The Merritt and Those Trucks: The Problem, the Ineffectual Efforts to Solve It, and What Else Might Be Done

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A faithful reader of this column sent me some disturbing pictures last week.

Joe C was driving on the Merritt Parkway in Norwalk when he saw a FedEx tractor-trailer moving southbound.

His passenger snapped these pictures:

This is so wrong — a serious accident waiting to happen. Trucks are, with few exceptions, not allowed on the Parkway — and with good reason.

All of the bridges on the Merritt Parkway, originally built to a minimum standard of eleven feet at the abutments, are too low for big trucks. In some places the bridges are even lower due to roadbed re-grading and raising. The road just wasn't designed for anything but passenger cars.

Trucks aren't the only vehicles banned from the parkways. So too are RV's, cars towing trailers, buses and all commercial vehicles. That includes any vehicle with advertising or logos on it, even passenger cars with "Combi" (combination passenger and commercial) plates.

But we know those trucks are there. We see them all the time. So why aren't they getting ticketed?

State police tell me it's an issue of priorities. They have only two troopers patrolling the Merritt Parkway per shift and their hands are full handling speeders, traffic accidents, drug busts, etc.

The problem is, it's only a $92 ticket for violating the prohibited vehicles warning signs at every entrance. That's not much of a deterrent. A bill to raise that penalty to $500 never made it to a vote in the legislature.

The old "Prohibited" signs at on-ramps were hardly noticeable and were wordy and confusing. So CDOT has just changed out all the signs to something simpler, more colorful and attention-getting. Apparently, they're not helping.

Even where more sophisticated warning systems employing lasers, blaring horns and flashing lights are in place, bridges still get struck.

Many truckers blame their GPS for directing them onto the parkways, so some insurance companies are offering financial incentives for fleet owners that use "smart GPS" designed for commercial drivers which will warn drivers of over-height vehicles to stay away. But if you're using a regular GPS unit or an app like WAZE, you're out of luck.

When a truck does strike a bridge there are consequences. In addition to often ripping the roof off the vehicle, the troopers also call in their Truck Squad which can issue thousands of dollars in fines if they find other violations regarding the weight of the vehicle, the driver's log etc.

Usually, when an over-height truck strikes one of the Merritt's 40 concrete underpasses, the truck loses. But any damage to these historic bridges, many of them recently restored, can take months to get repaired. Not to mention the incredible backups and delays from these accidents.

When the Merritt Parkway opened in 1940, the speed limit was 40 mph and it was designed to carry 18,000 vehicles a day. These days, outside of the bumper-to-bumper rush hours, the average speed is 73 mph and the parkway handles 90,000 vehicles per day. That's more than enough without adding dangerous trucks to the mix.

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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.](#)