



CONNECTICUT LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION VOTERS



Transit for Connecticut

Helping People, the Economy and the Environment

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Federal Transportation Bill a Disappointment for Connecticut

Bill maintains funding and avoids transit cuts, but rolls back safety and environmental protections

In response to the announcement of a conference committee deal to authorize the federal transportation program through September 2014, transportation advocates expressed disappointment at the bill's lack of reforms and at provisions that would make it harder for communities in Connecticut to provide input on major projects and improve street safety:

"While the bill allows the country to avoid a shutdown of transportation funding, it shuts down progress instead," said Veronica Vanterpool, Tri-State Transportation Campaign executive director. "It reduces funding for bike and pedestrian projects, rolls back environmental protections, and incentivizes new road building and driving. It's now up to local and state leaders to fight for a more accountable, environmentally sustainable transportation system."

The bill would make large portions of dedicated pedestrian and bicycle funding optional for states. Currently, less than 3% of federal transportation funding is dedicated for pedestrian and bicycle projects, and local communities rely on these small programs to improve safety and promote economic development.

"Scores of Connecticut residents are killed and many more injured while walking and cycling each year," said Kelly Kennedy, Executive Director of Bike Walk Connecticut. "With less help coming from Washington, ConnDOT must step up its commitment to safety."

The bill also appears to roll back environmental protections. It exempts more projects from the federal project review process and adds arbitrary deadlines that could lead to hasty, error-prone reviews.

"We're concerned that the bill could make it harder for local communities and residents to provide input on projects that affect their air, water, health, and property," said Kirsten Griebel, Transportation Program Director, CT League of Conservation Voters.

The Senate had crafted a forward-looking, bipartisan bill, MAP-21. Unfortunately, many positive reforms that had been included in MAP-21 were dropped from the final deal, including provisions to restore the transit commuter benefit to

\$240/month (it fell to \$125/month at the beginning of the year), give transit agencies flexibility over how they spend their federal funds, and focus road and bridge funding on repair and maintenance.

The legislation avoids cuts to public transportation. It would provide new sources of funding for repair of transit systems, and help municipalities build around their rail and bus stations.

“It’s a bitter disappointment that the commuter benefit won’t be restored, though Connecticut thankfully avoids a cut to transit funding,” said Transit for Connecticut Coordinator Karen Burnaska.

“Though the bill lacks significant reforms, it does avoid the most extreme cuts supported by some in the House,” Tri-State Transportation Campaign Federal Advocate Steven Higashide said. “Connecticut’s delegation helped defeat proposals to cut all dedicated funding for public transportation, walking, and cycling projects. We thank them for their hard work.”

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