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10 Years After Panel's Report on ConnDOT — Improvements, Missed Opportunities: Cameron on Transportation

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In the “land of steady habits,” we don’t fix problems — we study them, over and over again.

It’s been 10 years since then-Gov. Jodi Rell’s “blue ribbon” [Critelli Commission](#) report studying the reform of the state Department of Transportation. You’ll remember that the study came after a construction scandal on I-84.

And while much of the report addresses the dysfunction of ConnDOT, I was pleased that the Commission’s

chairman, then-Pitney Bowes Chairman Michael Critelli, also picked up on some suggestions for improving rail service.

Rail Service Recommendations

Among the key recommendations were:

- Expand parking at all rail stations, but leaving the towns to price and administer the issuance of permits.
- Revisit the Metro-North contract for the operation of our trains with an eye toward greater parity between the railroad and ConnDOT.
- Focus on the maintenance and repair of our railroad bridges, 206 of the 325 of which were rated as being in less- than-satisfactory condition.
- Better coordinate bus and rail schedules to offer riders of both an inter-modal transit experience.
- Evaluate an independent Transportation Authority (like the MTA or NJ Transit) which could serve the interests of mass transit apart from the highway interests which dominate our current ConnDOT. (Connecticut is one of only two states in the union that runs mass transit out of its DOT).
- Speed up construction of commuter rail on the New Haven to Springfield corridor.
- Expand service on the Danbury, Waterbury and Shore Line East branch lines.
- Do something to offer a rail freight alternative in Connecticut.

Recommendations Other Than For Rail Service

But, beyond rail, the Critelli Commission also suggested some ideas to make ConnDOT more “user friendly,” following the lead of other states.

- Have a website where consumers can actually find information. For example, when construction projects are scheduled and, if they are running late, why and when they’ll be completed.
- Offer a 511 dial-in service for all traffic and transit updates. Using such a service a traveler could ask “If I leave Stamford right now, how long would it take under current conditions to get to New Haven?” and be told travel time by road and rail.
- Finally, the Critelli Commission deserves commendation for embracing an often forgotten transportation alternative — pedestrians and bikers.

See also:

- [Darien Train Station To Get Its Own Platform Replacements, But Not Just Yet](#) (Sept. 16)
- [First Selectman: State Might Pay for Darien/New Canaan Bike Route Signs, Publicity](#) (Sept. 16)
- [Tokeneke Road Sidewalk Construction Project May Start Monday, Continue About 3 Weeks](#) (Sept. 15)

What Critelli Says Now

Anyone who uses transportation in Connecticut realizes how few of the commission's recommendations were ever adopted. So I asked Mr. Critelli, now retired, if he had any regrets given all the work he put into the report. He wrote:

“I do not regret the work because we achieved change, particularly in better ConnDOT communications and process improvement and in being a catalyst for the service area upgrades on I-95 and the Merritt Parkway.”

“My regret: The state did not take the opportunity to update its talent recruitment and management practices. ConnDOT has an even greater gap between the talent it needs in a fast-changing and very different transportation environment and the talent it can recruit for its existing jobs and compensation levels.”

As always, Critelli is being gracious. A year of his life was donated to this effort and so little was achieved, even now a decade later.

Doubtless some candidate this fall will suggest yet another study of transportation before anything gets done to really fix it.

Cameron on State Transportation Policy

- [CT's Lousy Job of Selling Itself to Potential Tourists at Darien North Rest Stop: Cameron on Transportation](#) (June 24)
- [Instead of Working on the Transportation Mess, CT Politicians Demagogue About It: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Aug. 13)
- [Forestalling Tolls and Tax Increases Won't Keep Bridges from Rotting: Cameron on Transportation](#) (May 27, 2018)
- [State Legislators Hold Ultimate Responsibility for Funding, Improving Roads and Rails: Cameron on Transportation](#) (March 21)
- [No Free Ride: Connecticut Needs Tolls and Gas Taxes: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Feb. 25)

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- [Don't Blame Gov for Transport Project Delays, Blame the Legislature: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Feb. 7)
- [CT's Prospects Get Ever Darker for Transport Funding, Even for Maintenance and Plowing: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 2)
- [Think Gridlock on the Roads Is Awful? Wait'll You Consider Political Gridlock: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Dec. 11, 2017)
- [Big Transportation Improvements? CT Needs To Play Budget Catchup First: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Nov. 17)

A Darien resident for more than 25 years, Jim Cameron is the founder of the Commuter Action Group and serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column, republished with permission of Hearst CT Media, are only his own. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com.