

Talking Transportation: Leaders Take A Step Forward, A Step Back — The Dance of the Sugar Plum Ferries

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As our Connecticut legislators wrap up their “short session” this week, it’s time to assess their work: things accomplished, mixed messages sent and issues left unresolved.

Transportation is responsible for [almost 30% of all air pollution in the U.S.](#), more than half of that spewed by cars and trucks. [The EPA says Connecticut is in “severe noncompliance”](#) with Federal clean air rules, especially Fairfield, New Haven and Middlesex counties. Our air literally stinks.

So while I’m happy the state has [finally committed to a Clean Air Act](#), it will take until 2040 for many of its provisions to take effect. That’s far too long to keep endangering the health of our residents.

But while lawmakers do one right thing, albeit too slowly, they send a very different message in the short term. [As I predicted](#), they have [continued a cut in the gasoline tax](#) until Dec. 1, shortly after the November elections. What a coincidence.

While commuters can save money by driving, bus riders and rail commuters are losing their discounts: the free bus rides program will expire at the end of June. Ridership on one busy transit system jumped 17% when the free-fare plan was launched, taking cars and their pollution off the road.

And if you mistakenly bought a peak ticket on Metro-North during the many months when only off-peak

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fares were required, good luck getting a refund. Why did the railroad keep selling peak tickets during the pandemic? They said they couldn't reprogram their ticket machines. Really.

As legislators congratulate themselves for cleaning up our state's air (by 2040) they encourage further driving, worsening our air pollution, while discouraging use of mass transit.

And, oh yeah, while you're speeding down I-95 please let your passengers enjoy a beer. Yes, Connecticut still can't pass [a law banning "open containers" in cars](#) despite an increase in deadly accidents on our highways. Why? Because sports fans want to be able to tailgate at stadium events.

Pandering to that vocal minority has cost Connecticut \$132 million in lost Federal aid over the last 20 years. Apparently, Washington is smarter than we are and doesn't want to subsidize stupidity.

What other weighty matters did lawmakers find time to address while delaying air quality and ignoring public safety? Well, they voted to name [the lollipop](#) as our state's official candy, answering a petition by third-graders from Fairfield.

Yep, that's quite a civics lesson for the kids, wheezing from asthma as they enjoy their lollies.

Finally, a get-well greeting to Stamford mayor Caroline Simmons who, along with her husband, [has come down with COVID-19](#).

She says she's feeling well but I think she's delirious. In her pre-recorded State of the City address she said her team is studying the idea of [a ferry service](#) to New York City.

Madame Mayor: [As I have written](#) since 2005, that idea has been "studied" over and over again and found wanting. Why waste time and taxpayers' money on a "fuelish" transportation plan long ago rejected by industry experts?

Please apply cold compresses to your fevered brow. And have a lollipop.

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. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com.