



State of Connecticut

SENATE

STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

SENATOR MICHAEL A. McLACHLAN
TWENTY-FOURTH SENATE DISTRICT

March 14, 2011

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE 3400
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591
CAPITOL: (800) 842-1421
E-MAIL: Michael.McLachlan@cga.ct.gov
WEB SITE: www.SenatorMcLachlan.cga.ct.gov

MINORITY WHIP
RANKING MEMBER
GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS
COMMITTEE
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Chairman Maynard, Chairman Guerrero, Ranking Member Boucher, Ranking Member Scribner, and members of the Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding HB 6567, *An Act Concerning the Disposition of Excess State Property Acquired for Transportation Purposes, And Making Technical Revisions To Real Property Acquisition And Condemnation Procedures*.

HB 6567 sets up procedures to sell certain property acquired by the Department of Transportation through public bid or auction. The bill is another step in the potential sale of land acquired by DOT, over the course of fifty years, to build a Route 7 Expressway. I strongly believe we need to step back and properly debate whether this land should be offered for sale in the first place.

To understand this issue, we need to fully explore the recent legislative history that brought us to where we are today with regard to the sale of land owned by the state for the purpose of the Route 7 Expressway Project. I do not believe this issue received full vetting by the General Assembly when passed in 2009. There was no public hearing, there was no discussion in committee, and there was no debate in either chamber.

PA 09-186 (HB 6649) repealed the provision that the Commissioner of Transportation shall not sell, or use in any manner that is incompatible with transportation purposes, any property currently under his control in Danbury adjacent to Route 7 and south of Wooster Heights Road. The bill was vetoed by the Governor, and overridden by the General Assembly. The bill that was raised in the Transportation Committee, HB 6649, was a "dummy" bill that required a review of the programs and functions of the Department of Transportation. There was no provision regarding the sale of Route 7 land. In fact, there was no real provisions at all in the bill, and no public testimony during the public hearing.

There was no public hearing in any other bill in 2009 repealing this provision. The dummy bill was substituted with several real provisions during the committee process. The repeal of the restriction of sale of the land in question was snuck in by opponents of the Route 7 Expressway Project.

Subsequently, PA 09-203 (the conveyance bill) restored the provision barring the DOT commissioner from selling, or using in any manner that is incompatible with transportation purposes, any property under his control in Danbury adjacent to Route 7 and south of Wooster Heights Road. The Governor vetoed this bill as well, for reasons unrelated to this provision. Unfortunately, the General Assembly decided not to override the veto.

Two bills contained competing provisions in the same year. Neither received public input, both were vetoed for reasons other than the potential sale of Route 7 land, and one was overridden. I do not believe this process accurately reflects the will of the General Assembly.

For five decades, plans to build an expressway on Route 7 from Norwalk to Danbury have been stalled. The state has spent millions purchasing the land. And while we may not be willing to follow through with the project at this point in our history, I see no reason why we must start selling the land, and preclude future generations from potentially finishing what we started. To quote Dick Martinez, former DOT chief of planning, "The land is there and if the time ever comes where traffic becomes so unbearable that people will warm up to the idea of a connector, we will be ready to pursue it."

Passage of HB 6567 will hasten the sale of this land, and I strongly urge opposition. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.