

REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN CHRISTOPHER J. DODD
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS
GREENER COMMUNITIES, GREATER OPPORTUNITIES:
NEW IDEAS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2009

I'd like to thank you all for being here today. I hope you all had a painless commute, but if you didn't, I understand. I'm from Connecticut. And although we love our state, we know something about rough commutes. Take I-95. Over the last fifty years, average daily traffic in the Connecticut Southwest Corridor has increased more than sevenfold.

Imagine you're on your way home from a hard day at the office. When you get there, your kids will want dinner, but at the rate traffic is moving, you're just hoping you can get there in time to make them breakfast tomorrow.

For 20 minutes, 45 minutes, over an hour, you grit your teeth and grip the wheel harder as traffic crawls slowly along the highway. The air is clouded with exhaust from what seems like millions of cars barely moving – at almost three bucks a gallon, by the way. And things won't be any easier when you and your fellow motorists slowly grind along the same road to work tomorrow morning.

Welcome to the daily commute for far too many residents of Connecticut.

If you know me, you know how I feel about the importance of new transit options. I've been a longtime advocate for the Tri-City Corridor that will create new transit villages, get people off the roads, and revitalize our regional economy. We will accomplish this by initiating new commuter rail service and 110 mile-per-hour intercity train service between New Haven and

Springfield, Massachusetts, with direct connections to New York City and, eventually, Boston. This project is one of my top priorities and I am going to work with leaders in my state and Secretary LaHood to get it done.

But our communities are growing and changing. And too often, our approach to community development policy has been like one of those cars on the Merritt Parkway – trapped in gridlock, never moving. It's time to re-think the way we plan the futures of the places we live, work, and raise our kids.

Between 1980 and 2000, the growth of the largest 99 metro areas in the United States consumed 16 million acres of rural land – that's about an acre for every new household. And with our population expected to grow by over 150 million people between 2000 and 2050, this land-use trend simply cannot continue.

Before today, federal policy has often treated transportation, housing, and environmental protection as separate issues. But that system of stove-piping simply isn't working. And the consequences of failing to address the way we plan our communities' growth are many. We'll continue to lose our rural land and open spaces. We'll see a worsening of the traffic congestion that has tripled over the past 25 years. We'll continue to pay more and more at the pump at a time when our family budgets are already stretched to the max. We'll continue to push lower-income families further away from job opportunities. We'll continue to increase greenhouse gas emissions despite the urgent threat of climate change.

In February, I wrote a letter to President Obama urging him to establish a White House Office of Sustainable Development to coordinate housing, transportation, energy, and environmental policies. The President has been a strong leader on these issues, and he has

already shown a willingness to shake up a federal government that hasn't always succeeded when it comes to addressing related issues in a comprehensive, effective way.

Today, following up on my letter, we've invited three members of the Cabinet who don't usually spend much time in the same hearing room. They'll be outlining for us the administration's commitment to sustainable development, a commitment that recognizes the importance of working across traditional boundaries to create more cohesive, collaborative policy.

One important piece of the work we have to do is to provide more transportation choices for families.

Few states suffer from worse traffic congestion than Connecticut, and the lack of good transit options costs families more than just inconvenience. In large part due to congested roadways and the lack of affordable housing and transit options, Connecticut ranks 49th in the country in keeping our young people in state. Meanwhile, living in a transit-rich neighborhood saves money – on average, as much as ten percent of a family's budget. This is particularly important for those living on fixed incomes or struggling to get by in a tough economy. Improving transportation isn't just about making a daily commute easier. It's about empowering people to access jobs and critical services, and making things just a little bit easier for those on a tight budget.

It's a problem that hurts not only quality of life for our citizens, but opportunities for our businesses.

So we must improve and expand bus and rail service, providing new choices for families who would no longer have to drive to work and creating space on the road for those who do. And we need to build more and better housing options near transit stations.

For instance, my state has developed a program called HOMEConnecticut. It makes grants available for towns to plan Incentive Housing Zones for higher-density, mixed-income housing in downtowns and re-developed Brownfields, close to transit options and job centers.

It's a strategic investment in our economy, our environment, and our quality of life. We've already begun to make progress in Connecticut – and we can do more across the country.

This Committee is currently drafting legislation to provide incentives for regions to plan future growth in a coordinated way that reduces congestion, generates good-paying jobs, meets our environmental and energy goals, protects rural areas and green space, revitalizes our Main Streets and urban centers, creates and preserves affordable housing, and makes our communities better places to live, work, and raise families. Our bill will also create a competitive grant program to provide resources to some of the projects identified in this planning.

There's a lot we can do on this committee, and I look forward to continuing to work alongside Senator Shelby and our colleagues to get it done – but we can't do it alone. Just like I've urged the administration to do, I believe we in the Senate must work in a coordinated and comprehensive fashion. In particular, this committee will need to work closely with Senator Boxer's EPW Committee and Senator Rockefeller's Commerce Committee as we write the next surface transportation bill – legislation that I hope will eliminate stovepipes within transportation policy, and ensure that it helps to advance broad goals related to not just transportation, but community development, economic growth, energy and the environment.

Today, we will hear from witnesses who have already begun the important collaborative effort within the administration, public servants who are doing a tremendous job. This administration is today making a significant and welcomed commitment to sustainable development and livable communities, and I'm eager to discuss how we on this committee can be partners in helping our communities plan for a prosperous future.