

The Necessity Of Public Transportation In Today's Changing Economy

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“I don’t think transportation should just help us get places better, it should help us make places better – and help improve the quality of life of people all across the country.”²

Anthony Fox
Department of Transportation Secretary

“Public transportation in the United States is a crucial part of the solution to the nation’s economic, energy, and environmental challenges – helping to bring a better quality of life.”¹

Every day Connecticut residents rely on our public transportation system to get them to work, to school, to a doctor’s appointment, to the supermarket, etc. Public transportation provides a reliable and affordable option which helps our economy, reduces congestion on our roads and provides a better quality of life.

The 2012 Texas A & M Urban Mobility Report (the 2013 report will be released in June 2014) demonstrates how traffic congestion has impacted our state in terms of excess fuel consumed, the hours spent waiting in traffic and the congestion cost which alone amounted to a staggering \$1,349,000,000⁰ in cost to the Hartford, New Haven and Stamford/Bridgeport areas. As APTA noted in their November 2013 Transit Savings Report, individuals who switched to public transportation from driving can save “on average almost \$9,986 this year and up to \$828 a month.”

Public transportation remains critical to Connecticut’s ability to maintain and expand our economic viability and provide job access to those currently employed and those seeking employment opportunities. Public transportation is a “\$57 billion industry” and “74% of government funding for transit is spent creating and supporting hundreds of thousands of private sector jobs.” (APTA)

Governor Malloy released his proposed midyear budget on February 6, 2014 and included some key initiatives to address transportation needs including a “Safety and Maintenance Program” for \$1.5 million; a \$7 million transit-oriented pre-development fund to assist communities with TOD development; and increasing the number of DOT engineers by 75 to speed project delivery. While rail and bus fare hikes were put into effect in January 2014 as part of the prior budget, no new fare hikes were included and there were no rail or bus service cuts. Additionally, there will be no transfers made from the Special Transportation Fund. Transit advocates have long urged legislators to not divert STF funds to the general fund and during the last year’s legislative session, lockbox legislation was passed.

Proposed Budget Cut has Serious Implications

There is a proposed \$1 million cut in the DSS budget for TEIP (Transportation Employment Independence Program) which provides funding for a variety of programs and services managed by the five regional job access partnerships in the state. CTTransit General Manager David Lee noted “We believe the services currently supported by the TEIP funding are of such priority that we would have to cut other service in our system to offset the lost revenue.” Barbara Kalosky, General Manager of North East Transportation which runs the Waterbury, Meriden and Wallingford divisions of CTTransit said “the loss of TEIP funds will at some point affect Job Access.” Windham Region Transit District Executive Director Melinda Perkins said “...any cut to this funding would adversely impact many residents of our area who work in retail or food service and do not work a traditional Monday through Friday job. These individuals depend on this service to access their job sites and their employment may be jeopardized if the proposed cuts are realized.” “...If

the TEIP funds are lost, it will impact the entire Jobs Access program for Danbury, Waterbury and Torrington...Unless some other funding sources come in to cover the lost TEIP funds, cuts would be likely. All that translates into fewer opportunities for employees in a fragile economy,” Richard Schreiner, HARTransit, Director of Service Development noted. This potential bus service reduction disproportionately affects those very people who rely on public transportation. The reductions in service further erode an individual’s ability to get to their job and leaves citizens stranded with no options. This reduction in TEIP funding can affect the public by the loss of evening service, Sunday morning or evening services and weekend service which impacts jobs and the economy.

“...continued demand for public transportation demonstrates the value of public transit to individuals and the communities they live in, no matter their size.....”³

Michael Melaniphy, APTA President and CEO

Public Transportation Riders



Linda is a Certified Visiting Nurse who has been utilizing Greater Bridgeport Transit’s bus system daily since September 2012. “I live in Bridgeport and I’m a new bus rider. I just started riding the bus a few months ago and I take it every day now.” As a Certified Visiting Nurse, Linda’s work takes her to meet people all over the region. “Now I am taking the bus two, three, maybe four times each day and use most of the routes. I pay the regular fare but I’m planning on going to the seven day or monthly pass to save”. Linda describes her experience on the bus this way: “I like the buses and the drivers are great — always friendly — I like the bus station too!” (Greater Bridgeport Transit website)

Joseph, a teacher, has been a GBT Access rider since 2004, using the bus several times each week. “I have been using the service for over eight years now going to work, my doctor shopping and banking. I have a great support system with my family but the day may come when I need to use the service more”. A Bridgeport resident, Joseph holds graduate and post graduate degrees and spent thirty-four years at Bridgeport’s Central High School teaching English to speakers of other languages. “I enjoyed interacting with young people and feel that I was a mentor for many of them”. Joseph would not allow students to tell him that they could not learn English or Spanish and would never tolerate lateness in his classes “I would tell them, I am never late and I don’t even drive”. He continues to work part-time as a teacher in Bridgeport. “On a scale of 1-10 I would give the service an 8, the drivers are helpful and personable – they are wonderful. However, the service does get busy at certain times of day and it would be nice to be able to travel to Monroe and other places in the region that we cannot currently reach”. Like many in the region, Joseph depends on GBT services for work. “Without services like this, where would we be? We would be home twiddling our thumbs. When you want to be part of the mainstream, we would be denied”. (Greater Bridgeport Transit website)



Ava is one of our youngest bus riders. Her mother Sarah takes Metro North to Stamford and then CTTransit to her Aunt’s house to visit. “Having the bus connection makes the journey so much easier and I don’t need to rely on my family to pick me up for family events. Plus Ava enjoys the ride,” said Sarah. (Full disclosure, Ava is the granddaughter of CACT Executive Director Mary Tomolonius)

Kathryn “I live on the bus and train line and I use the bus every day to get to work. I also use public transit to go to see my friends, go to the mall, get my shopping done and visit my parents. I am independent because I can use the bus and I like being that way. Not everyone has a car and not everyone can drive. If you take public transportation away you are taking away people's independence and that would suck.”

David “I was one of the first passengers on the commuter service from Avon to Hartford. And why wouldn't I be? Any time my wife needed the car she had to drive me to work, and home for her errands, then to Hartford and finally home. Think of the savings that we achieved over at least fifteen years of bus riding. Consider the purchase price of a car, the gas, the parking, the insurance, and count in the priceless amount of stress and strain. My gain was a quiet time for reading and studying on the way in, and a relaxing nap on the homebound trip. Winter storms were of no driving concern...just a longer nap.”

“Mobility is not just a question of building wider or longer roads; it is about providing appropriate and efficient systems that serve the most people in the best, most equitable manner. This includes encouraging a transition from car use to trains, buses and bicycles...”⁴

Ban Ki Moon Secretary General United Nations

Bus Operations in Connecticut

The Bus Operations line item in the Department of Transportation (CDOT) budget funds the CDOT share of the operating deficit for urban fixed route services, demand-respond services (non-ADA), rural transit services, commuter express and shuttle bus services. Passenger trips increased in FY 2013, with the public choosing these bus services for 41,406,109 trips.

Urban Public Bus Services provided 40,493,789 trips in FY 2013. The cost for these rides:

- Operating deficit was \$130,899,229
- CDOT share was \$126,009,805
- Local funding was \$3,515,957
- Federal subsidy \$1,567,668

Rural Transit Services provided 479,994 trips in FY 2013, an increase of 45,242 more trips than in FY 2012 through:

- Estuary Transit District
- Middletown Area Transit District
- Northeastern CT Transit District
- Northwestern CT Transit District
- Windham Region Transit District

The cost for the Rural Transit Service rides in FY 2013 was:

- Operating deficit was \$3,530,346
- CDOT share was \$1,130,773
- Local funding was \$831,905
- Federal subsidy was \$1,567,668

Transportation Employment Independence Program

The Transportation Employment Independence Program (TEIP) of the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) provides funding for a variety of programs and services managed by the five regional job access partnerships in the state. The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) manages a portion of Connecticut’s Job Access Program. This bus service connects people to job centers. In FY 2013 funding was:

- CDOT bus operations \$3,773,576
- FTA grants \$1,482,237
- TEIP (through DSS) \$ 2,812,708

Utilizing a variety of transit options, workers and job seekers were able to reach workplaces and daycare that was previously inaccessible due to limited service hours of pre-existing public transportation or geographical limitations. The TEIP funding for fiscal 2013 had been in jeopardy, but following letters to legislators, DSS and the Appropriations Committee, the proposed \$1 million reduction was restored. The Governor’s proposed mid-term budget cuts the TEIP funding in the DSS budget as of July 1, 2014 by \$1,000,000.

“Public transit is a vital link for the more than 51 million Americans with disabilities.”

American Public Transportation Association

ADA Para-Transit Program

The ADA mandates paratransit services be available to qualified persons on a reservation basis, during the same hours of operation and serving the same geographical area (within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile) of a fixed bus route service. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a federal civil rights law prohibits discrimination and therefore Connecticut residents who have a

disability that impairs their ability to use the accessible and affordable fixed route public bus service for their mobility needs rely on the paratransit services.

The State appropriation to the ADA Para-Transit Program provides the majority of funding for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated services. In FY 2013 in Connecticut 26,883 Connecticut residents used ADA Para-Transit services for 889,128 trips, an increase from 2012.

- Operating deficit was \$30,919,177
- CDOT share was \$29,845,575
- Local funding was \$1,073,602
- There was no federal subsidy

CDOT funds 100% of the operational deficit of the public transit operators and private carriers who provide ADA mandated services to the fixed route services of state-owned CTTransit. The operation deficit for ADA mandated services to transit district-owned fixed route service is not fully funded by CDOT. In FY 2013 six public transit operators utilized local subsidies for a total of \$1,073,602 in local funds to offset their deficit.

- Norwalk Transit District \$261,807
- Windham Transit District \$21,183
- Southeast Area Transit \$9,460
- Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority \$199,158
- Middletown Area Transit District \$154,843
- Milford Transit District \$325,907

“...Bus travel is increasingly popular because it is a convenient, inexpensive options for students, groups and families...”⁶

Anthony Fox, Department of Transportation

Non-ADA-Dial-A-Ride

This service provides demand responsive services to the elderly and persons with disabilities. The first appropriation to the Dial-A-Ride (DAR) line item was made in FY 1999 to offset the loss of federal operating funds (Sec. 5307) used by five public transit operators for demand responsive transportation services (ADA and Non-ADA) in the urban areas of Bridgeport, Milford, Greater New Haven, Middletown and Greater Hartford. In 2006, the General Assembly eliminated the DAR line item and created the ADA Para Transit Program and the Non-ADA Dial-Ride Program as two separate budget line items.⁵

In 2013, the Connecticut General Assembly appropriated \$576,358 to the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) Non-ADA-Dial-A-Ride budget line to fund CTDOT's share to

- Greater Hartford Transit District \$359,587
- Greater New Haven Transit District \$65,917
- Middletown Transit District \$112,332
- Milford Transit District \$38,5222

Within CTDOT's Urban transit budget line item, \$1,446,834 also funds dial-a-ride services in the Valley Transit District (\$717,856) and the Greater Waterbury area (\$773,814), along with an additional local subsidy of \$44,836.



State Matching Grants for Demand Responsive Transportation (CGS 13b-38bb)

In FY 2013, the state matching grant program to municipalities (*CGS 13b-38bb. Fund allocation is based on a formula in state statutes. 50% based on elderly population/50% on town square mileage*) continued to provide demand responsive transportation services for the elderly and people with disabilities in 136 Connecticut towns. Historically the allocation was \$5 million, in FY 2011 and 2012, funding was cut by 25%, having an immediate and profound impact. During FY 2013, \$3,351,689 was allocated (or 75% of the town allocations). For FY 2014 Commissioner Redeker has brought the funding level back to its \$5 million level.

The state matching grants have allowed family members to keep their jobs with the knowledge that their loved ones are safely transported to their destinations. This has also provided access to needed medical care, which keeps people healthier and living independently at a significant cost savings to the state. The transportation allows seniors and people

with disabilities to shop and spend their money on goods and services, thereby helping the economy. And finally, this transportation provides a quality of life for seniors and people with disabilities, which otherwise wouldn't be possible.

Financing Connecticut's Transportation

On February 3, 2014 the Office of the State Comptroller released their financial statements for the General Fund and the Transportation Fund. State Comptroller Kevin Lembo stated OPM was projecting a \$506.1 million surplus for the FY2014 General Fund and a \$173.1 million balance at the close of FY 2014 in the Transportation Fund.

The revenue generated from the Motor Fuel Tax was budgeted at \$502,900,000 for FY 2013 but the realized revenue (for the six months ending December 31, 2013) was \$217,479,000 or an increase of \$3,800,000. (Office of State Comptroller, Schedule C-2, Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2013)

For FY 2013-14, the Special Transportation Fund revenues will come from: Federal Grants 1.0%, Licenses, Permits, Fees 10.4%, 36.9%; Motor Fuel Tax, Interest Income 0.3%, Motor Vehicle Receipts 17.5%, Oil Companies Tax 28.1%, and Sales Tax-DMV 5.8%.

The 18.4 cent federal gasoline tax, which is mostly used to fund the Highway Trust Fund, has not seen an increase since 1993. Energy efficient cars and reduced gas receipts, have further suppressed the purchasing power of the federal gas tax.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation increased bus fares (CTTransit buses, ADA paratransit services) in January 2012, and fares on the Shore Line East and New Haven Line rail services beginning January 1, 2012 were programmed to go up by approximately 4 percent a year for the next three years with an additional 1.25% surcharge for the next seven years. Effective January 19, 2014, CTTransit increased fares from \$1.30 to \$1.50; one-way ADA Paratransit fares increased to \$3.00; 10-trip books for ADA Paratransit cost \$24.00, but an unlimited ride one-day bus pass decreased to \$3.00.

Expansion of Service in 2013

While funding sources continue to fluctuate, some examples of upgrades and service changes:

- **Connecticut Department of Transportation** offered various smartphone apps for traffic and rail updates and information. <http://www.ct.gov/dot>
- **Greater Bridgeport Transit** offered \$2 off admission to any Bluefish home games by showing a ZipTrip pass. www.gogbt.com
- **CTfastrak** Connecticut's first rapid transit system which will run from New Britain to Hartford with 11 stations has made steady construction progress during 2013. www.ctfastrak.com
- **CTTransit** was involved in planning on several Hartford projects including **CTfastrak**, the Main Street project, iQuilt project, and the City's Transit Triangle. <http://www.cttransit.com/>
- **Connecticut Department of Transportation** received state bond commission approval for \$170 million for DOT projects including the Stamford Transportation Center. <http://www.ct.gov/dot>
- *In cooperation with CTTransit* staff were very involved with the procurements of new fare collection equipment and ITS features for the **CTfastrak**.
- **Middletown Area Transit** received a \$965,339 state loan to assist in the cleanup of soil at its future Pease Avenue maintenance facility. The funds are part of a \$10.5 million state loan and grant program, which assists towns and cities in cleaning up contaminated soil.

The Future

A forum sponsored by CACT, Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), The Partnership for Strong Communities and Transit for CT, entitled, "*The Last Mile: Housing, Transit and Access to Jobs*" was held on May 22, 2013 at the Lyceum and featured DOT Commissioner Jim Redeker and Special Guest: CT Housing Commissioner Evonne Klein. Commissioner Redeker provided an update on **CTfastrak**, citing it's a dedicated fixed route "shuttle service" with high service frequency like the New York subway. As Jim noted "You go to the subway stop to get somewhere...Buses don't take you everywhere, it takes you from point to point..." **CTfastrak** is accessible and bike friendly. Tom Maziarz from ConnDOT noted, it now takes a 45 minute bus ride from New Britain to Harford, and when **CTfastrak** is operating it will take 20 minutes, a significant reduction in travel time. CRCOG Executive Director Lyle Wray talked about "putting jobs near transit." CRCOG is sponsoring meetings with towns to discuss Transit Oriented Development and the myriad of opportunities to expand economic development and affordable housing. Newly appointed Housing Commissioner Evonne Klein is in the process of consolidating the housing agency and spoke about determining where is housing needed at different levels and the

importance of placing housing near public transportation. “Property values go up with transit nearby...(and we) need to change zoning to accommodate new multi-family housing and density housing” said Shelby Mertes, Partnership for Strong Communities, “low and middle income earners are the transit riders, therefore housing development near transit needs to accommodate those individuals.”

“while ridership is up across the state, there are still opportunities to fulfill unmet needs and make our bus network even better...”

CACT & Transit For Connecticut: *Buses Move Connecticut*, February 15, 2013



AARP, CACT, GBT, Norwalk Transit District and Transit for CT hosted the “*Transit Roundtable: Successes, Challenges and Your Community*” on October 30, 2013 at the Bridgeport City Hall Annex. The group was welcomed by Bridgeport Mayor Bill Finch who wants to promote bicycling, walking and transit in Bridgeport and is actively working to get a second train station for the community. Nora Duncan, from AARP noted “everyone suffers from inadequate transportation.” AARP did a complete streets audit of the downtown East Main Street area in Bridgeport and then identified action items including a bus stop shelter plan. Joe Carbone, The Workplace President and Chief Executive said “...for a small investment, The Workplace administers the Jobs To Work program...1.5 million rides per year...many people working part time instead of full time. They need public transportation to get to work...people go to where the jobs are...many bus routes aren’t profitable but are necessary...unemployment is high but public transportation has made a difference.” Jonathan Rubell, Mobility Service Director at The Kennedy Center opined that “...probably 90% of their customers would not be able to get around without public transportation...some people will ride 2 hours each way to get to their jobs...if routes or hours are reduced, people can’t get to their jobs.” The Norwalk Transit District was established in 1974 and started service in 1978 with 18 buses and today operates 100 buses with 2 million boardings,” said Administrator Lou Schulman, and “if you can’t offer the service, you lose the passengers”. Executive Director Brian Bidoli, from the Greater Bridgeport Regional Council talked about how congestion hinders growth and the fact that you need jobs with access and opportunity through transit options. Mike Sanders, ConnDOT’s Public Transit Administrator from the Office of Transit and Ridesharing reminded everyone “...need to save and plan for future operations and structural needs.”

President Obama called for greater transportation investment in his 2014 State of the Union Address and for “rebuilding our roads, upgrading our ports, unclogging our commutes”. Our federal transportation fund is teetering on the brink of insolvency, so it’s imperative that we contact our legislators to remind them how vital transportation is to our economy. We need to provide affordable transportation to work, educational institutions, health care, marketplaces, and the other places life takes us. Transportation connects us – but a robust, efficient system requires both adequate operational funding and capital investments to meet the needs of today and the future.

Endnotes:

1. American Public Transportation Association: *website: Public Transportation Benefits*, Washington, D.C., 2014.
2. StreetsBlogUSA website: *Secretary Foxx Pledges to Make Bike/Ped Safety a Priority*, January 15, 2014
3. American Public Transportation Association website: *Transit News*. January 8, 2014
4. Smartgrowth.org website: *Selected Quotes: Category: Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices*.
5. Connecticut Association for Community Transportation: *Connecticut Public Bus Services: Mobility for the 21st Century*, February 28, 2008.
6. WebKnox website: Quotes from U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, found on edition.cnn.com on December 12, 2013

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