

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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 Proposed Senate Bill 720, *AN ACT CREATING PENALTIES FOR CAUSING HARM TO, OR THE DEATH OF, A VULNERABLE USER OF A PUBLIC WAY*. This bill has been endorsed by Connecticut's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board, among many other advocacy groups, and 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 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, perform community service and be eligible for a fine that would not exceed \$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 users of the State's roadway infrastructure and will also encourage drivers to view driving as a privilege to be taken seriously.

There is, however, an area where the bill can and should be strengthened.

Any definition of vulnerable users should also identify first responders including, but not limited to, police officers, state troopers, firefighters and EMT's. In 2008 alone, the most recent data available from ConnDOT, almost 50 accidents occurred that involved people directing traffic, working in the road and emergency personnel. These first responders put their lives on the line every day and should be protected under this legislation more explicitly.

If enacted, SB 720 would tap into a growing, nationwide, movement to hold careless drivers more accountable for their actions. Similar legislation has been adopted in Oregon, Illinois, Delaware and neighboring New York.

These efforts are needed because 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. SB 720 would address this gap in enforcement.

We understand that the State's budget is in dire straits, which makes this bill ideal for the current session. It is revenue neutral. It does not call for more funding, but simply strengthens protections for all users of the State's roadways.

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.

Tri-State is also here in support of the various Red Light Camera and Intersection Safety bills currently being considered. As the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's most recent report shows, Red Light Camera's save lives. According to their research, Red Light Camera's saved 159 lives in 2004-08 in 14 of the biggest US cities. Had cameras been operating during that period in all large cities, a total of 815 deaths would have been prevented.

The report indicated that red light running killed 676 people and injured an estimated 113,000 in 2009. Nearly two-thirds of the deaths were people other than the red light running drivers — occupants of other vehicles, passengers in the red light runners' vehicles, bicyclists, or pedestrians.

Red Light Camera's are an integral component for creating safe streets for all users of the road. Connecticut has debated this issue for long enough. It is time to finally act in support of Red Light Cameras.

Finally, while this part of my testimony may be brief, it is no less important. Tri-State fundamentally opposes SB 823, AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE USE OF HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE LANES BY ALL VEHICLES DURING RUSH HOUR. This bill will do nothing to decrease congestion along I-91 and I-84 over the long term while also foster increased suburban sprawl. A smarter way to manage congestion on these roadways would be to convert HOV lanes to High-Occupancy Tolling lanes. Doing so would make better use of the underutilized HOV lanes by charging solo drivers a fee to enter the lanes. Doing so will reduce congestion, while also potentially raising revenue for the state.