



Testimony of W. Wyatt Bosworth
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Before the Committee on Transportation
Hartford, Connecticut
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**Testifying in support of:
Senate Bill No. 215: An Act Concerning the Development of a Transportation Engineering Recruitment Program**

House Bill No. 5256: An Act Studying the Consolidation of Local and Regional Transit Districts

My name is Wyatt Bosworth and I am assistant counsel for CBIA, the Connecticut Business & Industry Association. CBIA is Connecticut's largest business organization, with thousands of member companies, small and large, representing a diverse range of industries from across the state. Ninety-five percent of our member companies are small businesses, with less than 100 employees.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of two bills.

Senate Bill No. 215: An Act Concerning the Development of a Transportation Engineering Recruitment Program (Support)

Under Senate Bill No. 215, the Departments of Administrative Services and Transportation are required to establish a transportation engineering recruitment program at institutions of higher education and report to the legislature by January 1, 2023 the status of the program with legislative and funding recommendations.

An engineering recruitment program is essential given the dire outlook for DOT's workforce in the next year. According to the CREATES Report, 35% of transportation engineers, 25% of maintainers, and 30% of maintainer managers will be retirement eligible this summer.¹ These workers are integral to DOT's mission of keeping our state's infrastructure in safe and good condition. In addition, the CREATES report notes that Connecticut

¹ Connecticut CREATES Report, Boston Consulting Group (2021)
<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/Secr-Reports/Connecticut-CREATES-Final-Report.pdf>.

continually finds it challenging to hire and retain certain engineering positions, including engineer 3s, principal engineers, and supervising engineers.

The engineering recruitment program will also benefit the private sector. According to the Department of Labor, Connecticut has recovered just 75% of the 292,400 jobs lost to pandemic lockdowns and restrictions in March and April 2020, well behind the U.S. recovery rate.² CBIA's 2021 Survey of Connecticut Businesses found that 80% of Connecticut employers have difficulty finding or retaining workers. Workforce recruitment programs, like the one contemplated in Senate Bill No. 215, will go a long way at getting workers, specifically engineers, back to work.

CBIA is ready and willing to work with this committee to build and enhance public-private partnerships in the state to equip DOT and the private sector with exceptional, Connecticut-educated engineering talent.

Senate Bill No. 5256: An Act Studying the Consolidation of Local and Regional Transit Districts (Support)

Senate Bill No. 5256 establishes a task force to study local and regional transit districts and make recommendations for consolidating districts, improving regional transportation options, and increasing efficiencies. CBIA supports the establishment of this task force because it will (1) obviate the need for local transit districts to conduct studies themselves; and (2) propose cost-saving measures that will allow local transit districts to make informed decisions on whether or not to consolidate.

Regional cooperation between local transit districts has occurred in Connecticut for some time now. For example, Windham Regional Transit District and UConn's Husky Go Service in Storrs are currently working to consolidate management, operation, and maintenance. Northwestern Connecticut Transit District is coordinating with CTtransit Waterbury Division to provide vehicle maintenance. Simply put, regional cooperation is working now, and it must be a focus for lawmakers moving forward.

² Robert Storage, *Addressing workforce shortage seen as key issue this legislative session*, Hartford Business Journal (Feb. 28, 2022)

<https://www.hartfordbusiness.com/article/addressing-workforce-shortage-seen-as-key-issue-this-legislative-session>.

Last year, the Estuary Transit District (ETD) officially moved to absorb the Middletown Transit District (MTD). The move to consolidate came after a 2020 report from the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments showed that an integrated district would achieve more efficient and sustainable operations to deliver transit services in the region.

Both transit districts were relatively small and faced similar financial challenges. ETD's challenges began in 2007 with rising expenses not being managed in line with available local and state revenues. Oversight and contract management reforms were enacted at this time, and ETD was able to recover financially. MTD was near bankruptcy and facing financial shutdown in 2017. Similar to ETD, local expenses were not adequately being reined in following cuts in state subsidy levels. MTD soon brought on new management and expanded membership. As a result, MTD had a positive cash flow in FY 2019, but a sizable outstanding liability to the state still needs to be addressed (roughly \$900,000 today). Given these challenges, the report commissioned by the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments recommended that MTD and ETD merge as one integrated district. The recommendation involved (1) the acceptance of member municipalities from one district into the other; (2) the transition of staff and negotiated contracts, assets and liabilities into the accepting district, and (3) the construction of two new facilities: (a) a shared operations and maintenance facility in Middletown; and (b) a second operations facility in Westbrook.

According to projections in the report, the consolidation recommendation would save 7.7% in annual operating costs and 12.4% in facility costs. While additional revenue studies would need to be conducted, the report did state that base fare would remain the same in both districts and a moderate impact on overall revenues could be realized.

In summary, regionalization has worked for a number of transit districts in the past, and is poised to work for MTD and ETD in the future. The task force proposed in this bill will help regional transit districts make informed decisions on consolidation in the future. We urge passage. Thank you.