



NEW BRITAIN DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

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Testimony: Friday, February 18, 2011

Proposed S.B. 800

An Act Restoring Commuter Rail Service from Waterbury to Hartford

Good Morning, my name is Gerry Amodio; I am the Executive Director of the New Britain Downtown District, which is a Business Improvement District (BID) special taxation district in the central core of our City.

As a native and lifelong resident of New Britain I have seen our community from it heights as a great manufacturing center to its present environment as a distressed community. During this time I have traveled the Central Connecticut Corridor more times than I can count. From the days when the route 72 & route 9 interchange was nothing more than a stacked interchange with a dead end, to today where my 8 mile commute to Hartford can take upwards of 45 minutes, as it did recently, on the most congested commute in the Capital region.

While Mass Transit projects have been routinely proposed and reviewed for this corridor, in 1999 the Capital Region Council of Governments and the Central CT Planning Agency designated the Busway as the locally preferred alternative (LAP) for the corridor.

The New Britain-Hartford Busway, a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, endorsed by New Britain and Hartford, Representative John Larson, State Representatives Tim O'Brien, Peter Tercyak, and former State Representative John Geragosian, is a shovel ready project which will produce Transit Oriented Development in all communities involved. John Robert Smith, CEO of Reconnecting America, a national non-profit organization working to integrate transportation systems and the communities that they serve, has stated that "Every dollar spent on public transportation creates \$4 of new economic activity, providing jobs and strengthening our economy for the long term".

Transit Oriented Development is often defined as higher-density mixed use development within walking distance-or half a mile-of transit stations. In communities where transit stations have been built millions of dollars have been spent to upgrade retail, residential and commercial space. The highest and best use is within the first quarter mile, then decreasingly in the second quarter mile. Over the 9.4 miles and 11 stations this will be in the tens or hundreds of millions of dollars of development. At just the Newington stations, Cedar Street and Newington Junction, a local developer is planning over \$30 million dollars of development on vacant and reclaimed land.

Charting other BRT's we have seen this evidence of this TOD; Breakthrough Technologies Institute's 2008 *Bus Rapid Transit and Transit Oriented Development: Case Studies on Transit Oriented Development Around Bus Rapid Transit Systems in North America and Australia* reviewed both Cleveland's and Boston's systems. In Cleveland the *Euclid Corridor Transportation Project* is a key initiative in Cleveland's strategy to revitalize its urban core. A 9.4 mile BRT line that runs along Euclid Avenue from downtown's Public Square to East Cleveland running 60 foot articulated buses run on diesel-electric hybrid motor systems that produce 90% less emissions than regular buses. As of

2008 the Cleveland Plain Dealer article tallied projects occurring between downtown's Public Square and University Circle, 4.5 miles east of the downtown; from 2000, those underway and scheduled to start within the next six years totaled over \$4.3 billion in economic investments. Boston's *Silver Line BRT* is the first addition to the rapid transit system in 50 years. The Silver Line Washington Street connects the Downtown Crossing rail station and Dudley Square, a major transfer point for bus service southwest of downtown. This is a 2.4-mile surface bus operation, largely in bus-only lanes with mixed street operations in a short downtown loop. Estimates are that between 1997 (when *Silver Line* planning began) and 2006, over \$571 million was invested in the corridor. The tax base grew by 247%, compared to a city average of 146%.

In addition to the Newington development mentioned earlier, New Britain has handled a flurry of calls from outside developers and investors interested in property adjacent to transit stations both in Downtown and East Street. For Downtown New Britain the station becomes a significant pillar for Main Street. Situated along a straight line from the Thomas J. Meskill Superior Courthouse, to our new Police Station, continuing to the ITBD/CCSU Building, and connecting the vast space over Rte. 9 to the beginning of Main Street in the heart of Downtown.

In both of these examples it is clear that the TOD along a BRT system is huge; easily at millions of dollars along each stop, into the tens of millions and possibly hundreds of millions.

Today we have this opportunity in our grasp; A transportation system that will alleviate a commuting nightmare, produce thousands of construction jobs, aid to the rebuilding of urban infrastructures, and help to reduce our carbon footprint on the environment. We can have this within the next 3 years, not many years from now.

Today, while we still can.

Thank you for your time and diligence in seeing that this project comes to fruition.