



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Office of the
Commissioner

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Public Hearing – February 4, 2013
Transportation Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Jim Redeker
Department of Transportation

Proposed S.B. 183 – An Act Requiring the Commissioner of Transportation to Study Congestion on Interstate 95.

The I-95 corridor has been the subject of numerous studies in the recent past, and several improvement projects have been completed, are underway, or planned. Below is a summary of current and prior efforts.

- Construction of auxiliary lanes between closely spaced interchanges, specifically from Interchange 8 in Stamford through 18 in Westport. The addition of these auxiliary lanes will improve traffic flow and safety by providing areas to reduce operational conflicts between entering and exiting vehicles.
- Reconstruction and widening of the Pearl Harbor Memorial "Q-Bridge"
- Construction of the bridge over West River is scheduled to begin this year
- Moses Wheeler Bridge is scheduled to be completed in 2016.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) has recently received a grant award in the amount of \$1,120,000.00 from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) under the Value Pricing Pilot Program (VPPP) to study the use of congestion pricing strategies in the I-95 corridor from New York to New Haven. Congestion pricing offers an opportunity to manage congestion through more efficient use of existing facilities. It also is an opportunity to finance improvements to the highways and commuter rail that can provide additional congestion relief and maintain a state of good repair.

Opportunities to increase the capacity of I-95 are very limited. The intense development surrounding this corridor, and the fact that the New Haven Line abuts the highway in many locations, severely limits opportunities for roadway expansion. The most viable infrastructure improvement options are operational lanes in some locations and improvements to some interchanges.

The goal of the study is to determine whether all electronic tolling (AET) and value pricing on I-95 and the Merritt Parkway can be used to (1) reduce and manage congestion in the corridor, and (2) finance highway and transit improvements that provide additional congestion relief and maintain a state of good repair. Given the limited opportunities for expanding I-95 and the Merritt Parkway, the study will focus primarily on the option of pricing all travel lanes. Other pricing options such as managed lanes will be evaluated early in the study, but previous studies concluded these have limited potential due to the difficulty of adding a new lane (priced) or converting an existing lane to a priced lane. If the screening of these options indicates some warrant reconsideration, a single such option will be advanced for more complete evaluation.

Congestion pricing or value pricing will be evaluated in conjunction with various highway operational and safety improvements, commuter rail improvements, and bus improvements in the corridor. The objective will be to

identify a combination of value pricing structures and transportation improvements that will provide substantial congestion relief in the corridor. While value pricing by itself will provide some measure of congestion relief, it also provides an opportunity to finance highway and transit improvements that the state has been unable to finance through normal revenue sources.

Congestion pricing in the I-95 corridor has been examined previously, but no previous studies resulted in subsequent steps toward implementation of value pricing. The current proposal differs from prior studies in two ways. First, most prior studies were limited in scope or preliminary in nature. The proposed value pricing study will be more comprehensive and explore in more detail all aspects of pricing, operations, financing, and public acceptance. Second, the fiscal condition of the state's transportation program has grown worse, and ConnDOT is unable to finance many of the necessary improvements in the corridor. While tolling in any form still does not have widespread support, there is more willingness to consider tolling so long as revenues generated from tolls are dedicated to transportation improvements.

It is important to note that the Department is also making investments in the New Haven Line and Shore Line East commuter rail services through the purchase of new rail cars, catenary replacement and upgrades to stations and parking, to provide an alternative to automobile travel. A new commuter rail station recently opened in Fairfield and stations are planned for Orange and West Haven, which will increase available parking. The "Danbury Branch Line Electrification Study" and the "Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Line Study" (complete) are evaluating potential additional upgrades to enhance commuter rail as a viable alternative to commuting by automobile. As another means to alleviate congestion, investigations are being conducted by the Cities of Stamford and Bridgeport to determine the viability of additional ferry service for passengers and freight between Connecticut and New York. The Department also supports programs to reduce single occupant automobiles through local and regional bus service, carpools, vanpools and telecommuting.

While a study of the congestion in the corridor between New Haven and the New York border is clearly covered in the VPPP Study previously described, funding to cover a study for the remaining piece of I-95 from New Haven to the Rhode Island border would be required. (Note - a study of this segment was completed in 2004 as described below). The primary interests in conducting a congestion study would be to (1) aid in preserving the capacity of the interstate (primarily for longer trips), (2) enhance the overall mobility of the traveling public, and (3) increase system efficiency for commercial interests. Such an investigation would require participation from the FHWA and regional planning organizations, as well as a comprehensive public outreach effort that would include municipalities and the general public.

Previous Studies:

Connecticut Electronic Tolling and Congestion Pricing Study (2009). The Connecticut Transportation Strategy Board (TSB) commissioned a study of electronic tolling and congestion pricing options within Connecticut. The study evaluated a variety of tolling concepts on different highway facilities. In this study, value pricing all lanes of I-95 was modeled to attain a 10% reduction in congestion (Volume/Capacity) on I-95 and Route 15 between New York and Bridgeport would raise \$32 billion exclusive of the cost of tolling. Tolling, however, would cause diversion to local routes and increased pressure on park and ride facilities. While the study indicated that I-95 and Rte 15 may need to be tolled in unison, it did not explore this option in enough detail to move into a design study. Diversion, price elasticity, construction financing, and transit demand are some of the aspects which require further study.

Value Pricing in Connecticut (2008). Researchers at the University of Connecticut Transportation Institute completed a study of congestion pricing in the I-95 corridor in 2008. This study evaluated peak hour tolling schemes for Interstate 95 and the Merritt Parkway (Route 15). They used a travel demand model to assess three pricing scenarios: (1) pricing only Interstate 95, (2) pricing only Route 15, and (3) pricing both I-95 and Route 15. Each scenario tested a range of pricing levels from \$0.03 to \$0.25 per mile. Although their testing

allowed for diversion to other roadways, the focus of the study was on diversion to alternate modes – primarily commuter rail and ridesharing.

Key findings were that:

- **Pricing only Route 15** yields relatively small diversion to rail or rideshare, and some diversion to I-95. Congestion on I-95 worsened.
- **Pricing only I-95** results in a much larger diversion to ridesharing and rail. The authors attribute this to the fact that I-95 is closer to the rail line than Route 15. While congestion on I-95 was reduced, congestion on Route 15 worsened significantly.
- **Pricing both I-95 and Route 15** yielded the most significant diversions and greatest reduction in congestion. It reduced traffic volumes on both routes, but shifted trips to local routes, other alternates routes, and transit.
- **Conclusion.** The authors conclude “... pricing only one route through the region will have a significant negative impact on the other route. Therefore, our results suggest that if pricing is enacted, both routes should be priced to avoid severe congestion on the route that is not priced and elsewhere in the region.” (Impacts on I-84 were not tested.)

The *I-95 Branford to Rhode Island Feasibility Study*, completed in December 2004, was prepared as part of Public Act 01-5, Section 16, in cooperation with FHWA. It was a feasibility study that provided an assessment of the transportation-related deficiencies and needs in the corridor, an evaluation of potential improvement concepts, and an evaluation of various transportation modes that currently exist and could potentially serve travel demand along I-95 including rail, bus and rideshare options. The final report presented an assessment of the existing transportation and environmental conditions, an analysis of future transportation conditions (projected to the year 2025), recommended improvement concepts and an implementation plan of action for improvements.

For further information or questions, please contact Pam Sucato, Legislative Program Manager for the Department of Transportation, at (860) 594-3013.

