

**Prepared Testimony of Mayor John DeStefano, Jr.  
Mayor of the City of New Haven, Connecticut**



**Before the  
Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs  
United States Senate**

**April 16, 2009**

Chairman Dodd and honorable members of the Committee, my name is John DeStefano, Jr. and I am the Mayor of the City of New Haven, Connecticut. I am honored to appear before you today to share my insight on climate change and transportation, as these pressing matters relate to the future economic standing of the nation, to the environmental health of the states and to the overall quality of life for our citizens. This is an opportunity to share with you the New Haven experience and to make a case for national support for an integrated and sustainable transportation framework.

*The Situation in New Haven and Connecticut*

Connecticut's land use pattern is in many ways typical of the national experience. Central cities grew dramatically with the Industrial Revolution. Over time, however, residents settled further and further from the central core – first to suburbs, then to so-called “Edge Cities” and even to exurbs. Over 80% of Connecticut workers now drive alone to work and overall vehicle miles traveled on Connecticut's heavily congested local roads increased nearly 50% from 1986 to 1995.<sup>i</sup> From a climate change perspective, the cumulative effect of our land use decisions is staggering: transportation accounts for 40% of the Connecticut's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>ii</sup>

In New Haven, I am pleased to report a far more positive story. Over the past decade, New Haven has made great strides with dramatic improvements in the health of the city. Community indicators ranging from public safety to education and from economic growth to quality of life indicate positive change and long-term sustainability. The Downtown remains strong as evidenced by the 500-unit transit oriented residential development now under construction at 360 State Street.

Sustainable transportation systems are one of many factors contributing to New Haven's success in recent years. More people live in Downtown New Haven than in the downtowns of many larger cities, including Denver, Detroit and Charlotte.<sup>iii</sup> Nearly half of the City's population does not drive alone to work; and, by percentage, more residents walk to work here than in any other New England city, including Boston.<sup>iv</sup> We have two passenger railroad stations and a major public bus system and many New Haveners simply do not need or want to own a car. Rather, on any given day, you will see cyclists, motorists and pedestrians all sharing city streets in an ever more appropriate balance for a community street.

## *New Haven's Economic Standing and Transit Oriented Future*

Two of our leading institutions - Yale University and Yale-New Haven Hospital – are global leaders and this elevates New Haven to measure itself on that scale. Our competitive advantages are in three basic economic sectors: advanced fabrication, research and development, and higher education. To compete in the global marketplace, our challenge is to (1) support these sectors as they excel in their economic sector; (2) create an environment conducive for residential and cultural activity within walking distance of major employers; and (3) enhance our quality of life in terms of cultural enrichment and environmental health so that New Haven remains a destination city for the Creative Class.<sup>v</sup>

Since these economic sectors are concentrated in the central business district and medical district areas, the City recently released “Downtown Crossing”, a 20-year development framework for New Haven. A central focus of this effort is to reconnect the city and build a critical mass of transit oriented urban land use by converting Route 34 from a traditional highway to an at-grade urban boulevard. From there, the City plans to initiate a fixed rail streetcar system which extends pedestrian mobility from the northernmost reach of the Yale campus to Union Station and the medical district. In the future, the City will be woven together seamlessly in a more organic, pedestrian-centered environment.

The economic impact associated with the short- and long-term development projects within walking distance of Union Station are promising. Short-term projects alone are expected to result in over 1,800 jobs and \$200 million in gross regional product at stabilization.<sup>vi</sup>

### *Route 34 East*

The Oak Street Connector (Route 34) was conceived in the 1950s as a link for commuters to and from the Valley and to address dramatically increasing traffic volumes. Companion urban renewal-era projects designed to eliminate blight and substandard conditions in the Oak Street and Church Street neighborhoods were intended to redevelop the districts with more contemporary structures and land uses. The section of Route 34 between the Air Rights Garage and Interstate 95 opened in 1959.<sup>vii</sup>

Additional right-of-way was acquired to the west, but this section was improved only with a pair of frontage roads. During the period from project inception to ultimate closure, the Oak Street / Route 34 effort displaced over 880 families and cleared 350 buildings. Adjoining neighborhoods were fractured, creating a clear division between the medical district and Downtown, as well as distinct residential communities to the north (Hill) and south (West River and Dwight) of the connector.<sup>viii</sup>

The concept plan restores these neighborhoods by converting Route 34 to a community-scale urban boulevard and by converting excess right-of-way for new homes and businesses. Likewise, the project provides economic opportunity through mixed use development and encourages sustainable transportation systems through a balance of bicycle / pedestrian improvements and public transit enhancements.

The Route 34 East project ultimately results in 16 acres for new development by constructing a new street grid consisting of six traditional intersections and new city blocks between College Street and Orange Street – thereby bridging the City’s medical district, Union Station and downtown into a seamless transit oriented development zone. Over the long term, this signature project for the City will create thousands of new jobs within walking distance of transit stops. For these and many other reasons, this project is our highest priority.<sup>ix</sup>

### *New Haven Streetcar Project*

The City, in cooperation with Yale University, is proposing a new fixed-rail streetcar line generally along the College Street corridor of the University’s central campus. The entire line is approximately four (4) miles, connecting the central campus with the Yale University and Yale-New Haven Hospital medical district. The streetcar project fills a gap in the local public transportation system, as no public transit service currently serves a heavy pedestrian corridor running between central campus and the medical district.

As in Portland, Seattle and other cities, the streetcar works from the national model of fixed rail transit in support of high density mixed use development. In New Haven, new growth is concentrated at the edges of the corridor, thereby enhancing the value public transit. At the northerly end, Yale University is planning to construct two new residential colleges, which when complete, will expand the undergraduate enrollment by approximately 15%. At Science Park, over one million s.f. (including 400 new residential units) are planned or under construction on the site of the abandoned Winchester Repeating Arms Factory. At the southerly end, the streetcar connects to the above-referenced Route 34 East development and, in Phase II, to historic Union Station.

### *Summary*

As demonstrated here in Connecticut and across the nation, we are faced with decisions on how to reduce congestion and how to dramatically cut greenhouse gas emissions. I argue for a sustainable transportation system that accomplishes both objectives.

The Committee is encouraged to focus on the goals: compete effectively in the global economy and reduce substantially the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions. Investing in sustainable transportation systems, particularly ones that link residential neighborhoods with a region’s basic economic sectors, is a pathway to reach both of these goals. Within that in mind, your engaged support for transit oriented systems is very much appreciated.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and share with you the New Haven experience. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have on this matter.

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- <sup>i</sup> Connecticut Economic Vitality & Land Use. Rep. New Haven, CT: Connecticut Regional Institute, 2003.
- <sup>ii</sup> Connecticut Climate Change: Working together for a climate we can all live with. July 2006. CTClimateChange. 15 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.ctclimatechange.com/documents/FinalCT-2006-Inventory-V5.pdf>>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Comprehensive Plan of Development. 15 October 2003. City of New Haven. Mayor John Destefano, Jr., Mayor.
- <sup>iv</sup> Sohmer, Rebecca and Robert Lang. Downtown Rebound. Fannie Mae Foundation and Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, Census, May 2001.
- <sup>v</sup> "Richard Florida - Creative Class." Creative Class The source on how we live, work and play. Creative Class Group. 15 Apr. 2009 <[http://www.creativeclass.com/richard\\_florida/](http://www.creativeclass.com/richard_florida/)>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Jones Lang LaSalle. Economic Impact Analysis Transit Oriented Development District Union Station. December 2008. Economic Development Corporation of New Haven. 15 Apr. 2009.
- <sup>vii</sup> New Haven City Plan Department. 2007 Annual Report. 15 April 2009 <<http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/CityPlan/pdfs/AnnualReports/Annual%20Report%202007.pdf>>
- <sup>viii</sup> New Haven City Plan Department. 2007 Annual Report. 15 April 2009 <<http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/CityPlan/pdfs/AnnualReports/Annual%20Report%202007.pdf>>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Jones Lang LaSalle. Economic Impact Analysis Transit Oriented Development District Union Station. December 2008. Economic Development Corporation of New Haven. 15 Apr. 2009.