



Connecticut Department of  
**ENERGY &  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – March 11, 2015  
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee

**Raised Senate Bill No. 1062 – AN ACT PROVIDING CONTINUED FUNDING FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION’S RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **Raised Senate Bill No. 1062 – AN ACT PROVIDING CONTINUED FUNDING FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION’S RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM**. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

We appreciate the Committee’s willingness to raise this bill at the request of the DEEP. This proposal, which we strongly support, would make small but needed changes to the “Connecticut Bikeway, Pedestrian Walkway and Greenway Grant Program” PA 07-7, (JSS), Sec. 68; PA 09-2, (SSS), Sec. 58 (Bikeway grant program) to allow a wider range of potential projects and grant recipients, better supporting the current need and Connecticut Department of Transportation’s (DOT) alternative transportation planning initiatives.

As documented by DEEP’s Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan, recreational trails continue to be a priority for Connecticut residents. As recreational trails are becoming more popular, they are also being integrated into economic development, public health care and alternative transportation here in Connecticut and in the region. Positive state and municipal economic impacts include taxes resulting from monies spent on lodging, transportation, souvenirs, restaurants and bars, groceries, take-out food and drinks, admissions and fees, clothing and sporting goods. The Erie Canalway Trail reports 1.6 million visitors generating \$28.5 million in federal, state and local sales tax. (Parks & Trails New York Presentation in Simsbury CT October 2014)\*

“Bicycling and walking offer many health benefits not only by improving physical health and quality of life but also by reducing health care costs. According to a National Park Service study, Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenways Corridors, people who exercise regularly have 14 percent lower claims against their medical insurance and spend 30 percent fewer days in the hospital.” (The Economic and Social Benefits of Off-Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities NBPC Technical Brief National Bicycle and Pedestrian Clearinghouse, Technical Assistance Series, Number 2, September 1995, Pages 2 and 3).

Governor Malloy, in his January 2015 briefing in New Haven to highlight his commitment to pedestrian access and bikeway projects, discussed how we might achieve a “Best-in-Class” transportation system for Connecticut. He noted that “transportation is holding our state back” and that “to change this we have to be comprehensive in our approach which means rail, highways and bridges but also means walking trails and bike trails”. DOT’s current 30 year planning initiative “Transform CT” is now being finalized to incorporate these ideas.

Even as the popularity and importance of trails increases, DOT and DEEP are in discussions regarding the future of the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), currently funded with ever-diminishing federal money that comes to DEEP through DOT. The RTP provides resources on a matched basis to municipalities, regional entities, state parks and private non-profits. This program has existed for twenty years, and has been tremendously successful in facilitating the design, construction and maintenance of multi-use trails across the state. More recently, the RTP and DOT's Transportation Alternatives Program (both utilizing parts of the same federal funding programs) have collaborated creatively and successfully to develop and restore sections of the East Coast Greenway including northern sections of the Air Line State Park Trail, and the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail.

**Raised Senate Bill No. 1062 – AN ACT PROVIDING CONTINUED FUNDING FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION'S RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM** utilizing state funds will better address the needs of the trails community, allow DEEP to run a more streamlined and flexible grant program, and allow us to be prepared with a replacement grant program if the Federal Highway funds are no longer used for this purpose. We feel that this request is a critical piece of our Connecticut "Best-in-Class" transportation system in that it will allow us to continue to provide funding for smaller but significant regional to local multi-use connections to the East Coast Greenway/Bikeway (ECG) and other regional bikeways connecting to the ECG. These "smaller" trail projects are critical to the functionality of the overall system of alternative transportation and are a critical companion to DOT's current plan.

In summary, DEEP strongly supports **Raised Senate Bill No. 1062 – AN ACT PROVIDING CONTINUED FUNDING FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION'S RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM** and looks forward to taking this step to work in collaboration with CT DOT and develop the operation of a state funded Connecticut Recreational Trails Program. DEEP intends to utilize the unallocated Bikeway bond funding plus any new potential bond authorizations to leverage existing Federal funding. This expanded program initiative will continue to leverage program resources and funding administered by DEEP and DOT thereby leading to a more efficient program that delivers superior service to municipalities, nonprofits, local and regional organizations and the state itself.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP's Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or [Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov](mailto:Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov) or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or [Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov).

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\*Walking and biking paths ranked third among 39 features identified by homebuyers as crucial factors in their home-purchasing decisions, according to a 1994 study by American Lives, a research firm serving the real estate industry. "Community designs that deliver low traffic and quiet streets" were ranked first, and "lots of natural, open space" was second. The increased salability of listings is considered to be the greatest value that the Northern Central Rail-Trail has brought to trailside properties in Baltimore County, Maryland. According to a 1994 study conducted for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, "if two identical properties are for sale and one is near the trail and the other is not, the trail is used as a selling point and helps many nearby owners sell their property faster." (Analysis of Economic Impacts of the Northern Central Rail-Trail). In addition, 63 percent of survey respondents, comprised of trail users, nearby landowners and local businesses, felt the trail added value to nearby properties.

- Not only has Seattle's Burke-Gilman Trail been used as a selling point for nearby properties, but it has also been proven to increase the value of those properties. According to a study conducted by the Seattle Engineering Department (1987), "property near but not immediately adjacent to the trail is significantly easier to sell and, according to real estate agents, sells for an average of 6 percent more as a result of its proximity to the trail. Property immediately adjacent to the trail, however, is only slightly easier to sell..."