

Public Comments before Connecticut Department of Transportation Reform Commission
October 9, 2007
Bridgeport, CT

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission: Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. My name is Michelle Ernst, and I am the staff analyst for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a policy watchdog group working to reverse automobile dependence in the tri-state region.

According to new data released last month by the Texas Transportation Institute, Bridgeport-Stamford area commuters endure more than 14.5 million hours of travel delay annually, about 31 hours per commuter per year. That's almost double the delay just 20 years ago in 1986.

The report notes that just to keep congestion from growing worse, Bridgeport and Stamford would need to add 42 lane miles every year. We know that's not practical, or even prudent.

With the highway network nearly complete, now is the time for ConnDOT to re-evaluate its primary mission. The agency needs to focus on maintaining the integrity of its existing infrastructure. This means not only ensuring the quality and safety of roads and bridges, but also ensuring that they do not get bogged down in traffic congestion.

And that objective naturally requires ConnDOT to get into the business of land use. In order to preserve capacity on the state's roads and bridges, ConnDOT should encourage smart growth development which is both walkable and transit accessible. It should work with local communities to ensure that highway corridors don't become crowded with traffic-inducing strip malls and shopping centers.

Specifically, here's what Tri-State recommends:

1. ConnDOT should embrace context sensitive design and work more collaboratively with municipalities on transportation projects and development plans that minimize new car trips and encourage transit, cycling and walking;
2. Governor Rell should create a transit village program modeled after New Jersey's which provides state funding and incentives for developments located near transit stops and stations;
3. ConnDOT should use a larger share of flexible federal funds for bicycle and pedestrians projects, and also add a bicycle/pedestrian grant program to its Town Aid for Roads; and,
4. ConnDOT should adopt a fix it first policy, shifting infrastructure investment further toward roadway and bridge maintenance and away from new roads and additional highway capacity.

Fundamentally, ConnDOT needs to embrace a new mission and a new way of doing things.

It needs strong and visionary leadership both within in the agency and from Hartford.

Thank you.