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## **Buses Remove Traffic, Get People, Often of Modest Means, to Work — What's Not to Like?**

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Why is there so much scorn for those who ride the bus?

Forty-one million trips are taken on 12,000 public buses each year in Connecticut in communities across the state (not counting school buses). Yet, those riders are regarded as losers, not by the transit operators, but by those who drive by car.

When Southington was recently considering restoring bus service for the first time since 1969, one resident wrote a letter to the local paper declaring “Towns that have bus service are towns that frankly have a lesser

Really? “Lesser quality” — how? Because they can’t afford to own a car? Or because they are minorities? That comment is either racist or classist or both.

As I wrote recently, the Greater Bridgeport Transit bus system carries 18,000 passengers every day (5.2 million a year), 90 percent of them either going to school or work. Something like 26 percent of all Bridgeport train riders got to or from the station by bus.

Sure, some are non-white or non-English speaking. But why begrudge them transportation? You’d rather they not have a job or an education?

And yes, their fares are kept low with state subsidies. But their incomes are also low and for them even a \$1.75 bus fare is expensive. Remember, Metro-North trips (26.5 million per year), though also expensive (the highest in the U.S.), are also subsidized.

But the biggest target of transit scorn is CTfastrak, the 4-year-old, 9.4-mile dedicated BRT (bus rapid transit) system between Hartford and New Britain. Transit planners from across the country come to study CTfastrak. The feds are looking to spend \$665 million on similar systems across the U.S.

Yet, Connecticut Republicans tried to close it before it even began.

When it first opened in 2014, the state Department of Transportation projected 16,000 daily riders. To date, the ridership is closer to 11,400. Fares are cheap (\$1.75 round-trip) and service is frequent with buses departing every few minutes. From New Britain to downtown Hartford, it’s only 20 minutes, even at rush hour. That’s about half the time you’d spend on Interstate 84 stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

From the dedicated bus-only right-of-way, buses can also transfer to local roads into downtown Hartford and communities ranging from New Britain and Bristol to Cheshire and Waterbury. The stations are clean and modern and the buses even offer free Wi-Fi — something we still don’t (and probably never will) have on Metro-North.

Critics complain about “empty buses” riding up and down the system. Sure, the buses may not be jammed like Metro-North on a summertime Friday, but they do carry thousands every day. Imagine if those bus riders were in cars. How would you like the traffic then?

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Why the scorn for bus riders? Beyond racism and class-warfare, I think there's actually some jealousy. Why do they get a fast, clean, cheap ride when I'm stuck in traffic? Well, for some, it's a matter of necessity: they don't own or have access to a car. For others, as with train riders, it's a matter of choice: they prefer the bus for speed and convenience.

So can we please stop shaming bus riders? Like all of us, they have places to go, so let's just allow them to ride in peace and harmony.

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