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10 Years After Critelli Commission Report on ConnDOT — Improvements and 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 the CDOT, I was pleased that the Commission's chairman, then-Pitney Bowes Chairman Michael Critelli, also picked up on some suggestions for improving rail service. 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 CDOT.

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 CDOT. (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. But, beyond rail, the Critelli Commission also suggested some ideas to make CDOT 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.

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

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- [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)
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