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Gov Lamont's Transportation Plan Hits CT's Same Old Roadblocks to Reform: Cameron on Transportation

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As we review the details of Gov. Ned Lamont's CT 2030 transportation plan, I have a strange sense of déjà vu. Haven't we been through all this before?

Journey back with me to 1999 when the famous [Gallis Report](#) warned that southwestern Connecticut's transportation woes were strangling the entire state. If something wasn't done, they warned, we would become "an economic cul de sac" in the burgeoning northeast.

The solution? Yet another study, this one undertaken by Wilbur Smith Associates for the SouthWest Regional Planning Agency (now part of [WestCOG](#)). The report specifically examined “congestion mitigation,” like doing something about our traffic problems.

The \$903,000 report was submitted in February 2003 and was titled “[Vision 2020](#).” You see the pattern — Vision 2020 morphs into CT 2030?

Rereading the report, I am struck with its many good ideas, a few of which actually came to pass:

Land use review

The idea of transit-oriented development has been embraced throughout the state with municipalities planning for dense (hopefully car-free) developments near transit hubs.

More rail station parking

While there has been some progress, many towns have wait lists for annual permits that are six or more years. And 20 years ago, who would have even imagined apps like [Boxcar](#) or Uber?

More bike and pedestrian options

We now have more sidewalks and bike paths as well as bike racks on buses and Metro-North.

But other ideas still haven’t happened

FlexTime, staggered work hours and van pools to lighten the rush hour. Next time you’re stuck in traffic, look around: it’s almost all SOVs (single-occupancy vehicles).

A “Smart Card” universally accepted for payment on all public transit. And free transfers from buses to trains.

A “Weigh In Motion” system to monitor trucks without long queues at seldom-open weigh stations.

But never addressed were the big (expensive) ideas

Ramp metering, like they have in California, to stop cars from piling onto Interstate 95 at will.

Closing some interchanges to make I-95 a truly interstate highway, not a local shortcut.

Adding a “zipper lane” to I-95 heading west in the morning and east in the evening — with tolls.

Running BRT (bus rapid transit) along the Route 1 corridor.

Double tracking the Danbury branch of Metro-North.

Start a “[feeder barge](#)” system to bring shipping containers from New Jersey to New England by water, not truck.

Resume rail freight service by adding a train bridge across the Hudson River.

Widen I-84 and Route 7 to four lanes.

Study the idea of [high-speed ferry service](#) along the coast.

Haven’t we heard all of this before? How many of these ideas are posed again in Lamont’s CT 2030? A lot of them.

We are not lacking in ideas, just political will. For decades, the Legislature has been unwilling to commit resources to our transportation infrastructure and economic future, instead wasting millions on more and more studies of the same problems.

All of these big ideas take money — big money. But the “No Tolls CT” folks have tapped into residents’ cynicism that anything in terms of new revenue will be misspent. They’ve intimidated lawmakers with threats of “Vote for tolls, lose at the polls” that even the bravest members can’t muster the courage to do the right thing.

Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the [Commuter Action Group](#), sits on the [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) board 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.