



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

REPRESENTATIVE GAIL LAVIELLE
ONE HUNDRED FORTY-THIRD ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 4200
300 CAPITOL AVENUE
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591

CAPITOL: (860) 240-8700
TOLL FREE: (800) 842-1423
Gail.Lavielle@housegop.ct.gov

RANKING MEMBER
COMMERCE COMMITTEE

MEMBER
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Testimony in Support of HB 5320

An Act Concerning the Revenue Raised from Public Transportation Fares

Transportation Committee

February 4, 2013

Good morning, Chairmen Maynard and Guerrero, Ranking Members Boucher and Scribner, and former fellow members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 5130.

My remarks also apply to HB 6039 and HB 6164, which are very similar to HB 5130.

It is no secret that our transportation infrastructure has many weaknesses. For example, DOT Commissioner Redeker has recently pointed out the number of bridges that need repair. The New Haven Line, the country's busiest railroad, providing more than 39 million passenger rides each year, is also the most antiquated. Not only is travel on this line uncomfortable, and in many ways inconvenient, but it is also prone to weather-related problems which can make it unsafe for passengers. We saw that in a recent incident when 100-degree weather caused a service interruption that left passengers locked in a non-ventilated rail car in Westport for more than an hour.

While Commissioner Redeker and the DOT are to be commended for the progress they have made and are making in these areas, they need adequate funding to continue. Estimates for our needs over the next few years range from \$3 billion to \$5 billion.

We know now that we cannot rely on federal funding, which is in dramatically short supply. Meanwhile, OFA is projecting growing annual deficits in the Special

Transportation Fund (STF) from 2013, reaching a deficit of \$108 million in 2016. Despite our pressing need for not only improvement, but also repair and maintenance, of our transportation infrastructure, the state never seems to have the necessary funds. While we can debate whether raising more revenue is necessary, it remains true that the transportation-related revenues we do raise from mass transit fares and gasoline taxes have never been safe from plunder for other purposes. Just last year, \$70 million was taken from the STF to close the fiscal 2012 deficit.

This way of managing our transportation dollars is not a responsible way to manage our infrastructure. It is also particularly unfair to commuters and other mass transit users, who are paying for a specific service. They should not have to bear the burden of spending that the state can't afford. When they are forced to pay higher prices, the least they should expect in return is better, faster, or safer service. Instead, the state is diverting their money for other purposes. It's tantamount to charging them a tax for riding the trains and buses. It's saying one thing and doing another, and this is neither fair nor honest.

Our mass transit needs are urgent. If we don't address them with the urgency they deserve, we will discourage economic activity, endanger our citizens, and cause serious deterioration in our quality of life. We will also risk facing fixes that are even more costly. We need to stare reality in the face and responsibly invest transportation funds in transportation -- where they are needed most.

We should be able to show Connecticut that this General Assembly knows how to talk straight and behave responsibly toward the people it represents.