

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

Testimony of Ryan Lynch, senior planner and Connecticut coordinator
Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Joint Committee on Transportation

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My name is Ryan Lynch, and I am the senior planner and Connecticut coordinator for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit organization working for a more balanced transportation network in Connecticut, downstate New York and New Jersey.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am here today in support of Raised Bill 5457, *AN ACT ENHANCING PENALTIES FOR HARM TO VULNERABLE USERS OF A PUBLIC WAY*. This bill has been endorsed by Connecticut's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board and, if enacted, would tap into a growing, nationwide, movement to hold careless drivers more accountable for their actions. Similar legislation has been adopted in Oregon and Illinois and legislation is currently being considered in New York and New Jersey. Even both houses of the Texas legislature, hardly a bastion of progressive transportation policy, adopted a vulnerable user law. Unfortunately, despite its importance and the resounding support of the legislature, the law was vetoed by Governor Rick Perry.

These efforts are occurring because for far too long, careless drivers have injured and killed vulnerable users of the nation's public ways, often without punishment.

Connecticut is no different.

Unless there is evidence of drug or alcohol use, or a hit and run, careless drivers are rarely held accountable for their potentially devastating, and preventable, actions.

To address this gap in enforcement, Raised Bill 5457 would identify vulnerable users of the State's public ways, users that include pedestrians, highway workers, cyclists, a person driving or riding an animal, a person using a skateboard, roller skates or inline skates, or a person operating or riding on an agricultural tractor or farm implement.

The list should not be considered exhaustive, and in fact, the legislation could be further improved by clearly defining what "a highway worker who performs duties on a highway under control of a political subdivision of the state, while in the performance of his or her duties and while outside his or her vehicle." Tri-State suggests simplifying this language to include police

officers, public safety officers and emergency vehicle operators that are outside of their vehicles. This explicit inclusion would build upon last year's passage of the 'Move over Law', legislation enacted to protect Connecticut's emergency workers and first responders.

The legislation, as currently written, would create penalties for a person convicted of inflicting serious physical injury or death to a vulnerable user. These offenders will be required to attend a motor vehicle operator's retraining program and perform between 100 to 200 hours of community service. The maximum allowable fine would be \$5,000.

While the penalties outlined in the current legislation are less stringent than those outlined in other enacted vulnerable user legislation, the measure is a good step towards driver accountability. The legislation will importantly increase awareness among drivers regarding other uses of the State's roadway infrastructure and will also encourage drivers to view driving as a privilege to be taken seriously.

We understand that the State's budget is in dire straits. This makes Raised Bill 5457 ideal for this session. It is revenue neutral. It does not call for more funding, but simply strengthens protections for all users of the State's roadways. This strengthening fits seamlessly with the recent adoption of Connecticut's Complete Streets bill and is a logical addition as the State works to create a more balanced transportation system.

While we urge you to make the aforementioned amendment to the bill, we hope the bill moves forward and is given a favorable recommendation by the Transportation Committee.

Thank you.