Connecticut Transportation Issues

FOREWORD

Western Connecticut has been a relatively unspoiled sector of the New York Urban Region. It has been blessed with beautiful countryside, seacoast, New England lifestyle, and modest taxes. Residents there have had much to be satisfied about, but of recent years they have begun to feel the outward surge of urbanization from the older, built-up areas of the Region. Even that has had its advantages. For example, in the past half dozen years, more than fifty national firms have established headquarters there. But with growth has come change and the need to adjust to it.

Regional Plan Association has discussed growth issues with Connecticut citizens on a number of occasions over the last several years: at the Conference on "The Future of Southern Fairfield County" in 1970 at Sacred Heart University attended by more than 1,300 people; through the CHOICES for '76 Town Meetings in Spring 1973, which drew about 12,000 ballots from Connecticut; at a Conference on Strategies for Implementing CHOICES ballot results in Fall 1973 in Bridgeport, attended by over 300 leaders and officials from throughout the State; and in smaller meetings with officials, citizens and business leaders.

Out of these discussions, transportation has emerged as one of the primary concerns of most residents of the Connecticut sector of the Tri-State Region, whether they live in the city, the suburbs, or the country. In cities like Bridgeport, Stamford and New Haven, problems of downtown access and public transit deficits continue; in the suburbs, traffic mounts and people debate the widening of the Merritt Parkway; in the State's magnificent countryside, scattered development urbanizes vast stretches of otherwise rural landscape and fills country roads with cars.

This brief survey was undertaken at the suggestion of Connecticut leaders who asked for a demonstration of what regional planning can accomplish, specifically on the broad range of transportation questions now being debated. The substance of this report was reviewed at a Transportation Forum held at GTE headquarters in Stamford in October 1974.

The Association's proposals are cast in the context of its policies for urban growth set forth in *The Second Regional Plan*, the burden of which is to encourage major facilities to locate in downtowns--large and small--and to avoid free-standing structures along every main highway in the Region. Because transportation both leads as well as follows growth, it can accentuate the trend toward spread development or be used to stem it.

Our primary recommendation then is: Connecticut would benefit from an urban growth policy within which specific transportation and development projects can be weighed. The State's recently-published *Plan of Conservation and Development* has been given the official force of a Governor's Executive Order, but it requires greater specificity if the State's builders are to be effectively guided.

This report is intended to add a regional dimension to Connecticut's transportation decision making. As a discussion document, it represents only a beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing citizen discussion of land-use and transportation issues by Connecticut residents.

Many individuals and organizations assisted in the preparation of this report. Financial support was provided in part by The New Haven Foundation, Bridgeport People's Savings Bank, and The Bridgeport Area Foundation. We are most grateful to all.

John P. Keith
President

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This report was prepared by David D. Doniger and edited by Richard T. Anderson, with the advice of Boris S. Pushkarev.

INTRODUCTION

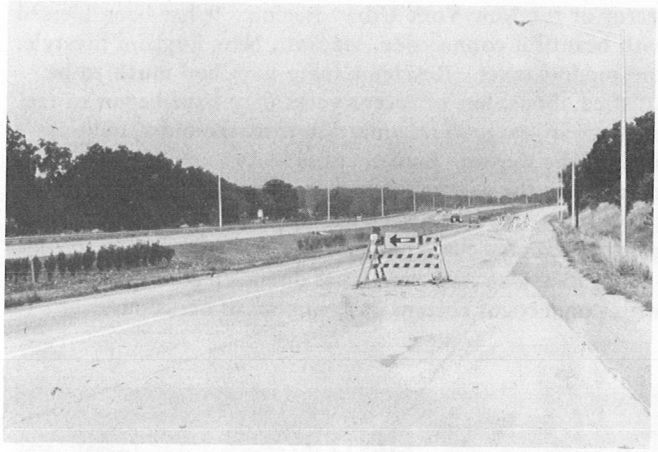
In the past four years, Regional Plan Association has had many discussions with citizens from the Connecticut portion of the Tri-State Region.* One concern comes up constantly: transportation.

Connecticut residents perceive several major transportation problems. Existing expressways are becoming more crowded, both with automobiles and trucks. New segments needed to keep redevelopment efforts in older cities from starving are being held up. Bus service in and to these cities is running further into the red. Train service from Connecticut cities and towns to New York City, although much improved, also has a large deficit. And at various times, rail freight service has appeared on the verge of virtual elimination.

The Association believes that these transportation problems can be understood and resolved only in their larger context of Connecticut growth policy. Transportation facilities and services not only serve and follow development, they lead it.

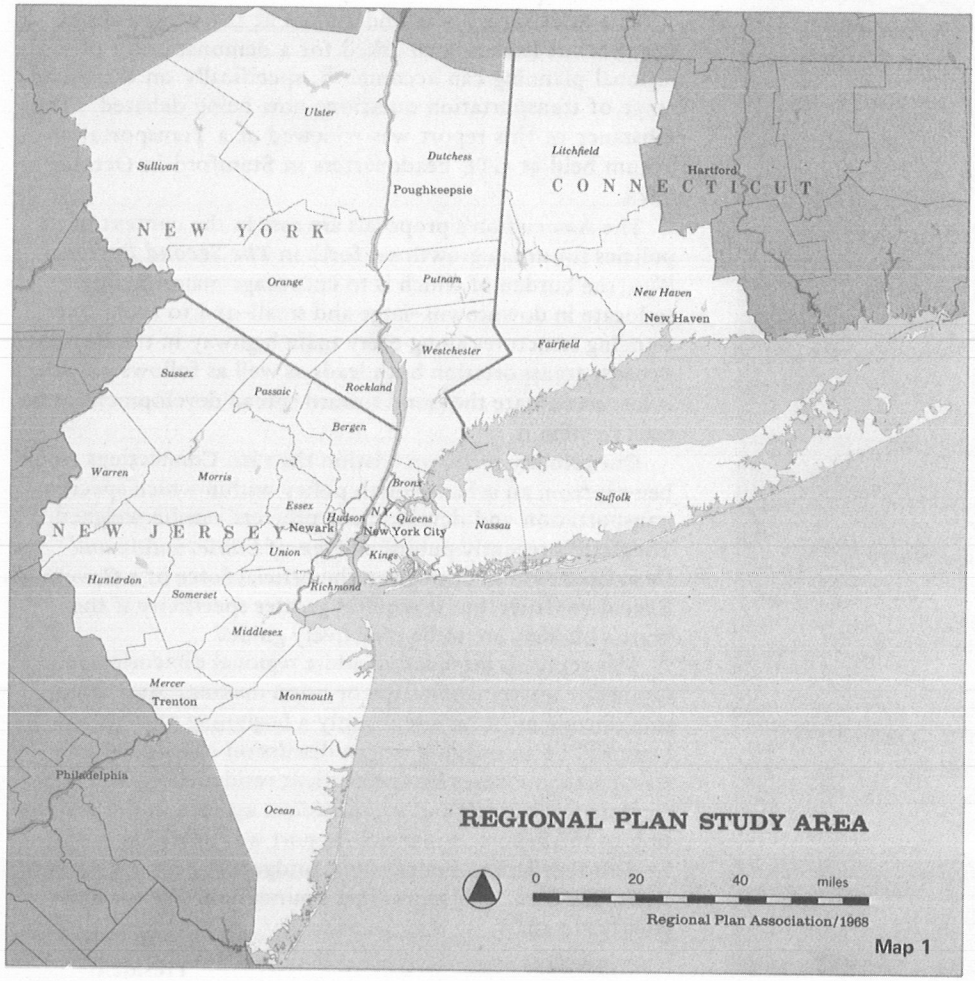
An expressway can support a city downtown with needed access, or it can encourage low-density, haphazard development in suburban and rural areas. Regional Plan calls this development "spread city."

Good public transportation has a more limited, but still essential, ability to shape growth. It cannot survive in low-density spread city without massive subsidies, but it can make city downtowns attractive places to live and work and to locate facilities. Residential densities of ten dwelling units per acre in cities employing about 80,000 people--as in New Haven or Bridgeport--appear to be the critical mass at which enough riders can be generated to run frequent, relatively quick, local service at a reasonable subsidy. To centers of greater density and size, service can be more frequent and rapid; as auto traffic becomes congested and

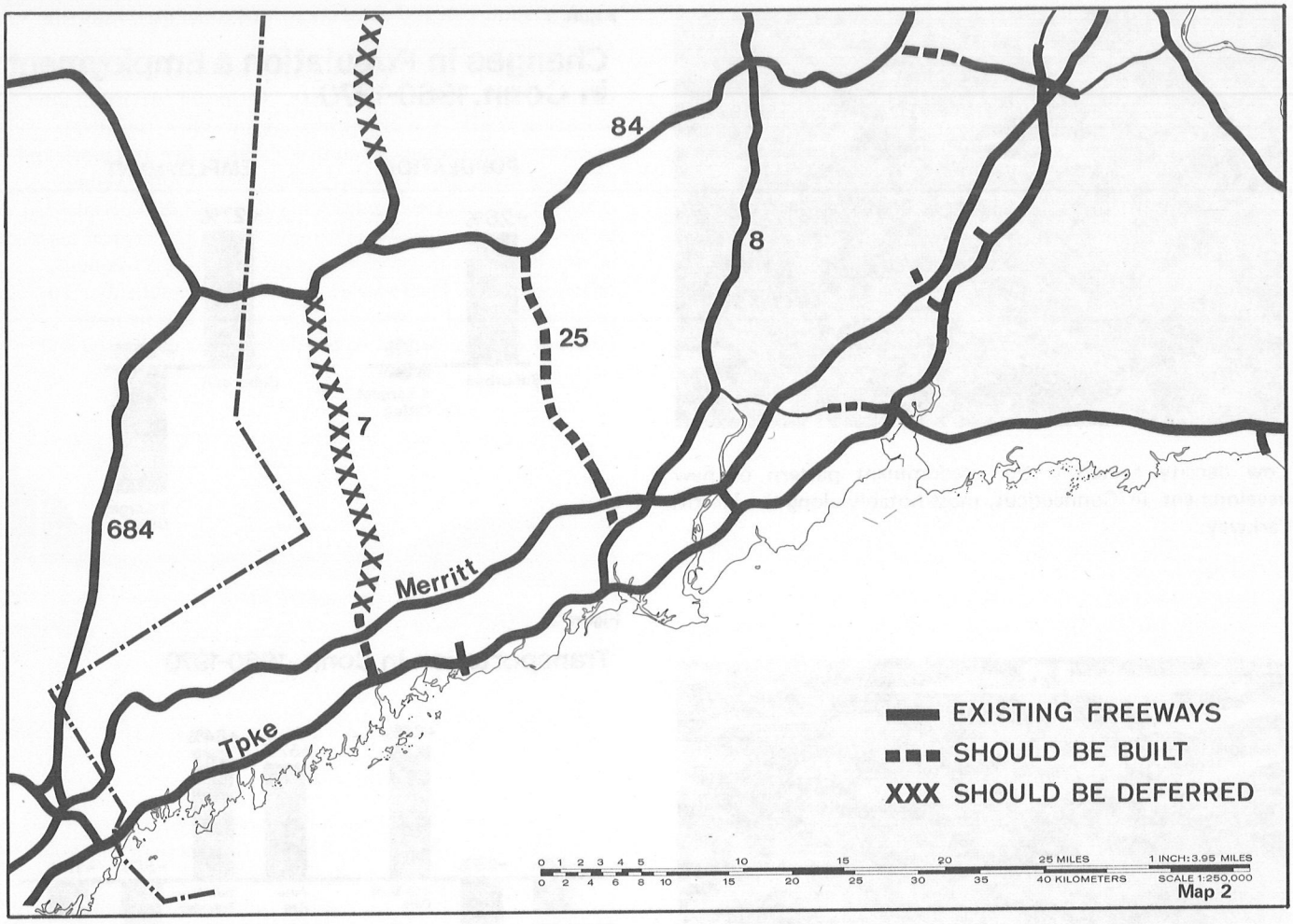


A major Connecticut highway issue is Route 7, shown here uncompleted in Norwalk. Extension north to Danbury and beyond is being held up by environmentalists' litigation.

* The Connecticut portion of the New York Region includes Fairfield, New Haven, and Litchfield Counties. The focus of this study is primarily the coastal corridor from Greenwich to the New Haven area.



The Connecticut sector of the 31-county Region has 8.5 percent of the Region's population on 17.0 percent of its land area.



Connecticut transportation issues include Route 7 from Norwalk to New Milford; Route 25 from Bridgeport to Newtown; the interchange design of Route 8 and the Merritt Parkway; Route 34 from New Haven to Ansonia-Derby; the future of the Connecticut Turnpike and Merritt Parkway; and several questions about bus and rail service.

expensive, buses begin to draw drivers from their cars. Although today almost any public transportation requires some subsidy, greater clustering of facilities means better bus service with lower deficits.

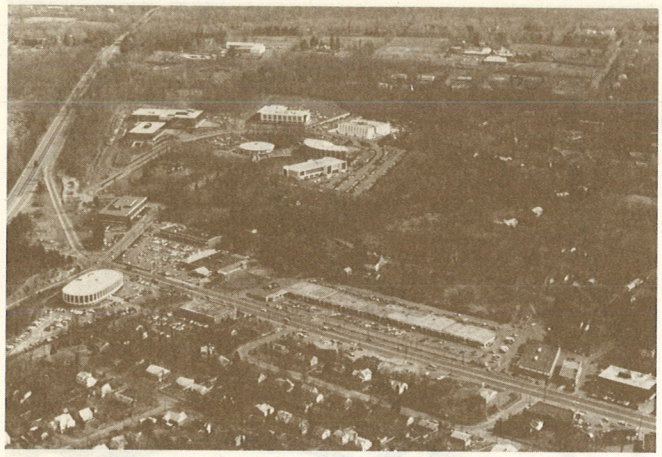
Spread city, however, has been the predominant development pattern over the last 30 years. It has lowered densities and weakened the focal points necessary for adequate public transportation and increased our dependence on automobiles, trucks, and limited energy supplies. Spread city is also partly responsible for the steep rise in housing prices, the neglect and decline of the older central cities, the separation of low-income city dwellers from rapidly expanding suburban job opportunities, and the excessive consumption of open land and degradation of Connecticut's natural environment.

The alternative is a policy of strengthening existing centers--major city downtowns and secondary centers--by directing major employment, housing, and service growth into and near them, and by planning expressways and public transportation to support these centers. Concurrently, further spread development must be inhibited. A centers policy would help reduce housing costs, satisfy energy and environmental constraints, and help bring disadvantaged groups into the economic and social mainstream.

Until the late 1960's, Connecticut's ground transportation programs--in no way atypical of other states'--consisted solely of expressway construction and other road improvements. These programs provided for and encouraged the spread of development over the last 30 years. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate how the spread of development, measured in acres of built-up land, has grown hand-in-glove with the growth of auto ownership and use, shifts in the location of jobs and residences, and the decline of public transportation.

The response adopted by the State of Connecticut has been to allocate its funds to both private and public transportation. The balance is still heavily weighted in favor of private transportation. Presently about $270 million in State funds are spent **annually** on expressways and on related expenditures, while State monies for capital improvements and subsidies to buses and rail are anticipated to be around $300 million **in toto** between 1970 and 1980. This allocation of resources was made without reconciling road, rail, and bus plans to any urban growth policy. As a result, the State pays to maintain rail and bus service at the same time that it pays for road construction that further decentralizes development and further weakens public transportation's ability to support itself.

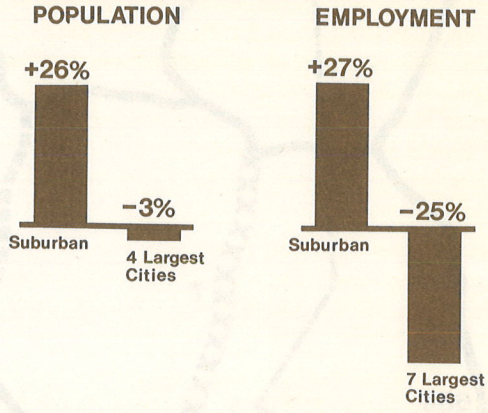
In this portion of Connecticut, the major economic and cultural centers are Stamford, Bridgeport, and New Haven. They have had redevelopment programs underway for more than a decade to strengthen their downtowns. Their future

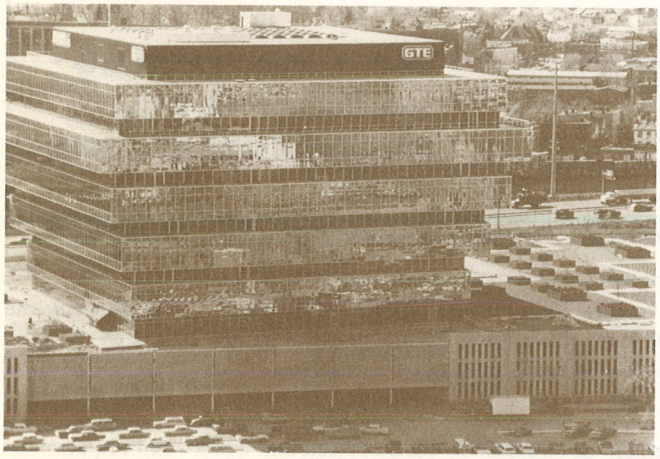


Low density spread is the predominant pattern of new development in Connecticut, most notably along the Merritt Parkway.

Figure 1

Changes in Population & Employment in Conn, 1960-1970

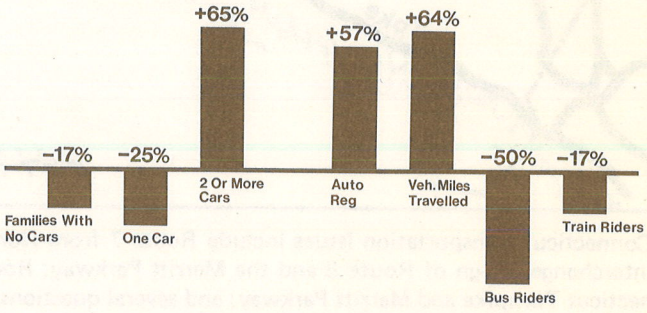




The decision of GTE (General Telephone and Electronics) (above) to locate in downtown Stamford was a major victory against sprawl; but 50 other national corporations have recently located outside Connecticut's downtowns, such as Bridgeport (below), where transportation improvements will be one key to attracting the next wave of incoming corporate offices.

Figure 2

Transportation in Conn, 1960-1970



is not yet assured, however, because contradictory State transportation policies still support spread city, as do State taxation, environmental, and other programs.

Therefore, **Connecticut's overall transportation policy should be to use transportation facilities and services to support the growth of older city downtowns and other secondary centers and to discourage the extension of low-density, spread development.**

The willingness of people to wait long hours in gas lines during last winter's energy shortage demonstrated that in the short run we cannot do without private transportation. The prospects for diverting much passenger transportation from cars to rail and bus or much freight from trucks to trains are small. Yet Connecticut could set a goal of minimizing the growth of private transportation and maximizing the growth of public transportation.

Therefore, **the State should set a policy of encouraging the bulk of new traffic, both passenger and freight, to use rail and bus modes rather than expressways.**

The State of Connecticut ought to reflect these overall policies consistently in transportation plans and projects of the Department of Transportation (Conn. DOT). This is the standard by which we evaluate transportation issues now under debate.

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES IN THE SURVEY AREA: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Transportation (Conn. DOT) and Connecticut citizens are now debating specific expressway, bus, and rail projects in the Greenwich-New Haven urban corridor (see Map 2). Expressway projects in controversy include: Route 7 from Norwalk to New Milford; Route 25 from Bridgeport to Newtown; Route 8 from Bridgeport to Waterbury; and Route 34 from New Haven to Ansonia-Derby. The future of the Merritt Parkway and the Connecticut Turnpike (I-95) are also at issue.

Bus service issues are: who should pay the deficits, who should operate the buses, and what levels of service should be provided? What is the potential for attracting drivers out of their cars?

There are three rail issues. First is the fate of freight service under Northeast Rail Reorganization. Second is how to increase ridership on the New Haven Railroad and its branches to New Canaan, Danbury, and Waterbury, particularly for intra-state commuting. Third, and intimately related to the second, is the potential for high-density employment, shopping, and service development at the station areas in Stamford, Bridgeport, and New Haven, the three major centers, and the potential for medium- and high-density housing development near suburban stations on the New Haven and branch lines.

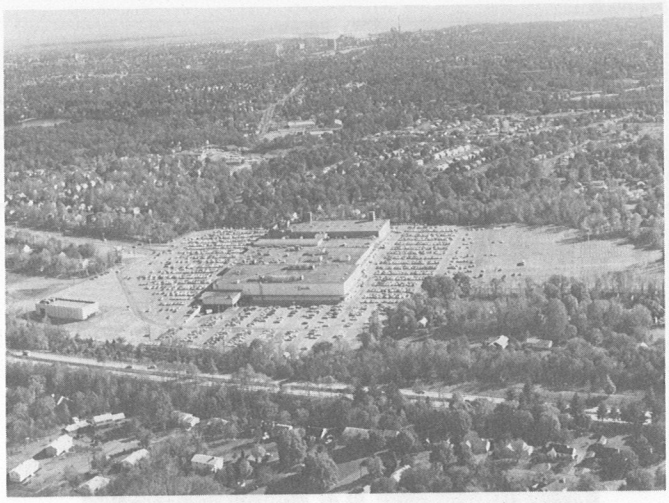
Our recommendations are based on the Second Regional Plan concept that transportation services should support downtown centers and inhibit spread city growth and that they should encourage new travel to use public transportation modes. The list of issues that we join in this survey does not, of course, cover all possible transportation concerns, but none of these projects or plans is too far along to be modified, nor too far into the future to be under debate today.

Expressway Needs and Traffic Trends

Future expressway construction in this portion of Connecticut should encourage access to urban centers. It should minimize competition with public transportation and minimize inducement of new traffic, measured in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) or average daily traffic (ADT). Where practical, it should support reductions in VMT growth, perhaps through express bus and car-pool lanes and the reduced tolls for car-pools recently introduced.

Most of all, an expressway should not open up large undeveloped or low-density areas to spread city growth, as have I-684 in New York and I-84 in western Connecticut. Local zoning cannot be relied on to prevent highway-related development of shopping centers, corporate headquarters, and other facilities that belong in the urban centers.

Because of their beauty, access, and proximity to New York City, sites along the Merritt and Wilbur Cross Parkways from Greenwich to Orange have become Connecticut's most sought-after locations for corporate headquarters and shopping centers. More than 50 national corporations have moved to Connecticut in the last six years, many in complexes such as High Ridge Park at Stamford and on isolated campuses elsewhere along the corridor.



Shopping centers, like the one above in Trumbull, are encouraged by new highways and become competitive with existing downtowns like Bridgeport, shown in the distance.

In anticipation of the completion of Routes 7, 25, and 8, land speculation and zoning changes are already going on near the Merritt in the towns of Wilton and Trumbull. Spread development of jobs and shopping takes urban facilities from locations in centers, gives no chance for public transportation in suburbs, weakens the chance for it in cities, and ultimately blights the very beauty and access that attracted development there in the first place.

For those expressways that are constructed, and for those which run through still undeveloped land, some form of State or regional land-use control, either direct or indirect, is essential to prevent spread development at major intersections and along rights-of-way. These controls should seek to maintain this land in residential, open-space, or other non-commercial uses. Control might extend along the highway one mile in each direction from entrances at local intersections, to encompass the area of enhanced access, and 2,000 feet to either side of the right-of-way, to take in land with the advantage of superior visibility from the expressway. (See figure 3.) Local governments should retain decisions about the specific non-commercial uses to be allowed in these areas, but the State should prevent location there of corporate headquarters and shopping centers, or discourage such locations through tax programs or other methods.

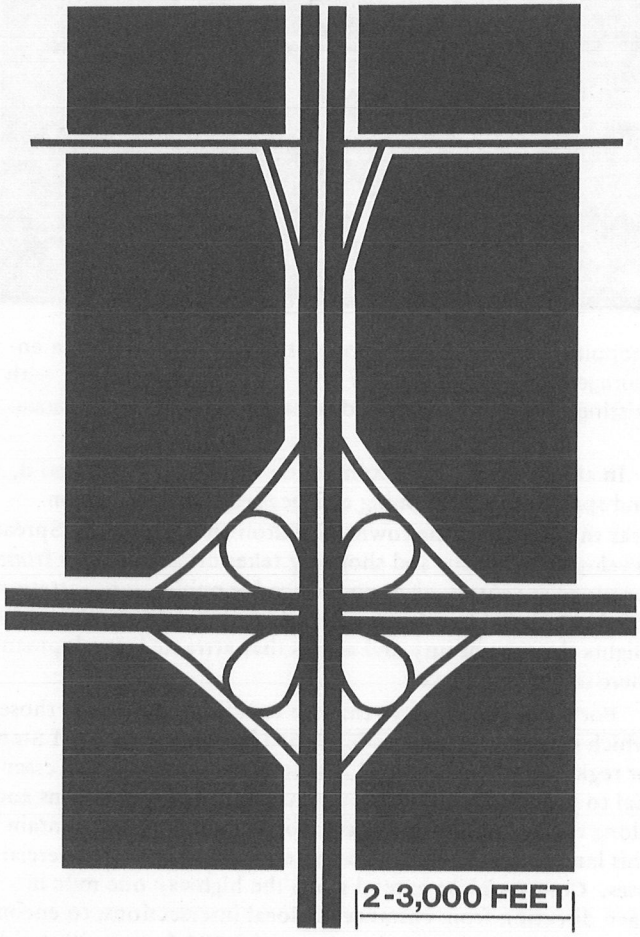
Therefore, **Connecticut should establish "critical areas" land-use controls or other inducements at major intersections and along rights-of-way of new and existing expressways, to discourage the consumption of open land and the displacement of urban activities from city to country. The program should be administered by the State or delegated from the State to the regional planning agencies. The Merritt Parkway should have the highest priority for this program, along its entire length. Without such steps, new expressways should not be built.**

Congestion and saturation of a road's capacity are relative terms; nevertheless, we make some assumptions about traffic needs in order to analyze trends and to judge which expressway segments ought to be built:

1. A **local road**, which basically carries two moving lanes of traffic, begins to reach **saturation** when total ADT is on the order of 20,000 vehicles.
   Present Route 7 in Norwalk, Route 25 in Bridgeport,

Figure 3

Land to be Sterilized at Interchanges



and High Ridge Road south of the Merritt Parkway in Stamford are examples of saturated local roads.

2. An expressway becomes congested during peak hours with ADT **per lane** of about 15,000. It begins to reach **saturation** with about 25,000 ADT per lane, when congestion stretches over several hours of the day.

   I-95 at Bridgeport is an example of 15,000 ADT per lane. Elsewhere in the New York Region, ADT per lane for all expressways in Nassau County is 14,000. The Long Island Expressway is an example of over 25,000.

By these criteria, to be discussed below, we conclude that little new expressway space is needed in the Greenwich-New Haven corridor and in western Connecticut.

Merritt Parkway. Automobile traffic on the Merritt Parkway (no commercial traffic is allowed) dropped markedly between 1957 and 1962 with the opening of the Connecticut Turnpike (I-95). Traffic levels at the western end of the Parkway have been static in recent years, well below the pre-Turnpike levels. There is no reason to expect a tripling of traffic by 1990, as Conn. DOT projects (see figure 4). The eastern end, at Stratford, has experienced faster growth. This is explained by decentralizing forces within

Figure 4

Coastal Corridor Freeways Greenwich 1940-'73

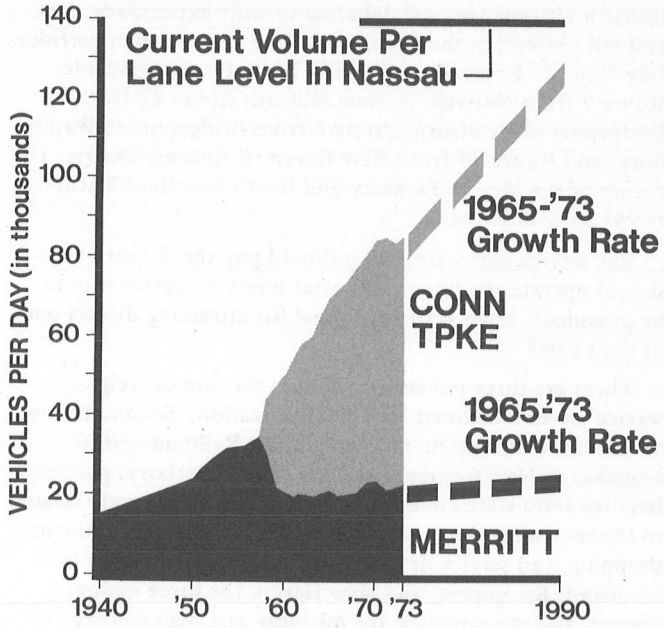
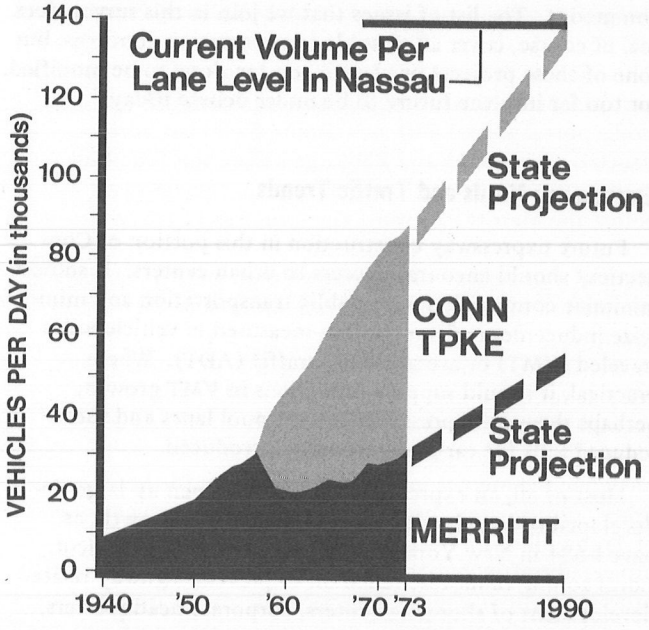


Figure 5

Coastal Corridor Freeways Stratford 1940-'73



the entire New York Region under which counties farther from New York City are growing faster in population and motor vehicle use. In 1973, traffic at Stratford reached its pre-1957 level. Here Conn. DOT projection of 56,000 ADT in 1990 appears reasonable (see figure 5). This figure is still below the congestion level of 15,000 ADT per lane, and thus there is no reason to widen the Parkway on traffic grounds. For environmental and aesthetic reasons, the Parkway should

be left as is, except perhaps for minor safety improvements of entrance and exit ramps.

Connecticut Turnpike (I-95). As on the Parkway, traffic on the Turnpike is growing faster at Stratford than at Greenwich. Between 1965 and 1973, traffic on the Turnpike grew at an annual rate of 3.1 percent at Greenwich and 4.7 percent at Stratford. Should these growth rates continue, traffic will exceed the 15,000 ADT per lane threshold of congestion at both locations in 11 or 12 years. At that date, some shifts in traffic back to the Merritt Parkway are likely. Significant amounts of through traffic will probably be diverted to I-84. There may also be diversion to improved rail and bus services. Thus, the combined flow on the Parkway and Turnpike is unlikely to exceed 15,000 ADT per lane before 1990. At the 1965-73 growth rate, saturation level would not be reached for 20 to 35 years. Since the growth rate itself is likely to slow down with increased congestion, higher fuel prices, and diversion to public transportation, Long-Island-Expressway conditions do not appear in the foreseeable future.

If decreases in peak hour travel speed are acceptable, I-95 and the Parkway have sufficient capacity for well beyond 1990. This should not exclude localized additions of a lane or two in the Stamford or Bridgeport areas, for example.

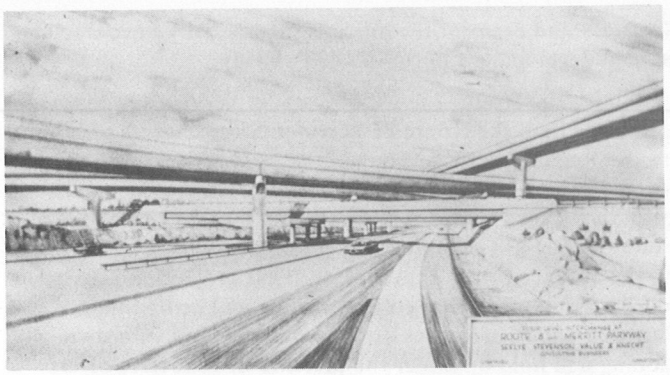
Therefore, **adding to the capacity of either I-95 or the Merritt Parkway, or building a fourth east-west route, is unnecessary.**

North-South: Access to Downtowns vs. Spread Development Pressures

Route 25. Present Route 25 is a two-lane, local road from Bridgeport northwest through Trumbull, Monroe, Newtown, and beyond. Conn. DOT plans call for reconstruction and relocation of Route 25 as an expressway from I-95 at Bridgeport to I-84 at Newtown. The section from I-95 through Bridgeport is shared with new Route 8 and has been constructed. Routes 25 and 8 diverge before the Trumbull border. New construction on both expressways ends just before the Merritt Parkway. Construction of two miles of Route 25 from the side of the Merritt to Route 111 in Monroe is underway. Long-range Conn. DOT plans include completion of new Route 25 from Monroe to I-84 in Newtown.

Old Route 25 now carries between 22,000 and 17,000 ADT at various points in Bridgeport and Trumbull. To encourage access to the center of Bridgeport, new Route 25 should be completed as an expressway through Trumbull, including the Merritt interchange, provided the State establishes "critical area" controls. The eight-mile section north of Trumbull to I-84 is partially justified by existing and projected traffic, but eventually it should be completed to provide continuity in the highway system of Connecticut and the New York Region. It would enable trucks and recreational traffic from the Bridgeport and New Haven areas to reach I-84. It represents a link in the outer circumferential highways of the Region, allowing traffic to bypass the more heavily congested areas of southwestern Connecticut, Westchester County, and New York City.

Therefore, **provided that plans are changed to be consistent with our recommendations of no significant modification of the Merritt Parkway and provided "critical areas" controls are established, Conn. DOT should build Route 25 through Trumbull now (five miles), and to I-84 in the future (eight miles).**



The interchange of Route 8 with the Merritt Parkway is under redesign and is not expected to be as large as shown in the early rendering, above.

Route 8. This expressway is nearly complete from Bridgeport to Winsted, except for the interchange with the Merritt. The same issues pertain here as at the interchange of Route 25 and the Parkway just two miles west. The interchange must be completed before Route 8 will help downtown Bridgeport. While Conn. DOT would have disturbed the Parkway less by dividing Routes 8 and 25 **north** of the Merritt, rather than south, it is now an accomplished fact. One still-available alternative is to build only partial connections at each interchange with the Merritt, rather than two full eight-way interchanges. For instance, traffic leaving Bridgeport for the Parkway might be required to choose its direction at the fork of Routes 8 and 25. Westbound traffic would take 25 to the Merritt, and eastbound would use 8. Similarly, traffic each way on the Merritt would be offered only one way into Bridgeport. In this way, a quarter of the ramps could be eliminated. We understand that Conn. DOT is looking at alternate interchange layouts in order to reduce impact on the Merritt.

Therefore, **the Route 8 interchange with the Merritt should be completed, provided there are development controls. It should be redesigned, in conjunction with the interchange of Route 25 and the Merritt, to minimize the number of connections.**

Route 7. New U.S. Route 7 is proposed to run from I-95 at Norwalk to New Milford, in Litchfield County. As a four-lane expressway, it is intended to supersede the existing two-lane arterial which is now heavily congested in places during rush hours. The spur from I-95 in Norwalk and the spurs in either direction from I-84 in Danbury have been built. Construction has begun on four miles of the Danbury to New Milford stretch, but the section between Norwalk and Danbury has been halted by a court injunction, pending the filing of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Presently, Route 7 carries ADT in the 21,000 to 18,000 range in the Norwalk area. It should be developed as an expressway connected with the Merritt Parkway extending the present 1.5 mile spur by about two miles. This will link the Merritt and Turnpike and facilitate access to downtown

Norwalk and Stamford, while not substantially encouraging spread development north of the Parkway.

The entire Route 7 corridor is under heavier development pressures than the Route 25 corridor because of its proximity to the Region's center. The bulk of land surrounding the right-of-way is zoned residential. Conn. DOT projects that growth induced between Norwalk and Danbury by the new route will be less than one percent of that which would occur in the absence of the expressway. That projection is based on the assumption that current zoning will be maintained, but past experience gives little confidence that suburban zoning will hold up under the pressure of attractive offers from corporations, shopping centers, and industries. In anticipation of the new expressway, Wilton has already rezoned several formerly residential parcels. Regional Plan believes that without State zoning controls induced spread development will be much greater than one percent. Even though traffic on the existing road north of Wilton is comparable to traffic on the northern portion of present Route 25, Route 7 between I-95 and I-84 is not a necessary link in the State-wide or Region-wide highway network. It might divert additional traffic from the Danbury branch of the New Haven Railroad. Even with development controls, this section sould be deferred.

Between Danbury and New Milford, Route 7 would generally not serve volumes greater than 20,000 ADT, even when completed as an expressway. Moreover, it would open vast areas of Litchfield County, still nearly rural, to suburban and second-home residential development and strip commerce. Even the State development control program urged here could not prevent this. This section of Route 7 should not be completed. The interchange of Route 7 with the Merritt Parkway must be handled with care, as at Routes 25 and 8.

Therefore, **provided that plans are consistent with our recommendations for the Merritt Parkway and include "critical areas" controls, Conn. DOT should build Route 7 to connect with the Merritt Parkway (two miles). A decision on the section from the Merritt to Danbury should be deferred (17 miles). The section from Danbury to New Milford should be cancelled (ten miles).**

Route 34. In the early 1960's, there were long-range plans to rebuild Route 34 west to New York as a fourth east-west expressway, then thought to be a future necessity. The Oak Street Connector from I-95 through downtown New Haven was built as a first step. Present long-range plans carry Route 34 as far as Ansonia and Derby, about 12 miles, replacing the existing, attractive four-lane divided highway with an expressway. Next year, Conn. DOT plans to construct another mile, from the Connector to the Boulevard, near the New Haven-West Haven border, for which part of the right-of-way was cleared years ago. Completion of this stretch would take much traffic off residential city streets. Induced development is not an issue here, as this is already-urbanized land. Extension of Route 34 should proceed no farther than the West Haven border. The existing route beyond this point has sufficient capacity for suburban access to downtown New Haven.

Therefore, **Conn. DOT should complete new Route 34 to the West Haven border, but no farther west.**

Better Rail Freight Service to Minimize Growth in Trucking

Good rail freight service is necessary if the growth in truck traffic on expressways is to be slowed. Its future in Connecticut, however, was severely challenged by the preliminary report of the U.S. Secretary of Transportation for the Northeast Rail Reorganization, now in progress. The report proposed that 164 miles of track in Connecticut be declared "excess" and be considered for abandonment. In this survey's study area, the Danbury and New Canaan Branches and part of the Waterbury Branch of the New Haven Railroad Line were so designated. In addition, the report proposes the virtual abandonment of the Poughkeepsie crossing of the Hudson River, in New York, which serves Connecticut through Danbury and the Maybrook Line.

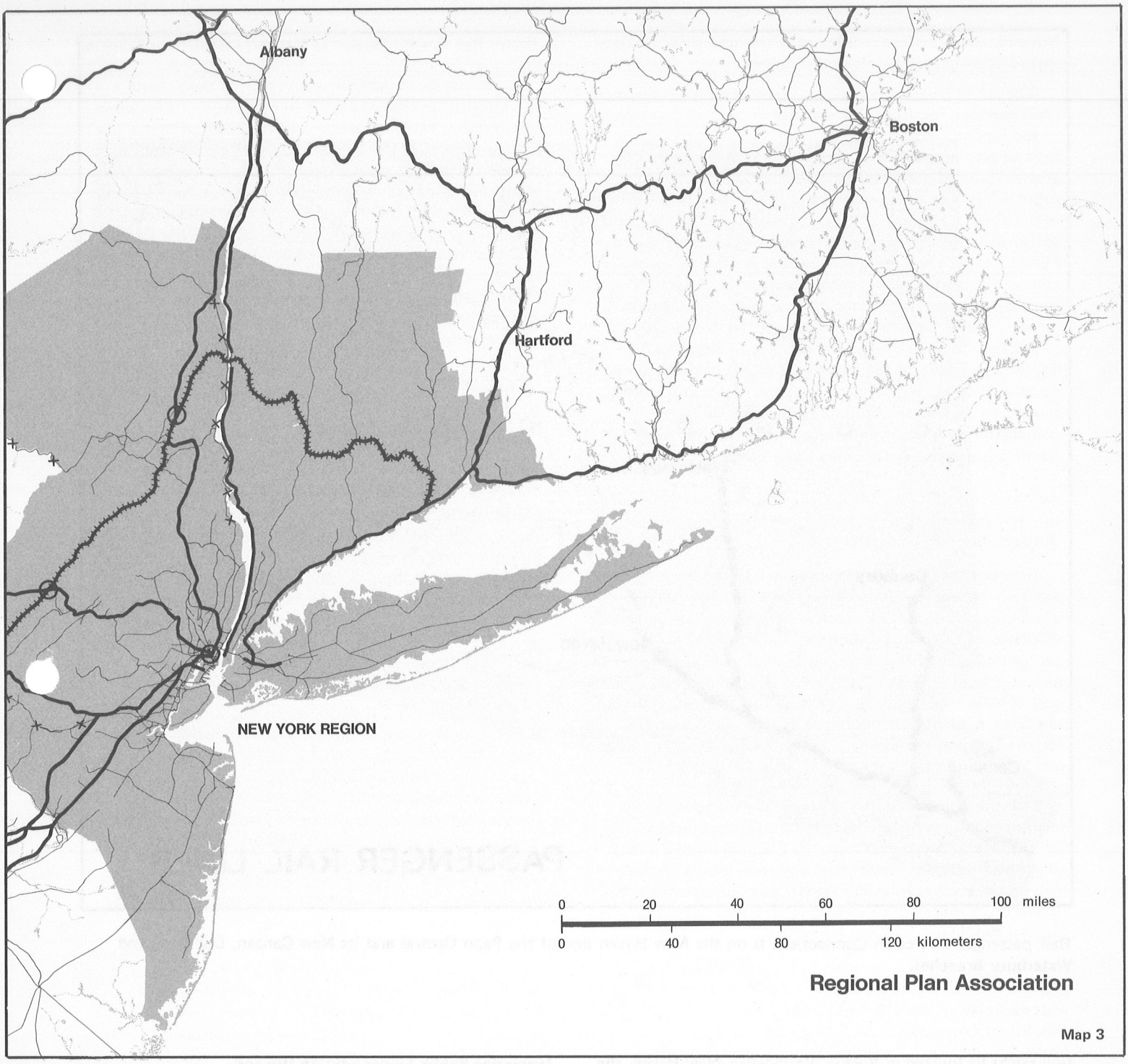
Current rail service to Connecticut, as well as to Long Island and Rhode Island, is not competitive with trucking, except for the long distance shipment of bulky, heavy goods for which speed of delivery is not crucial. These goods make up a declining proportion of shipments in the Region. This non-competitive position is due largely to the absence of a quick route through or around the New York City area from points south and west. When the Penn Central took over the New Haven Line in 1969, it downgraded the Poughkeepsie route to New England in favor of its crossing at Albany. For Connecticut shippers, this round-about trip takes 300 extra miles and several extra days. What little service remained on the Poughkeepsie Bridge was halted this spring by a fire, which will keep the Bridge out of service until at least early 1975. The federal DOT report proposes to eliminate the Poughkeepsie route completely.

Regional Plan believes that there are compelling economic, social, and environmental reasons for upgrading rail freight service.* Compared to trucking, rail offers energy savings, air and noise pollution reductions, and a reduced need for expressway capacity. Rail freight will never replace trucks for the short-haul needs of a spread-out economy, but it could compete with trucks for medium- and long-haul carriage, particularly if Connecticut's future urban growth policies result in stronger centers and lessen the spread of development. The federal DOT report, however, does not take these externalities into account.

In the long run, it would be desirable to have two competing rail carriers as well as competition between rail and truck. Regulation of the railroads has not been able to maintain efficient service; only competition can keep rates low and service levels high. A possible new route through or near New York City, either by tunnel or bridge, should be studied. This seaboard route could be managed by ConRail (the tentative name for the government-assisted system to be set up out of the bankrupt railroads). The Poughkeepsie Bridge route through to Danbury could be managed by another company holding the route through Allentown or Scranton, Pennsylvania. A common track arrangement could be worked out for sharing the New Haven Line east of Devon, where the Maybrook Line enters.

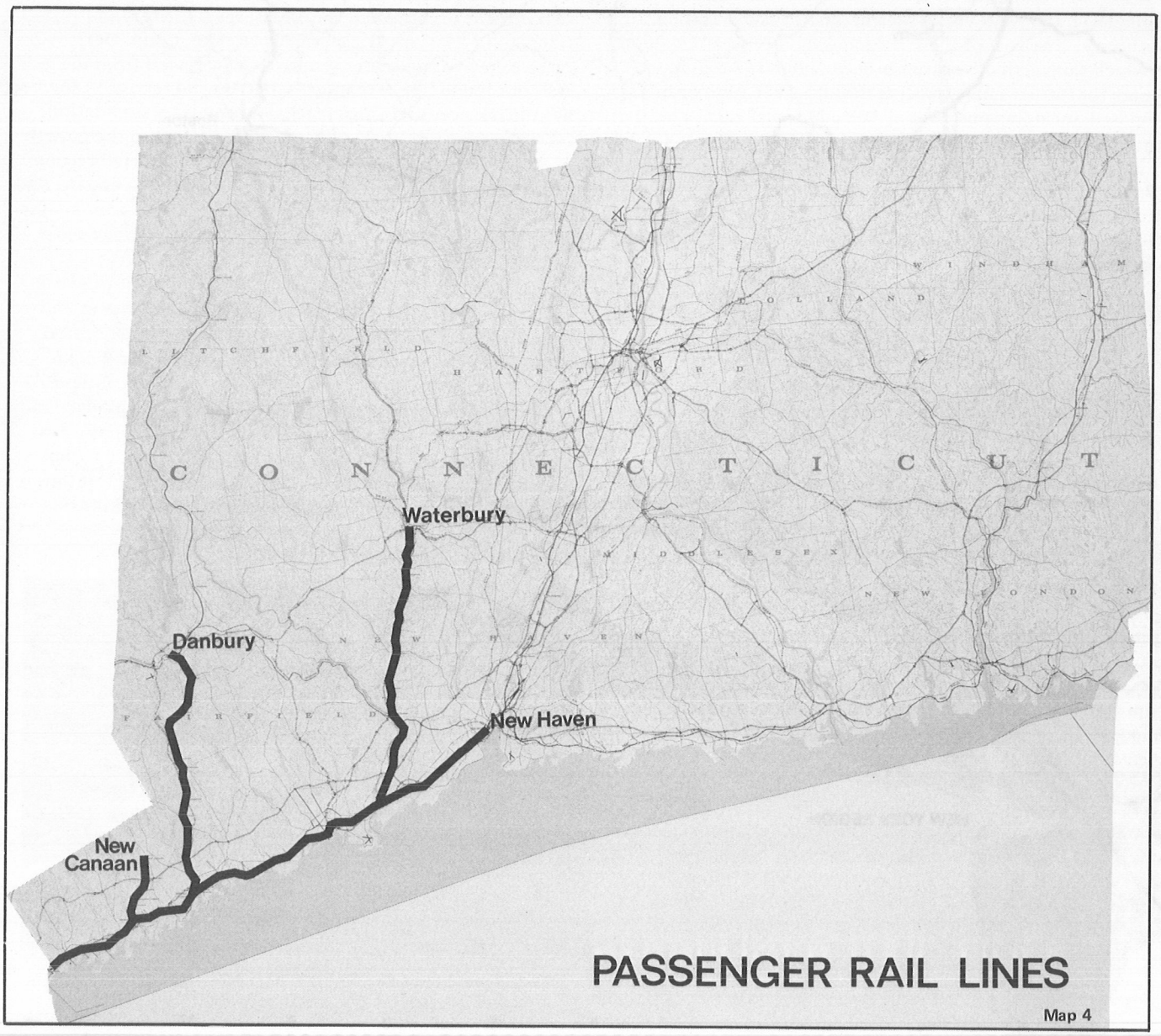
Service truly competitive with trucking should be containerized, with units that can be easily transferred from flat cars to truck flat-beds. This would be even more efficient than piggy-back service. Container terminals for regional distribu-

* *Regional Plan News* No. 94, "Two Rail Issues," June 1974.



ILLUSTRATIVE NETWORK OF INTERSTATE FREIGHT MAINLINES

- Potential interstate freight mainlines
- Poughkeepsie Bridge Route
- Mainlines which can be abandoned on environmental grounds
- New connections needed



Rail passenger service in Connecticut is on the New Haven line of the Penn Central and its New Canaan, Danbury, and Waterbury branches.

tion might be located in Boston, Providence, New Haven, the New York area, and points west.

In determining if the high costs of these improvements are justified, external factors should be considered, such as those missing from the federal DOT preliminary report. The cost might be shared by the federal and State governments, much as interstate expressways are funded.

Therefore, **Connecticut should press for the immediate reopening of the Poughkeepsie Bridge and for its restoration to a high level of freight service. In conjunction with other States and the federal government, Conn. DOT should study the potential of a new rail crossing through or near New York City and the institution of containerized rail freight service. External benefits should be weighed into their calculations.**

Increasing Public Transportation Use and Reducing Deficits

The New Haven Rail Line and Branches. Some 17,000 Connecticut residents commute to New York City each weekday on the New Haven Line and its branches to New Canaan, Danbury, and Waterbury, mostly from western Fairfield County. (See Map 4.) After years of decaying service, the Railroad has benefitted in the last three years from long-sought capital improvements, funded by the federal government and Connecticut and New York states, and from an operating subsidy from the two states. Capital improvements completed or scheduled include station reconstruction, track and signal modernization, and purchase of 144 new cars, half owned by

Conn. DOT and New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The cost of these programs has been $145 million, of which Connecticut's share has been about $47.5 million. Grants for further improvements through 1980 have been proposed, including purchase of 100 additional cars. The cost of these improvements will be about $74 million, of which Connecticut's share will be about $14 million. The operating subsidy is shared about equally by Connecticut and New York. In 1974, Connecticut's share will be about $5.5 million. It has been rising steadily, mostly due to increased operating costs.

As a result of these programs, rail commuting has been greatly improved. Ridership, which between 1960 and 1970 dropped 16.6 percent, has stabilized and apparently begun to recover. Ridership is up 8.8 percent for the first five months of 1974 compared to the same period in 1973. Connecticut ridership increased somewhat more than New York ridership. Gasoline shortages can account for only a small part of this increase, as a comparison of May 1974 to May 1973 reveals a 6.3 percent increase. If this trend continues, ridership will be back to 1960 levels in several years. (See Table 1.)

Connecticut residents account for 58 percent of the passengers, and about 90 percent of their trips are to New York City. Only eight percent of their trips, or about 1,200 round-trip passengers per day, are between destinations in Connecticut. Passenger increases this year have occurred at the same rate for both intra- and inter-state trips. Better marketing of improved service would help sustain and increase this ridership growth. Conn. DOT should undertake simple measures such as marking expressways and other major roads with signs leading to railroad stations.

It would be desirable to divert some automobile traffic along the coast and north-south into Stamford, Norwalk, and Bridgeport to the New Haven Line and its branches. To the extent that increased intra-state ridership fills underutilized capacity, it would reduce the total deficit, and it would reduce the deficit per passenger mile substantially. But present intra-state passengers are on the order of one or two percent of intra-state auto passengers (drivers and riders) on I-95 alone--1,200 versus 78,000. Conn. DOT plans to revive commuter service to New Haven from the east, but it will not have much capacity; and service to the north by Amtrak needs refurbishing and a commuter orientation. Increasing rail ridership so that it makes a dent in the growth of automobile traffic--in line with our second overall recommendation--would require at least doubling or tripling it. Rail ridership is low because most origins and destinations are far from the railroad, and automobiles provide faster and more convenient access to spread out points.

Encouraging intra-state rail ridership to grow at this scale will require greater concentration of major activities at and near railroad stations. Ideally, stations of the three central cities would be capped and surrounded by relatively high-density office buildings, complete with parking facilities easily accessible from expressways for downtown employees and shoppers and for rail riders picking up the train there. Most transportation services could be located in the same complex, such as local and inter-city buses, taxicabs, and airport limousines. With all transportation services in short walking distance of one another, inter-modal switching will increase (bus-train, auto-train, etc.).

This "Transportation Plaza" has been proposed for the Stamford rail station.

A Stamford developer has plans for an office complex over the tracks at Stamford station, complete with parking, a new station, and a restaurant. It will be built when office growth, now temporarily slowed, resumes in Connecticut. General Telephone and Electronics' new headquarters is within walking distance of the station. In Bridgeport, a new station has been built, and State National Bank has built its headquarters and an office building across from it. Eventually two more towers are to be built there. The bus depot is across the street. In New Haven, there has been discussion of locating a new railroad station building closer to downtown. All inter-city and local bus services could be combined there. The old site, which is defended as an architectural landmark, might well be made into a restaurant or given some other use. The potential for attracting rail riders would be much greater at the new site. If the old site is kept, it will still need a parking garage and easy access from the Long Wharf Exit of I-95. In downtown Greenwich, a subcenter for the coastal corridor, an office and shopping complex was recently built adjacent to the station.

Table 1
New Haven Rail Line Ridership Trends 1960-1974

Year	Annual Riders	Percent Change	
1960	20,195,000		
1970	16,850,000[1]	−16.6%	1960-70
1971	17,037,472	+1.1%	1970-71
1972	16,755,465	−1.7%	1971-72
1973	16,311,100	−2.7%	1972-73
1974[2]	17,754,444	+8.8%	1973-74

1960 source: Tri-State Regional Planning Commission
1970-74 source: Penn Central Railroad

1 interpolated from 1969 and 1971 figures
2 estimated from January-May, 1974

In suburban towns along the coast and along the branch lines, garden apartments, condominiums, or even higher-density apartments could be located within walking distance of the railroad stations. Although much housing that has been built recently is multi-family, it has been scattered, where it cannot generate use of public transportation.

Increasing densities in the vicinity of railroad stations is a step requiring local action. Stamford and Bridgeport have long zoned and directed redevelopment accordingly. New Haven may be on the verge of similar action. Suburban towns, however, will need to change their attitudes and reflect them in zoning, if housing clusters are to be realized at the stations. For the State's part, any action taken by Conn. DOT or other agencies to discourage suburban location of offices and shopping and to place its own facilities near downtown stations, like offices, courthouses, and colleges, will make downtowns more attractive to private investment.

As increased densities occur, the percentage of total rail trips by intra-state riders should begin to grow. At that time, Conn. DOT should consider adjustments to schedules, now oriented to New York City-bound travel, to see if additional intra-state riders can be encouraged.

Therefore, **to support present rail ridership growth trends, Conn. DOT should better market its improved New Haven Line service. To increase rail ridership enough to divert significant auto traffic, cities and towns should encourage denser development near railroad stations, including offices, shopping services, parking and transportation, and multi-family housing. The State should locate its major facilities in downtowns, and discourage office and shopping facilities in free-standing structures. Where warranted, Conn. DOT should adjust schedules to encourage intra-state rail travel.**

Local Bus Service. Since 1950, local bus service in the Greenwich to New Haven corridor, as well as in the rest of the State, has suffered the familiar spiral of rising fares and declining profits coupled with cuts in routes and bus frequency. Bus ridership has declined with rising automobile ownership and declining residential and employment densities. As noted in Table 2, between 1962 and 1971 ridership declined 50 percent for the two big companies, the Connecticut Company, principally serving Stamford, New Haven, and Hartford, and the now-defunct Connecticut Railway and Light (CR&L), formerly serving Bridgeport. Between 1952 and 1973, the decline was 87 percent, from 151 million riders to 20.5 million per year. It appears that most people who now use the bus have no alternative; they are too young, old, poor, or handicapped to own and drive a car.

The crucial point for local bus service was the four-month drivers' strike in winter 1972. CR&L went out of business, and the Connecticut Company was rescued only by the State's reluctant decision to cover its deficit for two years, plus a five percent profit. The State stepped in, through Conn. DOT, only when it was clear that local governments were unwilling or unable to fund the subsidy. As a result of the strike, ridership plummeted from its already low levels; it is recovering slowly, now approaching its fall 1972 levels and holding steady. For the first full year of the agreement, Conn. DOT paid the Connecticut Company $2.9 million. Conn. DOT also paid $300,000 to arrange special services in areas not served by the Connecticut Company, principally Bridgeport. This year's subsidies are expected to reach about $4 million.

As the price of covering the subsidy for two years, the State required towns and cities to form transit districts and to prepare to assume part or all of the subsidy at the end of the two year period, early 1975. Few transit districts have been active. Many are smaller than Conn. DOT desired--some are composed of only one town--because neighboring towns would not cooperate. Most have restricted their activities to future needs studies under U.S. Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) grants, even though they are empowered to regulate, franchise, or own and run service.

In our study area, only the districts of Danbury, Westport, and the Valley (Ansonia-Derby) operate their own small services. Greater Bridgeport has taken over regulatory powers and assigned the late CR&L's profitable routes to smaller carriers. More typical are the cities served by the Connecticut Company and covered by the subsidies. Stamford and New Haven appear to be unwilling to allow their respective transit districts to have a significant active role beyond planning, for fear that this would undermine the cities' position that the State permanently assume the total deficit.

In June, however, Governor Meskill reversed his position that local government should pay most of the subsidy. He announced that the State would pay the full subsidy of a "basic level of service," to be determined in the near future, and 50 percent of any additional service, up to a total subsidy of $6 million per year. The money would be drawn from the $16 million made available this year from the State Transportation Fund. Debate on bus service has virtually halted pending Conn. DOT's determination of the formula for "basic" service, which is expected by February 1975.

The Governor also announced the formation of five transit regions to cover the State, each taking in two or more planning regions. Each will be headed by a transit manager, who will oversee and monitor services run by private operators or transit districts, and to run any State-operated service. The relationship of the region managers to the transit districts is not yet clear. Now that the State has agreed to pay most of the deficit, it is unlikely to leave operations and planning totally in the hands of the districts, and it may wish Conn. DOT to take these responsibilities through the regions. The regions will probably find most functions ceded to them by dormant districts, although more active districts may try to retain their independence, or at least the opportunity to participate in service planning on behalf of local governments. If Conn. DOT purchases the Connecticut Company and other major bus companies, a move now being considered, the Department will probably insist that the companies be managed by the regions.

Table 2
Annual Bus Ridership (in millions)

	1952	1962	% Change 1952-62	1971	% Change 1962-72
Conn. Co	100	39	–61%	23	–43%
CR&L	51	16	–69%	4	–68%
Total	151	55	–63%	28	–50%

Conn. DOT has $31.7 million in bonds at its disposal for purchase of up to 800 new buses and related facilities. The Department might be able to use part of these funds, plus matching federal money, to buy the Connecticut Company and other bus companies.

In determining the criteria for the "basic level of service" to be fully subsidized, Conn. DOT is caught between, on the one hand, pressure to maintain the present level of service and to expand it in little-served areas and, on the other, pressure to keep the present and future deficit within limits. This can be done only by increasing ridership faster than costs rise. Regional Plan Association believes that the solution for buses is similar to the solution for trains: ridership growth on this scale, and on the scale necessary to entice people from private automobiles, can be accomplished only by increasing densities in and near urban centers.

Bridgeport and New Haven, with more than 80,000 jobs and relatively high residential densities, support adequate bus service. Stamford, with about 50,000 jobs and lower residential densities, should grow larger and more compact. New Haven's subsidy per trip is $.15 while Stamford's is nearly twice as high, $.29.

Just as in the case of rail ridership, the regeneration of bus patronage and reduction of subsidies require local and State actions to locate offices, shopping, colleges, services, and other facilities in the three major downtowns and in other secondary centers, and measures to build apartments along bus routes leading from these centers. Regional Plan believes that these measures belong in plans for the future "basic level of service."

Conn. DOT's rush-hour express bus services, from suburban shopping centers to downtowns, illustrate the importance of dense and focused destinations, and of central suburban points for collection of large numbers of passengers. Five express bus lines into downtown Hartford carry nearly five percent of commuters to downtown Hartford. Since the average automobile commute is shorter than the average express bus run, express buses account for more than this percentage of the total passenger miles. Bus riders leave their cars outside the city. There are four other lines, one to Middletown, two to New Haven, and one to Bridgeport. Except for the Bridgeport line, the express buses run with low subsidies or at a profit.

The Stratford-Bridgeport line seems not to draw many passengers for several special reasons. First, the most congested approach to Bridgeport is from the north; driving in on I-95 from the east is still relatively easy. Also, parking in Bridgeport is still easy and inexpensive. Finally, destinations in Bridgeport are not yet tightly centralized. Conn. DOT should expand express bus services to other parts of the corridor as rapidly as possible. If the State took measures to create relatively high density residential clusters in suburbs, express buses could serve them with rapid, convenient access to the urban centers, at little or no deficit.

The transit regions are the best sized geographic units for the determination and administration of measures to increase density and focus activities. The districts do not encompass the growing suburbs, and they are further compromised by the inability or unwillingness of local governments to cooperate. The State is too large for planning sensitive to the wide variation in needs and desires for bus service. At least in the coastal corridor, transit regions encompass the growing suburbs as well as the cities. In Transit Region 4, policies to build bus service would urge major offices, shopping centers, and other facilities that have been moving into towns like Greenwich, Fairfield, and Trumbull to locate in Stamford and Bridgeport. In Region 3, similar growth that has been going into Hamden, North Haven, and Branford, for example, could be directed towards New Haven.

The transit regions also appear to be fairer geographic bases than the State as a whole for drawing taxes to pay the subsidies. Presently, service in the Stamford area is more heavily subsidized ($.29 per passenger) than service in the New Haven area ($.15) or the Hartford area ($.12). All these areas, of course, are subsidized by people who have no buses from areas of the State far from these urban centers. Conn. DOT should study the advantages and disadvantages of regional taxes to pay the subsidies.

The transit districts might well be dissolved. Their operating functions could be performed by the transit regions. The regional planning agencies, about two in each transit region, might take over the districts' job of planning and soliciting local input. They are better qualified to combine planning of bus service with other objectives, such as housing, recreation, economic development, and environmental protection.

Planning of higher densities for train and bus service ought to be closely coordinated. Transit Regions 3 and 4 should be party to planning for the New Haven Rail Line. The downtown transportation centers, discussed under rail commuting, should include stops for all bus lines. Bus-train trips would thereby be encouraged, and single ticket packages or transfers could be instituted.

Therefore, **to increase bus ridership and reduce deficits, the State should take measures to increase densities of offices, shops, services, and other activities in downtown centers, and to encourage residential construction on small lots, townhouses, and apartments along bus routes. These measures should be coordinated with the "basic level of service" to be fully funded. Without these measures, bus deficits will continue to increase, even if ridership improves somewhat, until they may be beyond the State's reach.**

The transit regions should operate bus service, particularly if it is State-owned. Local input into planning should come through the regional planning agencies, roughly two to each transit region. Transit districts might well be dissolved.

The transit regions should be the geographic base for measures to increase densities and focus development, and for more equitable regional taxes to replace State-wide taxes now funding the subsidy.

AN URBAN GROWTH POLICY FOR CONNECTICUT: CITIZEN ACTION TO CHANGE PRESENT TRENDS

State monies available to public transportation, while still only about ten percent of those for road expenditures, have grown rapidly in the last several years. The State will spend on the order of $300 million of its own funds in the 1970's on public transportation, about two-thirds on capital improvements and one-third for operating subsidies. Federal matching, and some New York State matching for the New

Haven Rail Line, will multiply capital expenditures as much as fourfold.

With matching funds, this is enough money to complete planned improvements to the New Haven Rail Line and its branches, to begin restoring rail lines in other parts of the State, and to reequip or possibly buy outright the major bus companies. These expenditures will probably suffice to increase ridership on the rail lines and at least halt the decline on buses, but they will not alone enable public transportation to cut significantly into the growth in auto traffic. Capital improvements and subsidies alone, even if much greater, cannot compensate for current trends in development density, expressway construction, and auto ownership and use. Only steps supporting centralization of new growth, as recommended in this report, can create the conditions necessary for public transportation to capture a large portion of the growth in travel. The steps we have proposed, however, concern only transportation policy.

Presently, however, other State and local policies which shape urban growth are piecemeal and in conflict. Though there are many programs for the benefit of the cities, on the whole Connecticut public policies still encourage spread development. For example, State and local taxation policies, primarily the heavy reliance on local property taxes, make homes of moderate prices and densities a liability to municipalities, and offices, shopping centers, and industries a benefit. Zoning policies that result from this tax squeeze encourage urban facilities to locate where economically and environmentally they do not belong. Similarly, present air quality regulations are uniform throughout the State, which may create an incentive for large urban facilities to be located away from centers.

There are some encouraging official efforts to reverse the spread city trend. In September 1974 the State officially adopted--by Executive Order--a *Plan of Conservation and Development.* Based on water and land resources, the plan concludes that only by limiting urban growth to the vicinity of already-developed areas can Connecticut be assured of an adequate supply of fresh water and water for waste disposal, without seriously degrading remaining high quality resources. But the Plan, unfortunately, still allows spread growth across broad sections of the State. While policies of limiting growth to developed areas would not alone be sufficient to build metropolitan centers, they would at least restrict spread development.

The South Western Regional Planning Agency proposed a regional plan in January 1974 emphasizing downtown Stamford as the metropolitan center, with the downtowns of Greenwich and Norwalk as secondary centers. The Greater Bridgeport and the South Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agencies have similar plans, emphasizing Bridgeport and New Haven.

These plans and policies are in the right direction, but as of now they are only advisory to State and local governments and to private decision-makers. The *Plan of Conservation and Development* establishes overall State policies for land and water resources and carries the mandate of the Governor's Executive Order, but it will allow wide administrative discretion. Air quality regulations that would consciously shape development have not yet been implemented. Regional planning agencies have no power to enforce their plans over local wishes. **These plans must be melded together into a consistent and comprehensive urban growth policy for Connecticut, including transportation, environment, economic development, taxation, housing, and social welfare policies.** And they must be given force and a mandate by the State, the Governor and the General Assembly.

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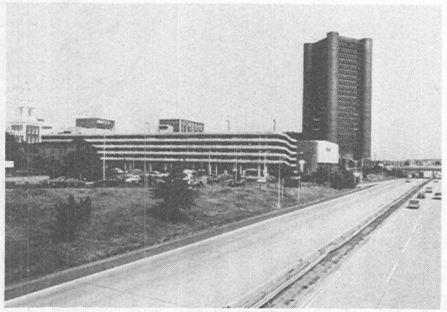

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