



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



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Transportation Committee

Testimony Submitted by Garrett Eucalitto
Department of Transportation

H.B. 5917 -AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISION ZERO COUNCIL.

The Department of Transportation (CTDOT) would like to provide comments on H.B. 5917, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Vision Zero Council.

Public Act 21-28 established a [Vision Zero Council](#) to develop a state-wide policy and interagency approach to eliminating all transportation-related fatalities and severe injuries to pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, motorists and passengers. The Council was charged with considering ways to improve safety across all modes of transportation by using data, new partnerships, safe planning, and community-based solutions to achieve the goal of zero transportation related fatalities.

I would like to thank the General Assembly for creating this council, the volunteers who worked tirelessly to put together state-wide interagency recommendations for the council and lastly the council members who then turned these into policy recommendations that we have confidence will make a difference by saving lives on our roadways in Connecticut and set an example for the rest of the nation. It should be noted that all Council members represented ourselves, and all votes and positions did not necessarily reflect those of the agencies we were employed by.

The establishment of the Council came at a critical moment for our state. In 2022, there were 239 driver/passenger fatalities which is an increase of 41.5% over the last 5 years as well as 75 pedestrian fatalities which is an increase of 31% over the last 5 years. 2022 has been the deadliest year on our roadways in decades. My hope is that the recommendations from the Vision Zero Council will elevate this alarming public health crisis and help reverse these increasing trends on our roadways.

The Council has submitted 18 recommendations. Some require legislative action; others could be implemented administratively by state agencies. It should be noted that some of them could require fiscal resources, and they have not gone through the agency or legislative budget processes.

While we have included some of these in our own agency legislative proposals, there are some that were not reviewed for inclusion due to the timing of the council's votes on final recommendations and the timing of the annual budget and legislative proposal submissions for state agencies. While Department staff have participated in high-level deliberations on policy proposals at the Council level, the Department takes no position on proposals either included in our agency package or advancing administratively.

With respect to recommendations from the Council that mirror our agency legislative proposals submitted to the Committee, I would like to touch on four important proposals.

The first proposal is to clarify CTDOT's authority to acquire land for multi-use trails, which will allow for extended non-vehicular connectivity throughout our state; this is Section 4 of HB 5917. We currently have two active federal grants that are waiting on this statutory change as well as 15 other projects totaling \$55 million.

For instance, the City of Waterbury was awarded \$23,100,000 for the Waterbury Active Transportation Economic Resurgence (WATER) Phase II Project. This project will build upon a 2014 federal award to further efforts to connect Downtown Waterbury to its riverfront, incorporate the Freight Street Corridor into the core of the city, and facilitate overall redevelopment in this area. The City of New Britain was awarded \$16,366,554 for the CT Trail Connections Project to complete the last gap in the 84-mile-long Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. There are also projects at risk in Plainfield, Coventry, Mansfield, Watertown, Trumbull, just to list a few.

This small clarification has big implications on the direction of the State to move towards alternative modes of transportation. It has been CTDOT's experience that these trail projects have been widely successful. Off-road multi-use trails are the safest way to provide alternative modes of transportation amongst our larger transportation network. Additionally, these programs have added many miles to the East Coast Greenway as this stretch of trail is critically important to not only Connecticut but also our region.

The second CTDOT agency proposal that aligns with the Council recommendations is to enact a helmet law for all motorcycle riders; this is included in Section 3 of HB 5917. In the past 5 years, there were 190 unhelmeted fatalities on our roadways. While Connecticut currently has a partial helmet law that covers 16- and 17-year-old riders, statistics show that states with partial helmet laws are not effective in reducing fatalities or traumatic brain injuries. It is proven to be the most effective means of protecting motorcyclist from severe injury and death. The fatality rate nationally, per vehicle mile traveled for motorcyclists is 18 times that of a passenger car occupant. Head injury is the leading cause of death in motorcycle crashes and an un-helmeted motorcyclist is 40% more likely to suffer a fatal head injury than a helmeted motorcyclist. Helmets are 69% effective in preventing brain injuries and 42% effective preventing fatal injuries. Helmet use laws covering all motorcycle riders significantly increase helmet use and are easily enforced because of the rider's high visibility. Helmet use is estimated at 99% in states with universal helmet laws. States that have enacted universal helmet legislation have experienced significant drops in motorcycle deaths, ranging from 15% to 37%, within one year of passage. Conversely, states that repealed or weakened helmet laws have experienced significant fatality increases. CT Motorcycle Crash Data: Motorcyclists are at a much higher risk of death and injury in crashes than passenger car occupants. In 2021, a total of 68 motorcycle operators and passengers were killed on Connecticut roadways, the highest number since 1987.

The third CTDOT agency proposal that aligns with the Council recommendations is to enact an open container law; this is included in Section 1 of HB 5917. This section would prohibit open alcohol beverage containers in the passenger compartment of motor vehicles to meet national standards. Under 23 USC

154 of Federal statute, states are required to enact laws making it illegal for the driver or passenger(s) to possess or consume from any open alcoholic beverage container in the passenger area of a motor vehicle on a public highway (or the right-of-way of the public highway), or face penalties. States that have not enacted such laws have 3% of the National Highway System, and Interstate Maintenance funds transferred into the Highway Safety Program, precluding their availability to finance Interstate Maintenance, the National Highway System and Surface Transportation Program projects, which was the original intent of these funds. Connecticut is one of 12 states that do not have an open container law in place and since 2001 has transferred \$175 million as a penalty to the Highway Safety Program.

Lastly, CTDOT urges the General Assembly to provide municipalities with additional tools to implement traffic calming on our roadways by authorizing the use of Automated Traffic Enforcement on state and municipal roadways; this is included in Sections 16-20 of HB 5917. Our agency legislative proposal differs slightly from the concept included in HB 5917, but the fact remains that automated traffic enforcement devices, such as red light cameras and speed cameras, have been proven to significantly reduce crashes and serious injuries, and ultimately save lives. We believe that the deployment of automated traffic enforcement devices should be tied to locations with a history of speeding or crashes caused by violation of traffic signals; this would ensure these tools are used to improve safety, and not generate revenue.

Thanks to Governor Lamont and the legislature, CTDOT has statutory authority to operate a pilot program for work zone speed control systems in highway work zones. This will be operational in the coming weeks and we are hopeful the pilot will prove the efficacy of deploying cameras in highway work zones to reduce speeding and protect the lives of all those working alongside our highways. We look forward to providing the legislature with the results of this pilot program.

All of us at CTDOT look forward to working closely with this Committee and the entire General Assembly to improve safety and achieve our vision of zero deaths and serious injuries on our roadways.

For further information or questions, please contact Anne Kleza (anne.kleza@ct.gov) at the Department of Transportation at (860) 594-3013.