

SOUTH WESTERN REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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March 4, 2009

TO: Connecticut State Legislative Transportation Committee

FROM: Hon. Woody Bliss, Chairman, South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO) and First Selectman, Town of Weston

RE: Proposed Senate Bill # 434 - An Act Concerning the Disposition by the Department of Transportation of Land Originally Acquired for the "Super 7" Highway

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on Proposed Senate Bill # 434 - An Act Concerning the Disposition by the Department of Transportation of Land Originally Acquired for the "Super 7" Highway. **We urge you to reject SB 434.** The Route 7 Corridor between Norwalk and Danbury, which includes Route 7 and the Danbury Rail Line facilities, is a critical component of the state's transportation network that provides essential north/south connections between the business/economic centers in South Western Connecticut and the fast growing residential suburbs of northern Fairfield County in the Housatonic Valley Region. This growth has also resulted in increased congestion resulted from insufficient roadway capacity and limited service on the Danbury Rail Line, and requires planning attention.

The "Super 7" highway proposal is a highly sensitive issue to the residents living in the vicinity of Route 7, and must be addressed in a manner that keeps all options on the table. In 2007, the South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization addressed the Transportation Committee regarding the proposed "Super 7" highway solution to the corridor's ever-increasing congestion, recommending that "a comprehensive multi-modal investment study for the Route 7 corridor between I-95 and I-84 be conducted and result in an implementation action plan with timelines for feasible operational, management and construction projects." This position is articulated in the South Western Region Long Range Transportation Plan 2007-2035, and remains in effect today along with a recommendation to preserve the corridor for future transportation and other uses. Permitting the sale of the existing right-of-way acquired for the potential use of Route 7 expressway extension runs counter to these recommendations, and jeopardizes the long-term prospects for development of appropriate solutions that promote improved transportation, environmental and quality of life in the corridor.

Furthermore, the current economic climate is not suitable for the Department of Transportation to sell state-owned land at this time. The state must be certain that it develops and maintains a long-range vision for the corridor that includes transportation and other public uses, such as open space or parks. If the land was sold at today's depressed values but was needed at a later date, reacquisition would be difficult if not impossible and cost-prohibitive. Regardless of how dire Connecticut's fiscal health is in 2009, we must insure that state assets such as the Route 7 corridor property be protected and held for future needs.

For the reasons stated above, *the South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization supports the preservation of the property in the Route 7 corridor and development of a multimodal plan for the Route 7 corridor before the disposition of assets that preclude implementation of future multimodal transportation and other improvements. We urge you to reject SB 434.*