



Testimony of Ryan Lynch, Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Connecticut Legislature – Joint Committee on Transportation
Hearing on HB-5041
Monday, March 3, 2008

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB-5041. My name is Ryan Lynch, and I am the Senior Planner and Connecticut Coordinator for Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation system in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey.

There has been much fanfare surrounding Governor Rell's recent proposal to split ConnDOT into a Department of Highways and a Department of Public Transportation, Ports, and Aviation, but this emphasis on bureaucratic reorganization is the wrong reform at the right time.

Instead of restructuring ConnDOT, the Governor and General Assembly should capitalize on momentum for transportation reform by implementing the sustainable transportation policies that actually made it into the Governor's Commission to Reform the Department of Transportation recommendations, namely smart growth and "Fix-it-First".

Legislating a "Fix-it-First" policy that prioritizes maintenance and repair of existing road and bridge infrastructure over highway expansion projects should be the centerpiece of any transportation agenda for the Spring 2008 legislative session in Connecticut. Why? Because existing roads and bridges are crumbling while the state embarks on highway expansion projects that won't solve long term congestion problems and will only encourage more driving.

According to TSTC's analysis of the 2007-2010 State Transportation Implementation Plan, the "blueprint" for the state's transportation priorities, ConnDOT spends 32% of its total budget on highway expansion projects, while only 19% is spent on highway maintenance and repair — an irresponsible agenda in a state where roads and bridges rank among the worst in the nation.

One way the General Assembly can reverse this trend is by drafting a bill that:

- Diminishes the backlog of infrastructure maintenance and repair projects by mandating that half of structurally deficient bridges and roadways be fixed within five years; and,
- Caps total highway expansion funding at 5%-10% of the total transportation budget within the next ten years.

If the Governor and the General Assembly are really serious about changing transportation policy in the state, then prioritizing a “Fix-it-First” policy is the vital first step. It is not an impossible feat to accomplish, and spending less than 10% of transportation dollars on expansion is far from extraordinary. In fact, the New Jersey legislature passed similar “fix-it-first” legislation in 2000, and NJDOT now spends just 3% of its budget on highway expansion.

Beyond “fix-it-first” ConnDOT needs to focus on “motorized transport demand reduction”, another smart recommendation in the ConnDOT Reform report. To do this, ConnDOT must get into the land use business. Right now, ConnDOT encourages suburban sprawl and congestion by unwittingly building roads that will open access to more land for development, which in turn will lead to more cars on the road, which will lead to more congestion and a demand for more roads. This is called the sprawl cycle and it has to stop.

To break free of the sprawl cycle, ConnDOT must take a leadership role in incorporating smart land use planning into transportation projects. Working with municipalities, the agency can find holistic solutions that reduce the need to drive to accomplish everyday tasks. The Governor has rightly linked responsible growth to transit. However, ‘responsible growth’ does not need to be limited to places around transit; it can also mean focusing development around existing Main Streets or suburban villages without transit stations.

The Campaign whole-heartedly agrees with Governor Rell that transit needs to be elevated to the same stature as highways, but splitting ConnDOT into two agencies would only further exacerbate the existing ‘silo effect’ that plagues the agency. As is, ConnDOT fails to adequately communicate and coordinate transportation projects across bureaus. If this key component to creating successful transportation systems is currently lacking, what would the effect be if this division existed in two separate departments?

In lieu of this large scale reorganization, we propose a smaller-scale realignment of ConnDOT. The new commissioner could name a deputy commissioner for highways and a deputy commissioner for public transportation which would effectively equalize ConnDOT’s emphasis on both highway and mass transportation systems. Bolstering the Bureau of Policy and Planning, the department that should be charged with coordinating land use planning into transit and highway projects, to the deputy commissioner level would also be appropriate.

Hiring a progressive-minded Commissioner who understands the land use transportation connection is also a good and immediate alternative to a large scale reorganization of ConnDOT. A strong leader at ConnDOT can facilitate implementation of the Reform Commission’s recommendations and move the agency, and in turn, Connecticut, towards a more sustainable, less car dependent future.

But the Commissioner, whoever she or he is, needs a thoughtfully-crafted legislative mandate from the state’s elected leaders to help guide the new ConnDOT into a smarter future.

Thank you and I would welcome any questions.