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Is It Worth Building a Monorail Along the Merritt? — Cameron on Transportation

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What is this fascination people have with monorails? I can't tell you how often people suggest them as "the answer" to our state's clogged roads and rails.

"Why don't we build a monorail down the middle of The Merritt Parkway?" [asked an architect at a recent meeting](#). To my astonishment, such an idea was once studied.

As lore has it, the state Department of Transportation in the mid-1980s asked local tech giant Sikorsky if a

monorail could be built and a plan was submitted. Sure, such a system could be built, they concluded, but where would you put the stations and the necessary parking?

Since hearing of this white-whale of a tale, shared by [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) Executive Director Wes Haynes, I have been on a relentless search for details of the proposal, but I've come up empty. Sikorsky has no record of the plan. CDOT said, "Huh?"

Digging through the archives of the Stamford Advocate, I found [articles from 1985 discussing the idea](#): A \$700 million monorail down the median of the Merritt Parkway from Greenwich to Trumbull as an alternative to Bridgeport developer Francis D'Addario's idea of widening the parkway to eight lanes — or double-decking Interstate 95.

Motorists were surveyed and the state DOT apparently spent \$250,000 for a study.

The amazing research librarians at the state library dug through their dusty files and came up with a DOT report from 1987 denouncing the idea, not only on grounds of impracticality but because it would compete with existing rail service. Heavens, no!

But again, why this obsession with monorails? I think people have been spending too much time at Disney World.

In 1998, a monorail [was once proposed for Hartford](#), connecting downtown to Rentschler Field in East Hartford. It was going to cost only \$33 million and would have been paid for with federal funds.

It never happened. The idea was revived in 2006 when the Adriaen's Landing convention complex was opened, but again, nothing.

A pseudo-monorail "People Mover" system was built at Hartford's Bradley Airport in 1976 connecting the remote parking to the main terminal, all of seven-tenths of a mile away.

The fixed-guideway system, with cars designed by Ford Motor Co., cost \$4 million but never launched because the \$250,000 annual operating cost was deemed impractical. It was dismantled in 1984, though you can still [see one of the original cars](#) at the Connecticut Trolley Museum in East Windsor.

Whatever your fantasies are about space-age travel by monorail, let me dispel your dreams with some facts.

Monorails are not fast. The Disney monorail, built by a Japanese company, [has a top speed of 55 mph](#) but usually just averages 40 mph. Even on a bad day, Metro-North can do better. The 3.9-mile [Las Vegas monorail](#) does about 50 mph shuttling gamblers from casino to casino.

Monorails are expensive. The Vegas system, opened in 2004, [cost \\$654 million](#). That's why existing monorails like Disney's have never been extended.

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Monorails are not maglevs — magnetic levitation trains. Don't confuse the single-track, rubber-tired monorails with the magnetic-levitation technology used in Shanghai and being tested for passenger trains in Japan. The Shanghai maglev [can travel over 250 mph](#), and the Japanese test trains [have hit 374 mph](#).

No, monorails are not in Connecticut's future and are not the answer to our woes.

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.