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Beware the 'Automotive-Construction Complex': Cameron on Transportation

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How did Americans develop their love affair with driving?

Visit the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington and the transportation exhibit "America on the Move" will sell you on the commonly held theory that when Henry Ford made cars affordable, Americans loved them and demanded more and more highways.

Of course, that exhibit is sponsored by General Motors, which donated millions to put its name on the collection.

But University of Virginia history professor Peter Norton, author of *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in American Cities* contends that's a myth. Just as outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower warned us of the military-industrial complex, Norton says an automotive-construction complex took over our country, paving from coast to coast.

Sure, Americans like their cars. But it was a conspiracy of economic interests that turned us into a car culture. Where cities once enjoyed a network of cheap, fast streetcars, GM, Firestone and oil companies bought and wiped them out, replacing them with buses and cars.

"This country destroyed and rebuilt its cities in the 20th century to serve automobiles," Norton says.

And those same interest groups are alive and well in Connecticut.

Groups like "Move CT Forward" aren't pro-transportation as much as they are pro jobs — in construction. The groups have spent a lot of money lobbying in Hartford to keep their members, the unions and contractors busy. While I'm happy they're promoting transportation, their motives are hardly altruistic.

Cameron on Roads:

- [CT's Lousy Job of Selling Itself to Potential Tourists at Darien North Rest Stop: Cameron on Transportation](#) (June 24)
- [How Uber and Lyft Are Disrupting the Taxi Industry in CT and NYC: Cameron on Transportation](#) (March 28)
- [Buses Popular with College Students and Not Just for the Poor: Cameron on Transportation](#)(March 9)
- [No Free Ride: Connecticut Needs Tolls and Gas Taxes: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Feb. 25)
- [Predictions for Roads, Rails and Air Transport in 2018: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 21)

News about area roads and construction:

- [Lanes Closed Monday on Rt. 106 Under Merritt Parkway Bridge in New Canaan](#) (July 7)
- [Here's Which Darien Streets Will Be Paved This Summer and When: Is Yours on the List?\(June 29\)](#)
- [Nighttime Lane Closures on I-95, Off and On, in Greenwich, Stamford Start July 1, Continue Till Nov 15](#) (June 29)
- [Rt. 1 Bridge Over I-95 at Exit 9 To Be Replaced By November 2019](#) (June 20)
- [Rt. 1 Noroton River Bridge Replacement Project to Last 3 Years, With Only 3 Traffic Lanes](#) (June 18)
- [Nighttime Lane Closures on Merritt Parkway in Norwalk From Now to 2019 for Bridge Project](#)

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Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the Commuter Action Group and also 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.