

TESTIMONY
OF
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CAPITAL DISTRICT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
ONE PARK PLACE
ALBANY NY 12205
BEFORE THE
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
NOVEMBER 23, 2009

I wish to thank Senator Dilan and the Senate Standing Committee on Transportation for this opportunity to provide testimony on key issues relating to the New State Department of Transportation's (NYSDOT) five-year capital plan. My name is John Poorman, and I serve as the Staff Director for the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) in Albany. CDTC is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for both the Albany and Saratoga Springs urbanized areas; there are 25 members on the CDTC policy board – county, city, town and village elected officials from Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady counties working alongside representatives of the NYSDOT, Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), Albany County Airport Authority, Albany Port District Commission, New York State Thruway Authority and Capital District Regional Planning Commission. Mayor John T. McDonald III of Cohoes serves as our chairman. As you are aware, all federal transportation planning and capital funds are cooperatively programmed by CDTC.

I will restrict my comments today to aspects of CDTC's adopted regional plans and policies that have bearing on the upcoming five-year capital plan. I also would be glad to offer the services of the CDTC staff, policy board and other committees to work with you on these critical subjects in the coming weeks and months.

1. **CDTC's multi-jurisdictional, multi-modal work confirms that funding for transportation in New York is severely inadequate to preserve existing investment and sustain a transportation system over coming years and decades.** CDTC complements NYSDOT's own bridge and highway work by tracking pavement conditions on locally-owned roads, assessing long-term capital needs of the transit system, and integrating these issues with air and intercity rail needs in its long-range metropolitan plan.

CDTC's New Visions 2030 plan estimates that the average annual cost (in 2007\$) for capital investment at all levels of government in our four counties, coupled with the cost of highway and bridge maintenance and operations and transit service, at \$655 M per

year. The current estimate of funding commitments over the coming five years is only about \$500 M per year, if current funding streams remain intact.

The higher value is the amount estimated to be needed not to “gold plate” or expand the system, but merely to replace buses when they are old, reconstruct at least a noticeable portion of the Interstate system before it is 75 to 80 years old, maintain the percentage of roads and bridges in fair and poor conditions at acceptable levels, address safety issues, community concerns and non-auto modes in facility design and maintain regional air and rail passenger facilities in good condition.

2. **The higher value does not include the potential cost of “big ticket” items.** Strategic highway, busway or rail investments in the Northway or other corridors, construction of a regional trail system, expansion of the CDTA fleet or service levels, redesign of the urban freeways in the area are initiatives similar to those that are common in metro areas of the Capital District’s size elsewhere in the nation but cannot be seriously pursued here at present.
3. **While transit mode share in the Capital District is in the top 25 of the largest 100 metro areas in the nation, even the full CDTC budget would not permit pursuit of transit options beyond incremental improvement of bus service.** At curtailed state funding levels currently experienced by CDTA, maintaining current service levels is a major uncertainty.
4. **The biggest absolute funding gap in CDTC’s adopted 2030 financial plan is in the category of highway rehabilitation and reconstruction needs.** A very careful assessment of 30-year needs link-by-link on the expressway system combined with pavement condition forecasting for the rest of the arterial and collector shows that current state and local investment meets less than 40% of annual average 30-year needs with a shortfall of over \$100 M annually. Bridge rehab and replacement is the category with the second largest capital shortfall and an urgent need for preservation dollars *now* to avoid serious vulnerabilities later.
5. **The current funding situation would be made untenable by stagnation or erosion of existing federal or state funding programs.** The large financial gaps in CDTC’s plan are present even with assumptions of the continuation of historic levels of federal, state and local funding. At present, CDTC’s *entire* program is based on assumptions, given that the federal authorizing legislation has expired and the state program will end in March.
6. **However, viewed from a longer perspective, meeting the financial needs of the Capital District’s transportation system is an achievable goal.** It is the assertion of the members of CDTC that society may or may not support funding for discretionary “big ticket” initiatives, but *will* over time provide resources for basic system preservation and modest enhancements. To do so requires only that federal, state and local governments restore lost purchasing power of current funding levels, sustain this funding in real dollars (adjusted for inflation) over time and grow the funding base in proportion to economic

and travel increases. This is not an outlandish desire, but as vehicle fuel efficiencies change over time, such a desire may require exploration of funding mechanisms that are both inflation-sensitive and use-sensitive in place of per-gallon and similar approaches.

The chart accompanying this testimony shows the growth in funding that would reflect inflation and travel growth. Any significant delay in securing an upswing in funding makes later funding needs that much more daunting.

- 7. Finally, as a representative of an organization that serves both state and local governments with a goal of equitable treatment, I must add a final comment regarding the need for re-examination of state funding programs for local governments, particularly cities.** CDTC's plans and policies recognize that our older cities are dealing with an uneven playing field with regard to highway responsibilities; while state touring routes in wealthier suburbs are maintained by the state, those same routes in cities (NY 5, for example) are the responsibility of city taxpayers, primarily through the property tax. This is the legacy of arterial law that is generations old, developed at a time when economic activity was primarily in the cities and the rest of the state was essentially rural.

CDTC has taken no position regarding a solution to this concern, but CDTC works to ensure that access to federal capital funds is on as even-handed basis as possible (based on function and need, not ownership). It is logical for the state to begin to explore this concern of equity, as well.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity. I encourage your effort to tackle these difficult issues and produce a five-year program that helps New York and the Capital District meet basic needs.

Submitted by:

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Note: This written testimony was submitted for the record. The oral testimony was slightly abbreviated in order to respond to a question Senator Dilan had posed earlier to Commissioner Gee regarding land use planning. In my oral testimony I cited CDTC's success with the Linkage program and offered that as a model for statewide application. – John Poorman

Annual Budgetary Requirements for CDTC's 2030 Regional Transportation Plan (all public sources of funding)

