



Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York- New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

1040 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10018 • (212) 398-1140

NEWS RELEASE

No. 1517

For Further Information:

James L. Wunsch
(212) 398-1140 (office)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AMERICAN CAN CHAIRMAN URGES NEW PLANNING EFFORT TO KEEP STATE FROM STRANGLING IN TRAFFIC

William S. Woodside, Chairman of Regional Plan Association and Greenwich-based American Can Company, cautioned that transportation planning could become a passive exercise unless a strong effort is made to control new development. His remarks were part of a day-long conference on the future of transportation in Connecticut, sponsored by Regional Plan Association.

Woodside praised Governor William O'Neill and legislative leaders for showing the political will to deal with the need to repair the State's crumbling bridge and highway network. But the enactment of ambitious transportation finance legislation should not lead Connecticut to complacency, he warned.

With offices and retail development stretched out along major highways, often far away from residential development and irrelevant to bus and rail service, the State is facing the prospect of more traffic and pollution.

He stated that while our bankbooks may say Western Connecticut is getting richer, in terms of our quality of life, we may be getting poorer.

Woodside called on the new Legislature convening in Hartford to connect land use and transportation planning to keep Connecticut from becoming the Los Angeles of the East Coast.

The full text of Mr. Woodside's speech is attached, along with a conference program.

Regional Plan Association is a non-profit civic organization which has been planning for the tri-state Region from Trenton to New Haven since the 1920s. Its 31-member Connecticut Committee serves as the policy advisory group for the Connecticut sector of the Region. The Connecticut Committee is chaired by Robert N. Rich, President of F.D. Rich Company.

#

/sw

"Can Western Connecticut Sustain Its Growth
Without Strangling In Traffic?"

William S. Woodside
Chairman
Regional Plan Association
Connecticut Transportation Conference
Friday, November 16, 1984
Sacred Heart University
Fairfield

Welcome to Regional Plan Association's conference "The Future of Transportation in Western Connecticut." On behalf of the Association I want to thank Dr. Thomas P. Melady, President of Sacred Heart University and a member of our Connecticut Committee, for the use of these facilities. I should also like to thank the Fairfield County Cooperative Foundation of Greenwich and its Executive Director, Frank J. Watson, for a grant to help underwrite conference costs.

Thanks also to the six regional planning associations of Western Connecticut co-sponsoring this conference. They provided our staff with valuable assistance in planning today's program.

This conference affirms Regional Plan's commitment to its Connecticut Committee and recognizes Western Connecticut's unique problems, needs, and opportunities.

*** *** ***

Many years ago, Henry Ford in a single sentence offered a neat solution to certain vexing problems. "We will solve the problems of cities," he said, "by moving away from cities." Ford, as much as anyone, gave us the opportunity to follow his advice, and to move away from cities in relatively cheap, mass-produced automobiles.

We are meeting here today to consider a problem resulting from Mr. Ford's solution--traffic congestion and what to do about it. I should point out that the problem is not a new one to Regional Plan Association. In the late twenties, about the time Ford was replacing the "Model T" with the "Model A," the Association was set up to draft a plan for the entire metropolitan area. A key problem it sought to address was how to keep the Manhattan central business district from strangling in automobile, trolley, and horse-drawn traffic. The 1929 Regional Plan proposed a series of bridges, circumferential and radial parkways--including the Merritt--to help decongest Manhattan and to disperse some development to communities outside the City. The Association recognized that Manhattan could not be planned in isolation, and that its New York suburbs, Western Connecticut, and Northern New Jersey constituted a mutually dependent whole, bound together not only by the existing rail commuter lines, but also by the proposed new highway and bridge network.

It should also be pointed out that along with the new highways and bridges, the 1929 Plan proposed rail passenger improvements to open up new areas for convenient commutation. Thanks to New Deal public works programs and post-war federal highway programs, the bridges and roads--including the Merritt--were built, but the rail improvements were not forthcoming.

During the 1950s, an extensive highway network helped to disperse people and jobs to the far reaches of the metropolitan area. That dispersion brought blessings, but it also brought--ironically--the urban problems which Henry Ford promised we could escape. So here we are, more than half a century later, more than 50 miles from Manhattan,

Looking at a Connecticut metropolis with a classic urban problem: congestion on its great uptown and cross town streets--the Turnpike, The Merritt, I-84, and Routes 7 and 25.

Will Western Connecticut strangle in its own traffic? To answer that and related questions, we have brought together a distinguished group of panelists. They represent diverse points of view, and I doubt very much they will reach concensus on all matters; but I believe they will agree that to sustain the level of growth--especially in new office construction which we have seen over the last 10 years--presents a formidable challenge. Lower Fairfield county ranks third in the nation as a center for major national corporations. Offices in Stamford alone occupy 3.4 million square feet and an additional 3 million square feet is under construction. Within the next decade, Stamford may have 13 million square feet of retail and office space.

As you all know, however, not all our Connecticut cities are sharing in Stamford's downtown redevelopment. Much of our new office development is stretched out along I-84, Route 7, and the Turnpike. Because the rate of new office construction so out paces the rate of new housing, our workforce is called upon to commute longer distances-- adding to the burden on highways. And because new office construction along highways cannot be effectively served by transit lines radiating in different directions, employees are forced to use their automobiles. Transportation experts visiting from Los Angeles advise that "we ain't seen nothing yet." I hope Los Angeles is not Western Connecticut's future.

To deal with our transportation problems requires a high level of public awareness of these problems and the political will to deal with them. This year brings reason for optimism. Last Spring the Legislature approved one of the nation's most ambitious programs to finance the repair and improvement of our highways, bridges, and transit facilities. What the State recognized--and it may have taken a series of turnpike disasters to force that recognition--was that we can't plan our transportation future while the existing bridge and highway infrastructure is crumbling around us. This new legislation, virtually unprecedented in the annals of state legislation, schedules a full decade of auto fee increases to generate \$2.1 billion while qualifying the state for \$3 billion in federal assistance.

When major legislation is adopted, there is a tendency to believe that the problem is solved. That belief is a luxury we cannot afford now. If the public is to accept 10 years of stiff increases in already high gasoline taxes, auto license and registration fees, then the public must understand where the revenue is going and why. That is a prime concern of our first panel on bridges and highways, chaired by Stamford attorney and Connecticut Committee member, John Merchant. The panel will consider what the new transportation package will mean in terms of repairs and improvements which can be expected in Western Connecticut. I hope that our experts will also tackle the question of our ability to assess how fast our infrastructure is actually wearing out and our capacity to set priorities in making repair decisions. And I hope the panel will also peer into a crystal ball and tell us what getting around our highways will be like in the year 2000.

Our second panel is chaired by a Regional Plan Connecticut Committee member, Charles Judd, Vice President of Southern New England Telephone. This panel will consider how we can accommodate future development by reducing our dependency on the automobile. How can Connecticut establish a more effective bus and rail system? And how can van pooling be used to supplement rather than undercut such a transit system?

After lunch, Ruth Sims, a director of Regional Plan and President of Greenwich Neighborhoods, will chair a panel which will consider Connecticut's transportation problems from the regional perspective of moving freight and passengers along the Northeast Corridor. One of the most astonishing, albeit least reported developments in transportation over the last 20 years, has been the phenomenal growth of the motor trucking industry and the virtual demise of rail freight in Connecticut. What are the prospects for rail freight revival? What are the problems for trucking if--as the industry anticipates--the squeeze on the Turnpike and other Interstates grows ever tighter? And what ever happened to the dream of good interstate rail passenger service for Connecticut? Why can't we have top-notch rail service between Washington and Boston via New Haven and New York with the speed and comfort provided in Europe and Japan? What do we have to show for the two billion dollars invested in the Northeast Corridor, and what are the prospects for improvements?

We have a great many issues to consider in a rather limited amount of time. I know, however, that this conference will prove rewarding to our Connecticut Committee, our co-sponsoring agencies, guests, and members of the press.

Let me leave you with a final thought, an idea which may not be discussed directly here today, but which should be implicit in your deliberations. Traffic congestion, the excessively rapid deterioration of highways and bridges, the ineffectiveness of our transit system to serve a dispersed population--these problems are symptoms of a fundamental problem: the lack of effective land use planning in Connecticut. Thousands of individual development decisions, subject to review only by individual municipalities, make transportation planning a passive function. In Connecticut, as elsewhere, we build first and let the state take care of transportation problems later. Instead, we need strong urban growth policies directly supported by a framework of transit system plans, and an allocation of transportation funds which does not emphasize highways that further decentralize development. We must realize that without effective land use planning, Connecticut's transportation plans will do no more than play catch up with development.

I believe that Western Connecticut will probably continue to grow and prosper for many years. We still have a vast area open for development, and we can probably sustain a strong growth level whether or not we plan for it. Nevertheless, I do not believe we can afford our haphazard, uncoordinated approach to planning.

The troubling fact is that as Western Connecticut grows wealthier--and it is already one of the most prosperous areas in the world--the quality of life may not be improving. You may have a lovely home, but if it is enveloped by noise and air pollution, is the quality of your life improving? You may have a good job, but if you

have to fight longer and longer traffic jams going to and coming from work, then is the quality of your life improving? The system is even harder on the poor; jobs are increasingly more remote from those who need them most. My concern is that, while our bank books show we are better off--in terms that really matter--we may be getting poorer.

A new year is approaching and the legislature is convening in Hartford; we now have in place a financing package designed to address significant infrastructure problems. But we also must examine the effectiveness of our planning process--at all levels of government--so that our dream of moving the people and goods of today is not turned into a nightmare of giant traffic jams tomorrow.

Good luck in your deliberations.

/sw