

TESTIMONY OF
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Presented at an open hearing of the
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

on the topic of :

“A 21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM: REDUCING
GRIDLOCK, TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE, AND GROWING
CONNECTICUT’S ECONOMY”

April 16, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, My name is Eric Brown. I serve as associate counsel for the Connecticut Business & Industry Association (CBIA). CBIA represents the interests of approximately 10,000 small, medium and large-sized businesses throughout Connecticut. Approximately 90% of our members have fewer than 50 employees.

CBIA and its member companies have long recognized the importance of a safe and efficient transportation system and we have worked with state officials and the legislature over many years to achieve that goal. However, it was in 1999 that our organization significantly elevated the priority of transportation following a meeting of our board of directors with Michael Gallis who had just finished an intensive study of Connecticut’s transportation challenges and the economic peril our state faced as a result of those challenges. The report, prepared for the Connecticut Regional Institute for the 21st Century, concluded dire economic consequences for our state if actions were not taken to address traffic congestion and to more

seamlessly integrate our transportation system with regional, national and international corridors of commerce.

Over the next several years, CBIA worked with the legislature and the Governor to intensify the focus on identifying, prioritizing, funding and implementing policies and projects to improve our transportation system.

In 2000, the legislature created the Transportation Strategy Board as an instrument to insert more strategic economic thinking into our state's transportation planning. In subsequent years, the legislature and the Governor allocated and approved several hundreds of millions of dollars for transportation investments.

These were important and helpful measures that have begun to move Connecticut in a better direction. However, significant challenges remain.

In the mid-2000s, the failed I-84 construction project along the Waterbury-Cheshire corridor brought a higher degree of public scrutiny upon the operations of Connecticut's Department of Transportation (CT DOT).

In 2007, Governor Rell created a special commission to look broadly at the operations of the CT DOT and make recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency. The commission produced an outstanding report that, among other things, looked at what measures other state transportation departments had taken to improve their operations. The commission's report was presented to the legislature in February of 2008 and provides an excellent blueprint for going forward.

One of the major recommendations of the report was to "make inter-modal travel a high strategic priority."

The importance of that recommendation is supported by data from the latest report of key mobility measures from the Texas Transportation Institute's 2007 Urban Mobility Report – perhaps the nation's most comprehensive comparative report regularly published on traffic congestion nationwide.

According to the report, road travelers (not just those travelling at peak hours) in the Bridgeport-Stamford areas averaged 31 hours of delay each year and that number is increasing at a “much faster rate” than similar metropolitan areas around the country.

In the Hartford and New Haven areas, the number drops to 19 hours of delay each year with “much slower growth” than other similar areas.

Costs associated with these delays are obviously substantial. The report estimates a \$78 billion annual drain on the national economy. Connecticut undoubtedly contributes hundreds of millions of dollars each year to that figure.

The causes for congestion and its adverse impacts on the economy and environment are multiple and can vary in different locations. Similarly, there is no one “silver bullet” to solve congestion problems.

Unquestionably, improving mass transit is one piece of the solution and Connecticut is clearly moving forward in that area. Obviously, as with most other strategies for reducing congestion, there are significant costs associated with large-scale transit initiatives. In addition to infrastructure and other capitol costs, substantial state subsidies will likely be needed to support these projects once completed.

CBIA supports expanding mass transit where it makes the most sense to do so. Individual corridors and options must be carefully studied from a cost-benefit perspective to insure limited but substantial transportation dollars go to those projects that provide the greatest economic and social benefits.

Additionally, we can not become so focused on transit that we short shrift our highway and bridge needs. In a recent statewide survey of Connecticut businesses, about 70% of the respondents said that the most positive impact state transportation officials could have on helping their businesses would be improving the condition of existing roads, highways and bridges or expanding highway and road capacity. Expanding mass transit options garnered 13%.

Going forward, Connecticut needs to closely examine the degree to which state funding will be needed to accomplish the goal of creating and maintaining a first-class, integrated, multimodal transportation system in Connecticut, and we will have to make tough decisions about the sources of that funding. We need to do a better job of refocusing our transportation planning from an interstate regional perspective and more appropriately balance those priorities with project lists created by multiple regional bodies within Connecticut that are appropriately but more narrowly focused on their local transportation needs. We need to rebuild the trust of our citizens that money raised for transportation projects will be spent on transportation projects and that those projects will be of the highest priority and will be implemented in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Under the outstanding leadership of CT DOT commissioner Joseph Marie working with the Governor the General Assembly, our Congressional

delegation and a variety of regional and national transportation entities, Connecticut is moving in the right direction and we are optimistic that the state can one day be the envy of most or even all other states with respect to our transportation system. We look forward to working with them and the many other transportation stakeholders to help realize that vision.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide testimony to the committee.