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Jim Cameron's Statement at Transportation Dept Fare-Increase Public Hearing

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Here's the prepared statement from Darien resident Jim Cameron, head of the [Commuter Action Group](#), gave to state officials at Wednesday night's public hearing in Stamford on proposed fare increases for Connecticut train riders:

My name is Jim Cameron and I am a resident of Darien and have ridden Metro-North for 25 years. I served 19 years on the CT MN Rail Commuter Council, 4 as its Chairman. I am also the founder of The Commuter Action Group, a rail advocacy organization.

First, I would like to commend Gov Malloy and CDOT for yesterday's announcement of the purchase of 60 additional M8 rail cars to handle our rapidly expanding ridership. This is very good news, if long overdue.

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But commuters should know that this car order has nothing to do with the proposed fare increase. Fares only pay a part of operating costs, not capital spending.

This proposed fare increase is really the responsibility of the one-party Legislature, which completed its budget process with a \$192 million deficit and told the Governor, “you fix it.” Every state agency has suffered cuts and layoffs because the majority-controlled Legislature didn’t do its job. Now it’s transportation’s turn to feel the pain.

You will hear today from angry commuters, lawmakers who have gathered petitions and some who offer creative accounting solutions to fill your budget gap. But all of these are just band-aids on a dying patient and none address the real, long-term problem.

If our trains and buses rely on the Special Transportation Fund as it exists and is funded today, we will be back for more hearings like this for years to come. What we need is systemic change in how we fund transit. Yet I know of nobody in Hartford with the guts to be honest with commuters and taxpayers about what is coming.

In January, the Governor’s Transportation Finance Panel identified potential solutions, none of which will be popular but all, or many of which, will be necessary.

Tolls on our highways. A vehicle miles tax. Re-directed or increased sales taxes. Raising the gasoline tax. Higher DMV fees. Land value appreciation recapture at transit oriented development sites. Advertising wraps on our trains. And yes, annual fare increases. This is CT’s future and lawmakers, the Governor and CDOT know it.

So let’s be honest with commuters. Yes, our fares are already the highest in the US, but they will go higher, much higher, unless we adopt other funding mechanisms to keep mass transit running, expanding, improving... and affordable.