

*Darienite*

*News for Darien*

<https://darienite.com>

---

## **We'll Need to Finance the CT Transportation Fund, It'll Be Painful, But Candidates Avoid Discussing It**

**Author :** David Gurliacci

**Categories :** [Transportation](#)

**Tagged as :** [Cameron on State Transportation Policy 2020](#), [Cameron on Transportation](#), [Cameron on Transportation 2020](#), [Coronavirus 2020](#), [COVID-19 2020](#), [Jim Cameron's Transportation Column](#), [Jim Cameron's Transportation Column 2020](#), [Transportation Financing 2020](#), [Transportation Funding 2020](#)

**Date :** October 13, 2020

When it comes to COVID's impact on transportation in our state, we are in the eye of the hurricane.

That's been the theme of my recent virtual talk to various Connecticut's libraries and civic groups, comparing the calm eye of an intense storm to how we've become complacent about our transportation future.

We kid ourselves if we think the winds have passed. The worst is yet to come. Commuters who've returned

to the rails tell me ridership is slowly coming back but many still fear for their safety on mass transit, and with good reason.

Metro-North has finally put \$50 fines into effect for those refusing to wear face masks on its trains. But they're leaving enforcement to the MTA Police who almost never are seen on Connecticut trains.

Anecdotally I've heard from many riders who've seen non-mask wearing riders and conductors who do nothing to get them to mask up.

We're talking about public health here. I think anyone who refuses to wear a mask should be kicked off the train. The back side of the COVID hurricane may see a second wave of infections, but we will certainly feel the effects of six months of financial losses born by the railroad.

The MTA's Chairman, Patrick Foye, says the agency is facing an "existential challenge" — a \$16 billion deficit by 2024.

Without federal help he's predicting layoffs and service cuts to as little as one train every two hours. Imagine how crowded those trains will be, commuters sitting three abreast among the unmasked.

But on the state level an even greater financial storm is approaching: The Special Transportation Fund (STF) is going bankrupt faster than previously feared.

It is the STF that funds highway and bridge repairs, subsidizes mass transit and keeps transportation moving. But it relies on gasoline and sales tax revenues that have been slammed by the virus, so by mid 2022 it will run out of money... maybe sooner.

And if the STF is in the red, nobody on Wall Street will underwrite any of Connecticut's new bonds — not for schools or sanitation or housing. Then what do we do?

What really galls me is that nobody is talking about this.

It is an election year (as if you haven't noticed), but our State lawmakers have disappeared, leaving the governing of the state (by executive order) to Governor Lamont who, by recent polls, is seen as doing a good job.

Some lawmakers have complained that the legislature has been cut out of decision making, but they couldn't cite which of Lamont's emergency orders they took issue with.

Aside from their brief summer session when they passed an omnibus police reform package, now receiving criticism after we understand its details, our state reps and senators are AWOL.

Oh, they're campaigning, but not talking about what's coming in the next session.

## *Darienite*

### *News for Darien*

*<https://darienite.com>*

---

Of course they don't want to tell you now what's going to be necessary to re-fund the STF: a combination of tolls, new taxes and higher fares. They'll leave that bad news until after they are re-elected.

That's why all of us must force their hand. Go to their campaign rallies (fully masked) and upcoming League of Women Voters debates and ask them, on the record, where they stand on tolls and taxes. And if not those remedies, what are their alternatives?

Then we can all cast an informed vote and decide who's best to help us weather the storm yet to come.

---

*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).*