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Proposed Bill No. SB 556 and SB 559  
Senator Dan Debicella Testimony  
February 24, 2009

Good morning Chairmen DeFronzo and Guerrero, Ranking Members Boucher and Scribner, and members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity today to testify in favor of Senate Bills 556 and 559.

The goal of these two bills is to improve traffic throughout our state, and specifically in Fairfield County where some of our worst traffic congestion exists. The bills seek to do this by eliminating bottlenecks on our roads and making mass transportation more convenient for those taking Metro North.

**SB-559: Eliminating Road Bottlenecks.** As someone who commuted for eight years down I-95 and the Merritt Parkway, I can tell you that rush hour traffic always occurs at the exact same places. Heading down the Merritt in the morning, it happens at Exit 44, Exit 41 and Exit 35. While some have proposed massive highway expansion as a solution to our traffic congestion, I believe there is a smarter (and less expensive) solution—introducing entrance and exit lanes at bottlenecks.

The typical culprit of bottlenecks on our highways is people entering and exiting, often into lanes that are “driving lanes” for those already on the highway. Adding targeted entrance and exit lanes at a few bottlenecks will increase traffic capacity where it is needed most.

Connecticut has already had success using this approach. The Sikorsky Bridge, between Exits 53 and 54 in Stratford and Milford, used to result in mile-long backups every day at rush hour. The DOT did a fantastic job of reconstructing the bridge and, in the process, added one lane to each side. Now there is never any traffic backup at the Sikorsky Bridge.

SB 559 would authorize \$50 million in bonding for such projects as the DOT deems most urgent in adding lanes at these chokepoints. While not cheap, this solution is less expensive than many others proposed to eliminate congestion on our highways.

**SB 556: Shuttles in Lower Fairfield County.** We know this approach works in New York, and there is good reason to believe it would be equally successful in lower Fairfield County. Metro North train usage is extremely high for Connecticut residents traveling to and from the city for two reasons. First, it is more convenient than driving—you can get anywhere you want from Grand Central Station by taxi, subway, or bus. Second, it is cheaper than driving and parking (especially if you are a daily commuter).

The same cannot be said of people who commute from eastern Fairfield County or New Haven County to the communities in western Fairfield County like Stamford, Greenwich, and Norwalk. While the price might still be right for Metro North, the convenience factor is not. Not only is parking difficult at many train stations (a topic for another day), but once commuters get to their destination stations there is no convenient way for them to get to their office unless their business provides a shuttle. Taxi lines in Stamford are long and crowded, bus access is limited, and no subway system exists to take people around.

We can make Metro North a more attractive option for in-state commuters by creating a comprehensive shuttle system in Lower Fairfield County to take people from the train station to major offices and back. If done in a comprehensive enough manner, Metro North could become as convenient for in-state commuters as for commuters to New York. Specifically, the shuttle system would:

- Have to run often enough to match up with the train schedule (e.g., if the train leaves every half hour, the shuttle would need to pick up every half hour)
- Hit major offices and office parks to ensure people do not have to walk outside in bad weather
- Run during both peak rush hours (although likely only needs to run one-way depending on time of day)

I have used the word “shuttle” very deliberately here as well. Many commuters will not take a 30-40 seat “bus”, whether because they are perceived as not running enough or because of a perceived stigma attached to it. However, many commuters are willing to take (and pay for) 8-12 seat “shuttles” if their runs match Metro North schedules. Indeed, existing corporate shuttle services may find it cheaper to contribute to a comprehensive system rather than run their own.

SB 556 calls for appropriating \$5 million to get such a system started, although the precise start-up costs and ongoing revenue stream have not been worked out yet. I also understand that with today’s fiscal environment, such an appropriation might not be possible. But I thank the committee for keeping the idea alive so that in better economic times it may be implemented.