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## Some of Connecticut's Lousy Air Quality Comes from Transportation: Cameron on Transportation

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Do you know how bad Connecticut's air quality is? According to the American Lung Association, all of our state's counties receive a [grade of "F"](#) when it comes to the ozone.

On hot summer days, the sun's rays combine with auto, truck and power plant exhausts to create an invisible blanket of ozone over our state. When it combines with fine particulate matter, it turns into a grayish haze, making breathing difficult.

Sure, we can [blame states to our west](#) whose pollution blows our way, including those "clean coal" meccas of West Virginia and Ohio. But before we point fingers, maybe we should consider what we are doing

ourselves to worsen the problem.

Think of this next time you're in bumper-to-bumper traffic on Interstate-95 or the parkways. Metro-North mostly runs its trains on electricity, but its diesels are downright filthy — as are local buses, though many fleets are converting to natural gas or electric operation.

Even shipping by water contributes to pollution, though you hardly think about it as you're breathing in the brisk air of Long Island Sound. So it was great to read recently that Connecticut will soon have its [first "hybrid" cross-Sound cargo vessel](#), "Harbor Harvest," named after the natural food store and café in Norwalk.

The 65-foot, aluminum catamaran will carry everything from fresh produce to craft-brewed beer back and forth between Connecticut and Long Island. The \$2.8 million vessel will charge its batteries using shore power for the 45-minute crossing. Its owners estimate their cargo will take one or two trucks off of I-95 by cutting the travel time in half.

Mind you, the project would not have been possible without a \$1.8 million federal grant, which the owners hope will keep them running for a couple of years. Then we'll see if it's economically viable. One shipping veteran on the coast tells me that's "possible but not probable."

Not that one little boat, displacing two trucks a day, is going to make our air breathable again. But it's a start.

Meanwhile in California, the shipping industry is [going green on a massive scale](#). The twin ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles are the two busiest ports in the U.S., handling 400 ships a year.

To reduce pollution, the ports introduced a speed limit of 12 knots for ships as far as 40 miles from the docks. Those vessels used to constantly keep at least a generator running to power the vessel in port, but now they too are "plugging in" when they tie-up to unload containers and freight.

Here's an astounding statistic: Allowing just one container ship to use shore-power for a single day is the pollution-reducing equivalent of taking 33,000 cars off the road for that day. That's a major impact on air quality. But it's only the beginning of the needed "greening" of this transportation hub.

Containers offloaded from the vessels will soon be moved around the port on electric trucks, then mounted on rail cars and carried away by fuel-efficient (but still very dirty) diesel-pulled trains and 16,000 long-distance (equally dirty) trucks. So there's still much to be done.

We worry so much about traffic and getting where we must, quickly and safely. Maybe we should also think about how our transportation choices affect our health.

*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](mailto:CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com).*