



Operating Engineers Continuing Political Committee

International Union
of Operating Engineers
Local 478

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Good afternoon Senator Leone, Representative Lemar, Representative Devlin, Senator Martin and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, My name is Nate Brown, and I'm here today on behalf of the Operating Engineers Local 478 an organization that represents nearly 3000 heavy equipment operators and support staff throughout Connecticut. I am here today to testify in **support** for H.B. No. 7202 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CONNECTICUT'S TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

It is well accepted that a fully functional transportation system is essential to Connecticut's economic prosperity and to state government's fiscal stability. As has been noted frequently over the last several years, a multi-modal transportation system, characterized by safety, reliability, and connectivity, is the prerequisite to the market accessibility, labor flexibility, and quality of life, on which economic growth, prosperity, and competitiveness depend.

House Bill 7202 could provide the state a long funding mechanism to rebuild Connecticut's crumbling infrastructure, could help fix to the current revenue shortfall problems and be a key factor in driving economic development in Connecticut when implemented properly.

Efficient transportation facilities and networks are at the heart of attracting new businesses, retaining existing employers, and growing the labor force, all of which are essential to the State's fiscal stability. However, Connecticut's current transportation funding is no longer adequate to support basic programs or to maintain infrastructure in a state of good repair.

At a critical moment over thirty years ago, in the wake of the collapse of the bridge that carried I-95 over the Mianus River in Greenwich, the General Assembly and then Governor O'Neill established the Special Transportation Fund (STF) and dedicated transportation-related user charges and fees, including the State's gasoline tax, to the STF and transportation investment. These actions allowed Connecticut to launch an ambitious transportation infrastructure renewal program with strong bipartisan support. STF became the principal mechanism to fund and finance Connecticut's transportation capital program and to match federal formula and discretionary funding for investment in rebuilding and upgrading transportation assets and facilities.

At that time, and for many years thereafter, Connecticut was at the "cutting edge" among all states, in establishing innovative financing tools for transportation investment and in assuring the adequacy of dedicated revenues to support transportation operations and capital projects. Federal surface transportation grants were fully matched by the State, and other capital projects were undertaken solely with state resources.

However, neither the financial structure, established in the 1980s, nor the revenue streams currently available to support STF, are sufficient to meet currently scheduled operational and capital expenses. Operational expenses and debt service requirements have increased to the point that current revenues are not adequate to support an STO bond sale. Connecticut's currently inadequate transportation-related revenue streams, combined with changes in federal transportation policy, have had a severely negative impact on the State's ability to maintain transportation systems and services.

Since tolls were abolished in Connecticut in 1985, out of state cars, buses & trucks no longer help defray the high cost of maintaining our crumbling infrastructure. The public must be made aware of the simplicity of the EZ pass systems and we must be assured that if tolls were to be implemented in Connecticut that the funds will be solely used for transportation projects. Polling shows that Connecticut's residents will support tolling, if properly implemented.

Connecticut needs to face the reality that we can no longer afford transportation costs by collections from the gas or gross receipts taxes. We must be fair, use the newest in twenty-first century technology and we must act promptly.

Thanks for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions.