmakers from both parties, and public sector union members, in a special session this summer would:

- a. Require the State to perform a cost-benefit analysis before contracting-out public projects to private consultants;
- b. Improve accountability, transparency and assure results-based outcomes by creating a process to review contracted work; and
- c. Create common-sense standards to ensure that accountable public service workers perform core public service functions, such as bridge and road inspections.

2. Fill Staffing Shortfalls and Vacancies in the DOT Employee Workforce

Recent news reports have revealed the agency has lost 1,000 workers over the past twelve years, and critical workforce shortages exist among many positions that impact public safety within the agency. Our report, Highway Robbery, found the DOT consistently retains an outsourced consultant workforce, including an average of nearly 400 full time equivalent design and inspection engineers, during the period of the report's study.

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3. Improve Recruiting of New Engineers to the DOT Employee Workforce

Several concrete steps would go a long way to enable the department to be more competitive in attracting the next generation of engineers to meet our 21st century transportation and infrastructure needs, such as:

- a. Establish a hiring rate of Step 5 for the Transportation Engineer 1 classification to assist recruitment;
- b. Create a path for promotion to the Transportation Engineer 2 level for our nearly 175 Engineer 1's in the agency to allow for progression to the working professional level; and
- c. Eliminate restrictions for both the Transportation Engineer 3 and Supervising Transportation Engineer positions to improve retention of a highly skilled workforce.

4. Create Greater Flexibility in DOT Employee Work Schedules

The department has one of the most restrictive, paternalistic, and draconian "alternate work schedule" (AWS) programs among State agencies, restricting its professional workforce to a thirty-five hour work, despite the fact our managers are on a forty-hour schedule. A voluntary forty-hour workweek will provide an long-term workers in our department an incentive to continue their careers with the agency, while also attracting a greater diversity among new engineers and professional employees.

5. Establish a More Consistent Policy on the Overtime Cap

As our member who testified during the first day of hearings into the I-84 "Little Dig" oversight fiasco last month illustrated, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) must grant the department the authority to allow its engineers, inspectors, and safety planners to work overtime. This will empower agency employees to put public safety ahead of bureaucratic policy.