



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.

Tri-State is here to testify in opposition to *SB 800 AN ACT RESTORING COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE FROM WATERBURY TO HARTFORD*. We oppose this legislation, not because we don't believe connecting Waterbury to Hartford by rail is not worthwhile. We believe it may be and warrants further study. We oppose this legislation because it would effectively kill a rigorously studied—environmentally, financially and otherwise—project that has shown that it will do the most to reduce congestion and provide the highest level of service for a region with no current rapid transit service in existence. And it would do so in three years.

I'll let others who support the Busway discuss the myriad benefits of the project. Tri-State, in its capacity as a regional organization with a federal advocacy component, has a unique perspective on what killing the Busway project would mean for Connecticut's broader federal transportation program.

As a transit project that is on the cusp of receiving New Starts federal funding, Connecticut is in rare company. While demand for this program funding is great, only 8 other New Starts applications are likely to receive federal funding in this year's budget cycle. Twelve additional projects, including eight Bus Rapid Transit projects, have been recommended but are not certain to receive funding because there is a lack of consensus in Washington on how to fund transportation in the future.

If the Busway is scrapped in favor of an unplanned rail connection from Waterbury to Hartford, these 12 projects, in addition to the hundreds of other projects nationwide that are further along in the planning phases, will take funding from Connecticut and the State would go to the back of the funding queue.

Failure to move forward on the Busway could also have a devastating impact to Connecticut's prospects for future federal funding for all transportation, including the New Haven-Springfield commuter rail line.

This leads me to the second point I'd like to speak about today, Connecticut's overreliance upon federal funding to support its transportation program.

Tri-State is very much in favor of using revenues generated for the Special Transportation Fund for their intended purpose: transportation. We support the bills being considered today, SB 696, 699 and 773, in concept, as well as the Governor's proposal to dedicate more of the generated transportation revenues to the Special Transportation Fund. However, we will leave it to the General Assembly to determine how that is done, whether through a two-thirds majority vote or simply a prohibition of using any transportation funds for other purposes at all.

We also support the Governor's proposal to increase the gas tax by three cents and diesel fuel by two cents in the coming year. However, this does not go far enough. Even with this increase, the gas tax will still be twelve cents less than it was in 1998.

This is why Tri-State is supportive of barrier free tolling and congestion pricing to generate revenue for maintaining our existing roads and bridges and supporting mass transit and as a way to reduce congestion on Connecticut's roads. However, we cannot support any of the bills under discussion today which would enact tolls only on Connecticut's borders and for road expansion and extension projects.

While we applaud the Transportation Committee's continued willingness to consider tolling as a means of generating revenue for the State's transportation coffers, tolls along Connecticut's borders face several problems. First they are inequitable, putting the burden of financing transportation solely on Connecticut's citizens who live along the border and second, border tolls are an ineffective way to reduce congestion in the state, an equally important goal that must be considered when implementing tolls.

This does not mean that the General Assembly should not move forward on toll implementation. In fact, new and innovative funding mechanisms must be considered as a way to generate enough resources to fund a 21st century, multi-modal, transportation system. Congestion pricing in the I-95 corridor, dynamic tolling of all the State's limited access highways and conversion of HOV lanes on I-91 and I-84 into High Occupancy Tolling lanes, are just three possibilities that should be at the forefront of consideration.

These three components—using the Special Transportation Fund for transportation projects, increasing gas taxes to put the STF on firmer financial footing and exploring tolling and congestion pricing away from Connecticut's borders are all ways to reduce dependency on Washington for the State's transportation program.

In summary, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign urges this committee to oppose SB 800, support a lock box initiative for the Special Transportation Fund and oppose border tolls in Connecticut, but consider other tolling and congestion pricing options.