



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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I would like to thank Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero, Senator Boucher, Representative O'Dea and the entire membership of the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to testify today. I am David Alexander, State Representative from the 58th District in Enfield. I am here to testify in favor of HB 6339, An Act Requiring Construction of a Commuter Rail Station in Enfield, SB 494 An Act Authorizing Special Tax Obligation Bonds for A Rail Station in Enfield and HB 6338 An Act Concerning a Plan to Install Fiber-Optic Wiring For All Lighting On State Highways.

HB 6339 and SB 494:

Quite frankly the proposed New Haven to Springfield Rail Line, now known as the Hartford Line, is the most important transportation plan in New England. On a macro-level the completion of this line will connect commuter rail service from New York to Boston. Metro-North obviously offers rail service from New York through Fairfield County to New Haven. As I have mentioned to this committee before, a strong Metro-North makes for a strong transportation system for our entire state. Contrary to some statements by Connecticut officials, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is heavily investing in commuter rail service from Springfield to Worcester to Boston. I have directly spoken to Congressman Richard Neal and newly elected Massachusetts State Senator Eric Lesser about this, and they contend that the Commonwealth is investing in rail service from Springfield to Boston. The missing lynchpin is our New Haven to Springfield line, and that is why I call on this committee and this legislature to work to see this project through. A New Haven to Springfield line would be an economic game changer for our entire state.

On a micro-level the economy on the ground near every proposed station on the New Haven to Springfield line will grow exponentially due to transit-oriented development. This is the theory that investors will invest in retail, housing and restaurants near public rail transportation. The evidence is clear. Transit orientated development has grown local economies in areas such as Seattle, Phoenix and Charlotte. In particular, I have visited Seattle and Phoenix and can speak to this personally.

I represent an economically downtrodden community called Thompsonville. This is a semi-urban area within the center of Enfield that degraded economically after the Bigelow-Sanford Carpet Mill left Thompsonville in 1971. As a way to redevelop Thompsonville, Enfield town leaders, along with me and the entire Enfield legislative delegation, propose placing a commuter rail station in Thompsonville on the proposed New Haven to Springfield rail-line. I have personally spoken to local property owners and investors who are eager to invest to improve Thompsonville's economy with the construction of a



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HB 6338:

Last winter numerous Enfield constituents contacted me about sections of highway lighting going out on I-91. I would contact the Connecticut Department of Transportation, and it would usually take a week to get these lights back on. This prompted me to draft an official letter to the Department about this problem because I noticed other sections of lighting going out after rain or snow events throughout Connecticut. In response engineers and maintenance staff from the Department met with me in December 2014 about this situation.

These engineers and maintenance staff informed me that all wiring for all highway lighting in Connecticut is original. This means in some cases that the wiring is close to fifty years old, and the wiring is decaying. This is what is causing all lighting to go out in large blocks of Connecticut highways, and this causes a serious safety concern. The Department's engineers and maintenance staff recommends a plan to install fiber-optic wiring piecemeal throughout our state highway system. They first contend that this needs to occur otherwise the wiring will become so degraded that it will become impossible to even keep the lights running at all. Their second argument is that fiber-optic wiring is much more durable and will not likely short out due to rain or snow. Their third argument is that it takes approximately one week to fix current shorts due to outdated technology. Repairing fiber-optic wiring would take less than two days, and that would save money and be safer for road crews. Their final argument is that due to the Federal Highway System all state investments in safety improvements are reimbursed up to 80% by the Federal Government. This clearly is a safety issue, and we definitely would be reimbursed by the Federal Government for this improvement.

I propose a plan to replace all wiring for highway lights be added to the Governor's transportation initiative. Clearly something needs to be done before all the lights go out on all the highways. In 2012 the Department of Energy and Environment Protection installed environmentally friendly LED lighting in areas of our highway system, and they successfully applied for Federal reimbursement for safety reasons. I believe that the Department of Transportation could work with the Governor's administration to install lighting piecemeal and successfully apply for Federal reimbursement. Now is the time to act. I will gladly answer any questions.