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Testifying on a Bill in Hartford: 'Not Any More. It's a Waste of Time.' — Cameron on Transportation

Author : David Gurliacci

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Don't look now, but our Legislature is back in action considering dozens of bills affecting transportation. Everything from tolls to train fares, from airports to Uber could be up for grabs this session.

But how are citizens supposed to voice their views, let alone follow these machinations from afar? Aside from following the Connecticut media or watching every moment [on CT-N](#), the state's version of C-Span, there is not much to keep us informed.

Some bills, like HB773 proposed by state Rep. Gail Lavielle, R-Wilton, deserve our support. That bill would require Legislature approval for proposed fare increases on Metro-North. But offering your support (or

disapproval) of any of these bills isn't easy.

Sure, you can submit testimony by email. But there are 36 members of the Transportation Committee, each juggling hundreds of bills coming before this and other committees on which they serve. Will your emailed comments make a difference or just be seen as spam?

Forget about lawmakers coming to you for a public hearing. You must go to them.

I traveled to Hartford for decades to testify on various bills in my capacity as a member of the Metro-North Commuter Rail Council, as a commuter and just as a taxpayer. But not anymore. It's a waste of time.

You have to give up an entire day to go to Hartford, arriving early in the morning to sign up on the testimony list (or enter a lottery for a slot).

Knowing where you are on the testimony list, you then settle into the hearing room waiting for your three minutes of time. With nearly 50 bills up for consideration at a single hearing and scores of people who want to testify, you'd better be patient.

Oh, and don't forget to bring 50 copies of your written testimony to give to the clerk.

The first hour of the hearing is usually given to the commissioner of the state Department of Transportation who explains why his agency opposes most of the bills up for consideration. Elected officials then get to speak — their time being far more precious than any citizen who's given up a day to watch this sausage-making.

Even with three dozen members of the committee, you'll be lucky to see more than a handful in attendance as they must flit from hearing room to hearing room, trying to juggle their calendar conflicts.

What you will see are the lobbyists, designated by a special-colored badge. They're well known to lawmakers and you'll see them making sure their clients' views are known on pending bills. Media come and go as well, occasionally grabbing folks for a soundbite after they've spoken.

Your turn to speak may come early or late in the evening. You'll read your remarks and hope there are follow-up questions before the egg-timer goes "ding" and you're sent home.

It's all political theater and you (like me) may come away quite cynical about the process. The real power lies with the committee chairmen and your favorite bill may never make it out of that body for consideration, let alone a full vote.

As demonstrators love to chant, "this is what democracy looks like." And it ain't pretty.

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Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for 25 years. He is the founder of the Commuter Action Group and also serves on the Darien RTM. The opinions expressed in this column are only his own. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com

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