

Darienite

News for Darien

<http://darienite.com>

How a 10% ConnDOT Cut Would Affect Connecticut: Cameron on Transportation

Author : David Gurliacci

Categories : [Opinion](#), [Transportation](#)

Tagged as : [Cameron on Transportation](#), [Cameron on Transportation 2017](#), [Jim Cameron 2017](#)[Jim Cameron's Transportation Column](#)

Date : January 20, 2017

As the Legislature reconvened on Jan. 4 in Hartford, all were buzzing about filling the predicted \$41 million deficit in the state's budget. While the governor is again pledging no tax increases (we've heard that before!), the alternatives are looking pretty ugly.

For the state's Department of Transportation, it may mean drastic cuts in services and staffing with long-term implications — what I'm calling the Domsday Scenario.

A few months ago, the state's Office of Policy and Management asked each department to come up with a plan for an additional 10 percent budget cut on top of last year's reduction of the same amount. Commuters

will remember how that last cut was partially funded: with fare increases. But this time, the DOT planners say that's not an option because it would take too long.

According to the DOT's own plan, here's what another 10 percent budget cut would mean to that agency and everyone in the state:

HIGHWAYS: Patching potholes and repairing cracks on our highways would be curtailed. Tree removal, fence and drainage repairs would be reduced or eliminated. Highway rest areas (not service areas) would be closed, replaced by porta-potties.

IMPACT: Worsening road conditions causing more damage to cars and costly repairs. Predictions of vandalism at closed rest areas.

WINTER: Elimination of 220 contract snow plow operators would mean cycle times for plowing would go from 2 hours to 3-plus hours on secondary roads — but not Route 1, Interstate 95 or the Parkways.

IMPACT: Less plowing means some secondary roads will be impassible during heavy storms.

RAIL SERVICE: Postpone the planned opening of the new Hartford Line — commuter rail from New Haven — to 2018. Reduced weekend and weekday off-peak service on Waterbury and Danbury lines and a 50 percent cut in service on Shore Line East.

Impact: Delay in opening Hartford Line could make the feds request refund of \$200 million in construction funding. Cuts in rail service would affect state's economy and "attractiveness" to people looking for a new home. Highways could gridlock as more commuters are forced to drive.

BUS SERVICE: Cut subsidies to municipal transit districts by 50 percent. CTTransit bus service would be cut 15 to 20 percent. Funding for new bus purchases would be cut.

IMPACT: Greatest impact on minority, economically stressed populations with no transportation alternatives. Less bus service, more car traffic, more delays. Funding cut would mean new bus purchases would have to be bonded instead of bought with 80 percent federal funding.

DOT STAFF: Layoffs of 6 percent of existing workforce, 213 positions. Curtailed planning for widening I-84 in Danbury, West Rock Tunnel on Wilbur Cross, design of I-91/691/ Route 15 interchange and planning and design for widening I-95. Staff cuts in Finance and Administration would delay contract awards, contractor and municipal payments, highway safety campaigns and environmental permits.

IMPACT: Though one of the largest state agencies as measured by number of employees, these layoffs on top of last year's staff cuts would leave DOT 15 percent below staffing needs projected for 2019. Planning

Darienite

News for Darien

<http://darienite.com>

for new projects would be in gridlock, possibly imperiling federal funding grant applications.

If any of these cuts happen, it would hasten a vicious cycle of less service and more delays, encouraging even more people to leave the state, further reducing tax collections. Now would be the time to tell your lawmakers in Hartford that we must avoid Doomsday.

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

Republished with permission of Hearst CT Media.