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Predictions for Roads, Rails and Air Transport in 2018: Cameron on Transportation

Author : David Gurliacci

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I recently reviewed my transportation predictions for 2017 and gave myself a B+ for a final grade. Not bad for a guy who doesn't even own a crystal ball.

This week, I'm doubling down on some predictions and offering a few new ones. So tuck this column away and give me a prognostication grade this time next year.

ing to like this one. With the Special Transportation Fund (STF) imperiled (see below), I predict there won't be money to pay for the additional M8 railcars on order for delivery in 2019.

Crowding will continue to the point that ridership will peak and start to drop. Adding insult to toe-stepping injury, there will be calls for another fare increase of at least 10 percent. Ouch.

[*Editor's note: Jim Cameron's column was [originally published](#) Jan. 7. By Jan. 10, [the Connecticut Post reported](#): "Metro-North commuters are facing a 10 percent fare hike this year and reduced service to cover ongoing shortfalls in transportation funding from the General Assembly. Judd Everhart, a spokesman for the Department of Transportation, confirmed DOT is planning to hold public hearings on rate increases in the coming weeks, the first step toward higher prices."*]

Service cuts

As he threatened, Gov. Dannel Malloy will cut transportation spending when the Legislature does not act on new funding sources for the STF. Even before the STF runs dry, expect reduced or eliminated train service, fewer road repairs, less snow plowing, etc. It's going to be bad, really bad.

Lock box

Before we see discussion of new tolls or taxes, we will need a lock box on the STF. We will have a chance to vote on that in a November referendum. But I predict the vote will be "no" — not because we don't need a lock box, but because the one proposed won't be secure enough to persuade cynical voters it would be pilfer-proof. A "no" vote on the lock box will put any new tolls or taxes for transportation in question.

Our next governor

This is a hard one to call because none of the dozens of early-announced would-be candidates for governor have said anything about transportation. They all know this is going to be a crucial issue. But they also know voters don't want any new taxes or tolls.

So, who among this gaggle of wannabe governors will have the guts to be honest on this issue? That's the man (or woman) who'll get my vote, if s/he exists.

Positive train control

In the wake of the recent Amtrak crash near Tacoma Wash., this technology to control our trains is years late, millions over budget and in some peril. Despite a three-year extension by Congress, I fear Metro-North will not have Positive Train Control up and running by the Dec. 31 deadline.

Infrastructure spending

Fresh from his first (and only) legislative victory in 2017, President Donald Trump will bask in the glory of his mighty tax cut, but he will not be able to get Congress to make good on his promise to spend \$1 trillion to

rebuild our nation's infrastructure.

Why? Because deficit-concerned Republicans won't stomach the cost and so despise the Democrat-dominant Northeast that they'll say "no way" to our multibillion dollar projects.

Self-driving vehicles

Autonomous cars and trucks will start showing up on our roads. The occasional accident will raise calls for better safety. But the age of the auto-bots will continue, and we here in Connecticut will either get on board or be declared irrelevant.

Hyperloop

Elon Musk's controversial system of high-speed tunnels will continue occupying the headlines, despite predictions of its eventual failure. A prototype has been completed and tested even as his Boring Co. continues drilling. But money problems at Tesla will drain his bank account and Hyperloop will be put on hold.

Those are my predictions for 2018. Check back next year and see if I'm right.

Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for 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 are only his own. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com

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