

[Opinion / Op-Eds](#)

State Must Get Going On Transportation Fixes



Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's \$100 billion, long-range plan to improve Connecticut's transportation infrastructure is badly needed, two engineers write. (Peter Casolino / Special to the Courant)

By **GARY J. FUERSTENBERG** and **ROY MERRITT**

FEBRUARY 13, 2016, 9:00 AM

Connecticut is going places thanks to the bold \$100 billion, 30-year Let's Go CT! plan that Gov. **Dannel P. Malloy** outlined for transportation. The governor has focused his second term on the need to modernize Connecticut's transportation systems, including roads and bridges, railroads, transit systems, ports and airports.

During his recent State of the State address, the governor reiterated his plea for the **General Assembly** to enact a constitutional amendment creating a financial lockbox to protect transportation funds. By doing so, we would have the assurance that funds raised through transportation-related fees, such as the gas tax and car registration fees, will be used for their intended purpose. This additional level of protection puts

Connecticut in a more competitive position, as it ensures consistent investment into our transportation systems.

The governor's 30-year transportation plan would help reverse decades of under-investment in our transportation systems and put Connecticut on the path to having a "best in class" transportation network that is safer, less congested and more efficient. These investments are critical as our existing infrastructure is aging — requiring an increasing investment each year in maintenance and repair to keep our facilities functioning and safe.

Currently, 41 percent of state and local roads are in poor condition and 35 percent of Connecticut's bridges are functionally obsolete or structurally deficient, according to the state's Transportation Finance Panel. Such conditions cost us time and money, and reduce safety. The average driver in Connecticut spends an extra \$661 a year in vehicle operating costs. Congestion is also a major issue which costs commuters time, slows truckers and delivery of goods, and holds back the state's economy. The Connecticut Business and Industry Association found that 42 percent of businesses think the state's road congestion hinders their opportunities and growth, which impacts jobs and makes our state less competitive globally.

Recent projects demonstrate the benefits that come with investing in the backbone of our economy. For example, the widening of I-84 through Waterbury is ahead of schedule and will improve traffic flow and enhance safety. New rail cars and other improvements on the busy New Haven commuter rail line promote increased ridership, improved reliability, and reduced traffic congestion on I-95. These upgrades offer a glimpse into what is possible if we continue to increase investment into all modes of our transportation network.

By investing in our transportation systems, we improve mobility, create jobs and strengthen the economy. The American Society of Civil Engineers' Failure to Act economic study found that, nationally, if we increase investments by \$94 billion a year, we could add \$2,600 of GDP for every person in the U.S. and save 2 billion hours in travel time. Those national figures show the positive impact investment in transportation can have on Connecticut. If we fail to increase our investments in transportation here in Connecticut, we risk allowing our infrastructure to fall into a state of disrepair, which will impact the public's safety, lead to more emergency repairs and costly retrofits in the future, and further degrade our state's economy, competitiveness and quality of life.

By creating a lockbox on the Special Transportation Fund, our lawmakers can ensure that future funding is available and dedicated to modernizing our transportation systems. Being the fiscally responsible state the governor envisioned during his State of the State address includes investing in our transportation network. It

has not received adequate investment in the past, and we are currently paying the price. It's time for Connecticut's elected leaders to take the bold action required to modernize our transportation systems and strengthen the backbone of our economy.

Gary J. Fuerstenberg, P.E., is president of the Connecticut Society of Civil Engineers. Roy Merritt, P.E., is chairman of the Legislative Affairs Committee of the Connecticut Society of Civil Engineers.

Copyright © 2016, Hartford Courant

This article is related to: [Dannel Malloy, Connecticut General Assembly](#)