

Questions for Department of Transportation Commissioner Nominee

By: Heather Poole, Principal Analyst
January 26, 2023 | 2023-R-0040

Department of Transportation (DOT) Commissioner ([CGS §§ 13b-3 & 13b-4](#))

The Department of Transportation (DOT) commissioner is responsible for all aspects of planning, developing, maintaining, and improving transportation in the state. The commissioner's specific duties include the following:

1. developing a comprehensive, integrated transportation policy;
2. operating a modern, safe, efficient, and energy-conserving system of highway, mass transit, marine, and aviation facilities and services;
3. cooperating with federal, state, interstate, and local agencies performing transportation activities;
4. providing for the planning and construction of capital improvements and repairs needed to operate a safe and efficient transportation system;
5. promoting coordinated and efficient use of all available and future modes of transportation; and
6. formulating and implementing plans to improve transportation safety.

Nominee Questions

General

1. What is your vision for transportation in Connecticut? What does the state need to do to get there? What are the potential barriers?
2. You most recently served as DOT's deputy commissioner. How did your experience in that role prepare you to lead the agency? What agency changes would you like to make?

Transportation Planning and Funding

1. Congress recently passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which provides increased federal formula funding and additional competitive grants. What is the impact on Connecticut? What has the department done to prepare for and make the most of the additional funding? What more needs to be done?
2. How has the department handled loss of senior staff to retirement? Is its current staff level adequate? How does staffing impact the department's ability to make use of the additional federal funding?
3. Do you believe the state's current transportation funding sources are adequate to keep its transportation system in a state of good repair over the next 15 years?
4. The highway use fee took effect this month. In FY 24 (the first full fiscal year of collections), the Office of Fiscal Analysis projects it will bring in \$90 million, or less than 5% of Special Transportation Fund (STF) annual revenue. What are the pros and cons of this revenue stream?
5. What types of strategic planning does DOT need to do to meet future transportation and mobility needs? How should DOT prioritize transportation projects?
6. How does DOT work with local officials (e.g., metropolitan planning organizations) in transportation planning? How can collaboration be improved, particularly in light of new competitive grant opportunities?

Highways

1. In the past few years, Connecticut has seen concerning increases in traffic fatalities, and in pedestrian and wrong-way driver fatalities in particular. Do we know what is causing the increase? What has DOT done, and what more can it do, to curb the trend? What can the legislature do?
2. Cannabis retail locations just began selling to the public this month. What role does DOT play in combating potential increases in impaired driving? Are there federal funding opportunities to help the state address this?

3. Last session, the legislature passed the Connecticut Clean Air Act ([PA 22-25](#)), with a number of programs and policies aimed at reducing transportation sector emissions. Should the state do more to facilitate a transition to electric vehicles? What role can DOT play in such a transition? What other policies do you think will help the state lower transportation-related emissions?
4. Much of Connecticut's roads and bridges are over 50 years old. How does this affect transportation planning and funding? What are the challenges of maintaining an aging transportation system? Are we meeting our obligations to keep roads and bridges in a state of good repair?

Public Transit

1. Bus service has been free in Connecticut since April 2022. How has this impacted ridership? In your opinion, should free bus service continue? What should the legislature consider when deciding whether to continue this policy?
2. What improvements have been made to rail service in Connecticut over the past four years? What are the most pressing rail needs? What federal funding opportunities exist to address these needs?
3. Can you provide a status update on the governor's "Time for CT" (i.e., 30/30/30) initiative to speed up rail service in Connecticut?
4. Connecticut has historically been a fairly car dependent state. What can be done to encourage people to use public transit services? How can the state better integrate bus and rail services so they are easier to use?
5. Many experts, including the Federal Transit Administration, indicate that transit-oriented development provides many benefits, including increased ridership and associated revenue gains for transit systems, economic returns to surrounding landowners and businesses, and neighborhood revitalization. How can the state, and DOT specifically, promote transit-oriented development?

HP:kl