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Steven Higashide, Senior Planner/Connecticut Coordinator  
Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
Contact: 860-796-6988

### **Testimony at ConnDOT Public Hearing on Stamford Parking Garage and Transit-Oriented Development Project**

Good evening. My name is Steven Higashide and I am the senior planner and Connecticut coordinator for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a regional transportation watchdog which supports increased investment in public transit, smart growth, and efforts that support biking and walking. I'm here because we believe there's a lot of potential for a transit-oriented development near the Stamford Transportation Center, and we want to make sure it is designed well.

It's smart for ConnDOT to be exploring transit-oriented development because TOD is a strategy that works. It's one of the reasons why the cities and towns along Metro-North have been so successful. It's why Stamford has performed so strongly over the past thirty years. I think almost everyone would agree that the Transportation Center is a critical asset and the area around it is one of the most promising areas for development in the city and perhaps the entire state.

Of course, the details of any given project are important. One of our main concerns about the station area today is that it needs to work better for pedestrians, as well as cyclists. It's a very short walk from the train station to downtown, but it doesn't feel short because it's not a pleasant walk. The City clearly recognizes that this is a missed opportunity, which is why it is using both local and federal funds to improve the pedestrian experience around the station.

I'm pointing this out because, while there is a clear and valid concern about commuter parking, we want to ensure that you also hear about the needs of those who work in Stamford, those who visit Stamford, and those who get to the train station on foot, bike, and bus. These are the majority of the users of the station. There are currently 2,200 parking spaces in the station area, but over 26,000 boardings and deboardings on Metro-North and Amtrak every day. Clearly, most people who use the station are coming to Stamford or getting to the station by walking, cycling, or transit.

This is why it is paramount that this project be done in combination with walking and cycling improvements, and that it not compromise any of the work the city is already doing to make it easier to

walk to the station. We are very concerned that concentrating more commuter parking in one location, such as next to the train station, will concentrate traffic and degrade the environment for both drivers and walkers. ConnDOT appears to be open to dispersed parking, which could be a sensible way to handle this issue.

While we support ConnDOT's TOD efforts, we are also concerned about how the agency is analyzing the effects of a TOD. The Environmental Impact Evaluation analyzes a theoretical mixed-use development with more than 2,000 parking spaces. This doesn't seem like a realistic number. To get to that parking number, ConnDOT assumed that 80% of trips to and from the development would be by car, which seems high. According to the Census, 80% of work trips in the entire Southwest Connecticut region are made by car. That's the average of both the transit-oriented and non-transit oriented parts. So you would think that for a development around the busiest rail station in Connecticut, actual car use would be lower than what the state is predicting. Various studies reviewed by the Victoria Transport Policy Institute suggest that 60-70%, or even lower, would be a more realistic estimate.

ConnDOT also largely ignored the fact that mixed-use development reduces the number of trips generated, typically by 20-30%, because residents and workers can meet more needs within the development. ConnDOT assumed only a 5% trip reduction. Furthermore, the agency's RFP requires that the developer look at demand management to further reduce car trips. In other words, a TOD could reduce car use by a much greater extent than ConnDOT is estimating here.

While the state must conduct a thorough and thoughtful vetting of the proposals it receives, and can do more to seek stakeholder input, we support the continuation of this process and applaud ConnDOT for exploring the potential of TOD. If done well, a walkable, bikeable, transit-oriented development can improve the neighborhood around the train station; add amenities for commuters, residents, and workers; and reduce the taxpayer burden. Thank you.