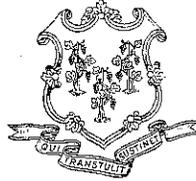


2A



**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**  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**MEMBER**  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

**Testimony**

**HB 6840: An Act Concerning Investments in Connecticut's  
Transportation Infrastructure**

**Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee**

**April 27, 2015**

Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, Senator Frantz, Representative Davis, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on HB 6840: An Act Concerning Investments in Connecticut's Transportation Infrastructure.

This bill gives the State Bond Commission the power to authorize approximately \$2.8 billion in bonding over the next five years for 31 transportation infrastructure projects. This appears to be the same list of projects provided in the 5-year ramp-up plan for Let's Go CT, with a few precisions and additions.

My comments concern a project that is absent from the list and one that is on the list.

**Absent from the list: the Danbury Branch Line**

Prioritizing investments in projects where demand already exists and where, therefore, an immediate return on investment is most likely would seem to be the best way to use taxpayer funds wisely and to improve service for large numbers of residents quickly.

Metro-North is the busiest railroad in the country and provides 39 million passenger rides a year. It serves the region of the state that generates the most economic activity and provides more than 45% of Connecticut's tax revenue. I am pleased to see that the list includes a number of improvements to Metro-North, because these will benefit not only southwestern Connecticut, but the state as a whole.

**Conspicuously absent from the list is the electrification of the Danbury Branch Line,** which currently provides 700 – 800,000 rides a year in a highly traveled, very economically active corridor. Despite recent improvements to its signal system, service on the line breaks down constantly, with important incidents every week, sometimes every day. Many commuters who have written to me have been very late to work so often that they have been told they might lose their jobs. They often feel literally like hostages to a railroad that doesn't work.

Ample studies have been performed to demonstrate the benefits of Danbury Line electrification and track improvements, and a potential extension to New Milford, in terms of speed, main line compatibility, reliability, and frequency. We also have detailed projections of ridership increases and cost estimates. Alleviating traffic congestion, relief of pressure on parking lots at mainline stations, and emissions reduction are also important considerations.

I have introduced legislation to upgrade the Danbury Line multiple times. This year, two of my proposals – one authorizing bonds of the state for its electrification and the other extending the line to New Milford – are included in SB 479, now before your Committee. I respectfully urge the members to consider including upgrades to the Danbury Line in the list of near-term priorities in HB 6840.

#### **Included in the list: the Route 7/Route 15 interchange in Norwalk**

While the intersection of these two routes clearly needs improvement, discussions of proposals offered in the past revealed multiple objections to the potential adverse impact of certain configurations on the surrounding area. One proposal, labeled 21C, was identified in 2009 as having the least impact on neighborhoods, on the environment, on noise levels, and on the historic and aesthetic character of the Merritt Parkway, while providing the greatest benefits in terms of traffic improvement and safety. While there were major valid objections to other alternatives, all concerned parties agreed that 21C was by far the best. Any change in the scope of the 21C proposal is likely to encounter significant resistance from many parties for many reasons. If the item remains in the bill, I strongly urge the inclusion of language specifying the parameters of the 21C alternative.

---

The poor condition of our transportation infrastructure needs to be addressed with great urgency. It is holding back our state in every conceivable way. That said, the OPM Secretary has confirmed twice in testimony before the Appropriations and Transportation

Committees that no funding stream has been identified for the debt service on the bonds scheduled in HB 6840 to be authorized in July of 2017, 2018, and 2019.

While I believe that transportation infrastructure is a highly appropriate use of bonding and strongly support an urgent focus on transportation, we must have the means to implement these projects in a financially responsible way. Reallocating certain GO bonds to transportation projects would help make progress, while allowing us to set and to stick to an annual bonding cap close to the 2014 figure. It is essential that we not exceed our means or allow the state's bond rating to deteriorate further.

Thank you for your attention to this critically important subject.