

State Legislators Hold Ultimate Responsibility for Funding, Improving Roads and Rails: Cameron on Transportation

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I've been criss-crossing the state for weeks, talking to folks about our transportation crisis: The proposed fare hikes on trains and buses coupled with service cuts on the branch lines, and the state Department of Transportation's multi-billion dollar spending cuts.

I call it the "winter of our discontent" magical misery tour.

From Woodbridge to New Canaan, and Old Lyme to West Haven, I've talked to crowds large and small, explaining what's going to happen on July 1.

Most folks knew something about our impending doom, but they all left unhappy about the cuts' specific impact on their lives.

Like the first selectwoman from Old Lyme who said taxpayers were going to have to spend \$600,000 repairing a local bridge because, for the third year in a row, the state DOT doesn't have enough money to share with municipalities.

Then there's the manager of the Roger Sherman Inn in New Canaan who said she'd probably have to close if off-peak train service was cut on the branch, making it impossible for her cooks and waiters to get to work.

The culmination of these presentations came recently at the University of Connecticut-Stamford, where more than 200 angry people attended a state DOT public hearing.

I went more to listen than talk, but couldn't resist and used my allotted three minutes to ask:

- "What are we doing here? Why are we at this hearing when nothing that you or I say tonight will do anything to change the inevitability of these fare hikes and service cuts? This may be cathartic, but it's just political theater. The folks you should really be talking to are not from CDOT, but your state rep and state senator. The Legislature created this funding problem and only they can fix it. If they raise the gas tax and get serious about making motorists pay their fair share, none of these service cuts or fare hikes will happen."

I was 11th in a line of more than 80 who signed up to speak. Some of them waited four hours for their few minutes in front of the mic.

But not the politicians. As state representatives arrived, they were whisked by the state DOT commissioner to the front of the line, jumping the queue. The commissioner is no fool. He knows who controls his budget and it isn't the old guy with a walker complaining about the buses.

When the politicians spoke, it was the usual platitudes but no new ideas.

"Don't raise fares, find other funding sources," one said.

What funding sources? To their credit, some of the politicians did stay to listen, but others, including at least one gubernatorial hopeful, did their grandstanding and split.

One state representative did have the guts to poll the crowd on their appetite for raising the gasoline tax and tolling our roads, both of which got loud support, much to his surprise. The people have spoken, so now's the time for action.

But what kind of message does it send when scores of New Canaan residents go to the Stamford hearing to oppose rail service cuts, but take a chartered bus instead of the train?

People are angry. But they need to direct their anger to the state Legislature — not the DOT — and hold them accountable for their inaction.

See also:

- [Don't Blame Gov for Transport Project Delays, Blame the Legislature: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Feb. 7)
 - [State Transportation Chief Describes Service Cuts, Rail Fare Hikes Coming Soon Unless Alternate Funding Found](#) (Jan. 26)
 - [AAA Poll: Plurality of CT Drivers, But Not a Majority, Say Tolls Are Best Way to Finance Transportation](#) (Jan. 23)
 - [CT's Prospects Get Ever Darker for Transport Funding, Even for Maintenance and Plowing: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 2)
 - [Predictions for Roads, Rails and Air Transport in 2018: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 21)
 - [How My Transportation Predictions for 2017 Worked Out: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 7)
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