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The Problem With CT's Preparation for Massive Storms Goes Way Beyond Eversource: Cameron on Transportation

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Welcome to Connecticut, the home of third world infrastructure.

Tropical storm Isaias has shown, once again, that we don't want to invest in our state's physical plant and we don't learn from our mistakes. But we are all so ready to blame somebody else when stuff goes wrong.

Every time a Metro-North train pulls down old catenary (overhead power lines), commuters scream, "Where are the replacement buses?" as if a fleet of buses is kept on permanent standby waiting for such strandings.

If we did better maintenance on the trains and wires, such accidents might not happen. But that takes money

we don't have. Tropical storm Isaias causes power outages for 2 million-plus Americans from Maryland to Maine, toppling thousands of trees, and angry residents cry "Where are the linemen?"

Did Eversource have a hard time organizing repair efforts? Absolutely. But were those delays caused because they had laid off hundreds of linemen over the years? Probably not. Had those jobs been kept the utility still would have required thousands of other utility workers to come to their aid, and maybe the National Guard, too.

Could Eversource have done a better job of pruning trees near power lines? Maybe. But the devastation from Isaias went far beyond anything that pruning would have helped.

And where was Eversource CEO Jim Judge (a.k.a. The \$19 Million Man) during all of this? That's a good question. He was obviously in hiding, sending his subordinates out to face the media when he should have been there himself. Bad optics, Jim.

But does yelling at him, trying to get his salary cut or getting him to resign really change anything? Sure, it's cathartic and makes for a good photo op for pols before an election, but maybe it's not that productive. Because we've been through this horror show before.

Remember the fall of 2011 when the state got hit with two massive, blackout-creating storms, Hurricane Irene and the October Nor'easter? That wasn't the first or last time we suffered blackouts as big as last week's. People were angry, demanding an investigation, and one was done.

Read [the report](#) of the [Two Storms Panel](#) commissioned by Governor Malloy and see if you don't have a sense of déjà vu.

That panel held 10 days of hearings and listened to 100 witnesses, and their recommendations were so prescient yet so ignored:

—**Develop performance standards** for recovery efforts from true worst-case scenarios (like a [Category 3 hurricane](#), not just a tropical storm).

—**Update and harden our infrastructure.**

—**Improve communications** with towns and customers.

—**Give PURA**, the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, some **"teeth" for better enforcement.**

How many of those recommendations do you think were acted upon? A handful, but not many. Why?

If you live amongst the trees, you must expect that they may fall down in 70 mile an hour winds, despite your pruning.

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Should we bury the power lines? Sure, if we are willing to spend \$1 million per mile to protect them. Do the math on the cost of the spoiled food you had to throw out or your willingness to invest \$2,000 in a home generator and you tell me how we should invest for the next storm and the one after that.

It's so frustrating to me, and hopefully to you, that — as our infrastructure keeps crumbling — we keep asking why, and yet we're unwilling to do something about it.

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.