

9. Transportation

Statement of Purpose

The Capitol Region's identity as a viable, interconnected region hinges on the quality of its transportation system. Though the major interstate highways that crisscross the region are perhaps the most recognizable and most used portion of this system, automobile travel on interstate roads is merely one of many important components. Passenger automobile transportation, mass transit, nonmotorized transportation, air travel, and the transportation of goods together form the complete regional transportation system. The improvement, integration, and accessibility of these components to all residents of the Capitol Region are essential not only to regional quality of life, but also to the region's competitiveness in a global market. As the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Capitol Region, CROCOG helps to coordinate transportation planning in the region.

Current Conditions

The *Gallis Report*¹, a high-profile study on transportation's place in future global economic competition warned that Connecticut was in danger of becoming a huge "cul-de-sac." The implication of this statement is that Connecticut's current transportation system is inadequate to the task of competing globally in the movement of goods, services, people, and ideas. Though this grim pronouncement was made about Connecticut in general, the state of the transportation system in the Capitol Region was certainly a strong factor in the conclusions. While the *Gallis Report* reflects conditions in 1999, few major transportation changes have occurred that would alter its basic conclusions. Many of its recommendations are echoed in



1. *Connecticut Strategic Economic Framework: A Report of the Connecticut Regional Institute for the 21st Century*, Prepared by Michael Gallis & Associates, 1999.

the 2006 *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (CEDS) prepared for the MetroHartford Alliance, and by *Hartford Connecticut, Redeveloping an Urban Gateway*, a 2008 Advisory Services Panel Report by the Urban Land Institute.

This section of the *Plan* briefly describes the strengths and weaknesses of each component of the region's transportation system and suggests long-term strategies for improvement. A complete and current report on transportation priorities and policy directions can be found in the *Capitol Region Transportation Plan: A Guide for Transportation Investments Through the Year 2035* (adopted by the CROCOG Policy Board in 2007).

Passenger Automobiles

The automobile system is composed of local streets that are built and maintained by municipalities, and larger routes built and maintained by state and federal agencies. The automobile system is easily the most prominent facet of the Capitol Region's transportation system, with its core in the central municipalities of Hartford and East Hartford. Interstate 91 is a north-south route through the Connecticut River Valley that connects Hartford with Springfield, MA, to the north and New Haven to the south, with further connections to Bridgeport and New York City via Interstate 95. Interstate 84 runs east-west through Hartford, linking the region to Massachusetts in the northeast and to Waterbury, Danbury and New York State in the southwest. Important highways in the region also include I-384, I-291, Routes 2, 5, 9, and 15. The state routes radiate from Hartford and East Hartford to the suburbs and provide primary access in and out of the core of the region.

Because both major interstate highways run directly through the employment and population center of Hartford, peak hour congestion can be severe. Unlike many similarly sized cities, Hartford does not have a beltway, causing both the interstates and many of the smaller state routes to operate over capacity much of the time. Despite frequent public complaints about slow traffic and paralyzing congestion, individuals' dependence on the automobile is growing. In the 20 years from 1980-2000, the population of the Capitol Region increased approximately 8 percent. In that same span, the number of passenger vehicles in the Capitol Region increased by 32 percent, while the highway system was not enlarged significantly (Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles and U.S. Census Data). Quite simply, more people are driving more often, driving longer distances to work, and it is beginning to choke the highway system. Apart from traffic congestion, environmental officials are increasingly concerned about the air pollution created by increased auto use.



In order to focus state, federal, and intermunicipal cooperation on mass transit, CROCOG developed a ten-year *Regional Transit Strategy* (RTS) in 2001 to improve current bus transit and increase commuting and transportation options to the region's residents. The RTS recommendations consist of four basic elements:

1. *Rapid Line Haul Service*, or fixed guideway service, is a transit mode that does not run on mixed traffic routes, and thus is not slowed by automobile congestion. The RTS recommends the construction of four new busways (a roadway dedicated solely to bus transit service) and the addition of commuter rail service. The busways will provide quick access to Hartford from Manchester, New Britain, Rocky Hill, and Bloomfield (with a possible extension to Bradley International Airport), tying together much of the highest-density population in the Greater Hartford Area. The commuter rail will help link the Capitol Region to Springfield, and to New Haven, with a connection to new high-speed rail service between New York and Boston. [Note: as of late 2008, several feasibility studies have been undertaken: 1) Manchester busway – study completed and phased implementation recommended; 2) New Britain busway – in final design, operation could begin in 2013; 3) Bloomfield (Griffin) busway feasibility study completed, with recommendation to defer construction pending experience with New Britain busway. In the meantime, a Northwest Corridor transit study is in progress to preserve the viability of this corridor for future busway use; 4) Commuter rail – feasibility study completed in 2005.]
2. A *Downtown Circulator* is believed to be an integral part of the success of a Capitol Region transit plan. This bus system would make it easier for people to move between

activity centers in Hartford, and would make for easy connections to the new busway and commuter rail stations. [Note: The Star Shuttle began operating in 2005 and provides free service connecting the CT Convention Center, Riverfront, Union Station, several hotels and other points of interest.]

3. *Local Bus Service* improvements are needed to maintain the core transit service within Hartford and between major activity and employment centers (such as Buckland Hills and Bradley International Airport). Enhancements included in the RTS include more hours of service, more express routes, more timed transfer centers, and the increased use of alternative-fuel vehicles.
4. *Timed Transfer Centers* are proposed at Copaco Plaza (Bloomfield), West Farms Mall (Farmington), Buckland Hills Mall (Manchester), and Wethersfield Shopping Center (Wethersfield). These centers provide opportunity to travel more places throughout the region with greater convenience by creating a multihub bus system. In addition, these centers, which would consist of covered platforms with enclosed station areas, could be the focus of transit-oriented development to improve overall convenience for local passengers and the general population.

Nonvehicular Travel

The dedication of federal and state transportation funds for the development of nonvehicular facilities, such as multiuse trails to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles, is a notable trend of the last 15 years. Additionally, increased attention is being paid to the region's street system, which is generally considered unfriendly to bicycle traffic. CROCOG's Transportation Department works with communities to provide critical connections in the region's trail network and to improve bicycle and pedestrian access on existing and planned streets. Currently, there are two primary bicycle/pedestrian trails in the region.





The Farmington Canal Greenway: This greenway extends generally north-south, and is part of a proposed regional bike network planned from Suffield to Farmington. Eventually, the path will extend north to Northampton, Massachusetts, and south to New Haven. Sections of this trail from the Massachusetts border to Route 4 in Farmington have been funded, and are in various stages of completion.

The Charter Oak Greenway: This greenway runs generally east-west, and is also part of the proposed interstate bike network. Upon completion, it will provide continuous bicycle facilities from Hartford to East Hartford, continuing through Manchester, Bolton, and Andover. Eventually, the trail will extend through eastern Connecticut to Providence, Rhode Island, and will also connect with the Farmington Canal Greenway to the west. There are completed segments along I-384 in Manchester, in East Hartford, and along Route 6 in Bolton and Andover.

Pedestrian networks are also important transportation elements. Pedestrian facilities provide access to transit, recreational facilities, and other community and private facilities. Well-planned pedestrian networks can enhance the livability of the region and its communities. Such facilities can enhance individuals' enjoyment of a community, while supporting community businesses that do not have generous parking facilities, and therefore rely on pedestrian traffic. Pedestrian facilities support sustainable development objectives by seeking to reduce vehicular travel and associated impacts. CRCOG's Policy Board adopted a newly updated and integrated *Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan* in 2008, which provides more detailed information on facilities, policies, and recommendations.

Air Transportation

The Capitol Region's "regional scale" airports include Bradley International Airport and Brainard Airport. Brainard Airport

in Hartford provides corporate and private service, and does not anticipate any expansion or change in service. Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks is a primary transportation hub in the I-91/Connecticut Valley corridor, providing commercial passenger, commuter, and freight service. Air travel is becoming an increasingly critical transportation component for the region. The regional and national economies are continuing to shift from manufacturing-based to service-oriented and research and development-based industries (this is also termed the "new economy"). The commerce of the "new economy" requires sufficient airline access for people and freight. In addition, metropolitan regions that seek to expand their economy need access to emerging global markets. The *Gallis Report* states that metropolitan regions function as hubs in the global transportation and communications network, and regional airports are important hubs for linking transportation, logistics, and communications networks. Thus, air passenger and freight service is an important component in the region's global transportation network.

The *Bradley International Airport: Airport Master Plan* presents recommendations for a phased, 20-year development program. The Connecticut Department of Transportation anticipates a substantial increase in demand for passenger service during this period. The *Master Plan* concluded that runway space will be sufficient, but new and expanded terminals, vehicular improvements, and increased parking will be required. The flight options for the region's passengers increased when Southwest Airlines added service to Bradley, and when, for several months beginning in 2007, Northwest Airlines operated daily transatlantic service to Amsterdam. (This service was suspended in 2008 because of high fuel costs. Although expected to resume in June 2009, recently the service was indefinitely suspended due to economic conditions.) Bradley is the busiest airport in the state, but daily flight options are limited in comparison with Boston or New York. Improvements in bus and rail transit are expected to both improve Bradley's accessibility from Hartford and create at Bradley a multimodal transportation hub.





The *Bradley Area Transportation Study* (BATS) was undertaken by CROCG, the State of Connecticut, and the Towns of Suffield, East Granby, Windsor, and Windsor Locks to help focus on the Bradley area as a major facet of the region's economic and transportation future. The BATS included a comprehensive analysis of current and future traffic conditions and land use in the future airport area. The study identified transportation improvements needed to accommodate growth and provided a strategic plan for maintaining safe and efficient access to the airport area.

Improvements identified in the study were categorized as either "regional" or "local" based on the nature of their impacts and/or benefits. While most were classified as local improvements, four of the improvements were classified as regional in nature. The regional recommendations include a new roadway connecting the northeast area of the airport to the Route 190 bridge, the enhancement and extension of Bradley Park Road, improvements to Route 75 in the commercial area near the airport, and improvements to transit services for airport passengers and the airport area employees.

Transportation of Goods

A study of the growing global marketplace identified the "NAFTA Corridor" as one of the most important trade routes for the next century. This route, which extends from Nova Scotia in the northeast through Toronto and south through the Midwest toward Mexico, comes very close to the Capitol Region. Unfortunately, much of the region's highway and rail access to this corridor is severely limited by few available Hudson River crossings. In general, it is projected that the relatively modest freight capacity of the Capitol Region, and Connecticut as a whole, will lead to difficulty here competing in the global economic market.

In 2005, Global Insight completed a study of freight traffic for the greater Hartford/Springfield area (including the geography covered by CROCG, the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency, the Midstate Regional Planning Agency, and

the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. This study noted the dominance of truck tonnage, the large volume of through freight traffic, and the imbalance between inflows (higher) and outflows of freight traffic.

Trucking: The ratio of truck-to-rail tonnage in Connecticut is very high, when compared with the national average. In large part, this is due to limited freight capacity in the state and region. Large volumes of heavy truck traffic impose a negative impact on the region and its communities. At the community level, impacts include: noise and vibration; accelerated wear to roadways; and decreased driver safety. At the regional scale, these factors impact the economic efficiency and livability of the region's communities. The manufacturing sector remains an important component of the region's economy, despite the decline in this sector across the state and nation. Investing in the networks to move goods may help to stabilize the manufacturing sector.

Rail Freight: Hartford Yard, located northeast of Union Station, is the hub of the region's rail freight network. The region's freight routes include: South Windsor to Enfield (Central New England Railroad) and several interregional routes operated by Connecticut Southern Railroad. The Amtrak line from Springfield to New Haven is the primary route for moving freight by rail both into and out of the region, where it is dispersed to several shorter rail lines within the region. While this main line is an excellent physical facility, time restrictions and high fees imposed by Amtrak limit its usefulness. As a result, rail freight service in Connecticut comprises a substantially lower percentage of total goods movement than the national average, and there is a high volume of truck traffic on the region's highways. Freight service in the region is undergoing modest expansion: a freight route from Hartford to Middletown has been made continuous, and the Griffin



Line from Hartford to Bloomfield has been reopened. The Connecticut Department of Transportation owns substantial, contiguous rail rights-of-way in the western and eastern sectors of the region where rail service could be initiated in the future.

The Global Insight study noted that the region's use of intermodal freight is about one-tenth of what might be expected based on national averages. CSX Railroad has a terminal and intermodal facility in West Springfield, MA, that is not used to capacity. If the region could take advantage of this, it might be able to divert some of the truck traffic to rail intermodal.

Air Freight: United Parcel Service has a strong presence in the region; one of six national minihubs is located at Bradley International Airport, and a ground hub in Hartford serves the entire Northeast. The demand for air cargo and mail service at Bradley has increased dramatically since 1984, and continued growth is anticipated. The percentage of freight moved by air in Connecticut is comparable to the national average. The recommendations of the *Bradley Area Transportation Study* (BATS) are intended to help maintain the competitive advantage that Bradley International Airport has in air freight due to its good ground access.

Goals & Policy Recommendations

A. Provide a Range of Viable Transportation Options within Region

Changes in demographics over the past 20 years have led to transit carrying a smaller and smaller percentage of the region's trips. Economic activity is shifting away from downtown Hartford to suburban centers, personal income is rising, and automobile ownership rates are growing. These changes enable and attract increasing automobile travel. Most of these changes point to increasing amounts of automobile-oriented travel – yet there are numerous environmental, land use and economic concerns about the impacts of rising auto use and new highways on the region's quality of life. Also, increases in highway congestion may lead to economic stagnation. Because of these concerns, many citizens are seeking to reduce their dependence on the automobile. In addition, there will always be a portion of the population that depends on public transportation to meet their mobility needs. If transit is to remain a viable transportation option for all travelers, it must respond to changing travel needs and provide a service competitive with the automobile. Recent CROG policy decisions have favored transit investments over highway expansion to relieve congestion and to serve future transportation needs.

Policy Recommendations

1. Support goals and recommendations of the *Regional Transit Strategy* and subsequent corridor studies, including the

construction of new dedicated busway lines to connect regional population, retail, and employment centers.

2. Work with Hartford area transit officials and with Jobs Access and human services partners to improve local and express bus service for both commuters and the transit dependent, including more reverse commute routes.
3. Work with major employers to actively promote vanpools, ride sharing, and other access-to-jobs transit options within the Capitol Region.
4. Work with employers and local officials to provide incentives for employees to use transit, or disincentives to travel by automobile.
5. Support improvements in the transit system to better accommodate the elderly and people with disabilities.
6. Encourage telecommuting or off-peak hour commuting when practical.
7. Coordinate local, regional, and state efforts to improve traffic flow in key corridors.
8. Preserve existing rail corridors and rights-of-way for future development of transit options.
9. Work with local and state officials to develop new, dedicated bicycle/pedestrian trails and connect existing trails to form regional and interregional trails.
10. Work with local and state transportation officials to make the region's existing and future streets more friendly to bicycle travel.
11. Support improvements to the pedestrian environment, including sidewalk improvements and other techniques, to make walking a more viable transportation option.
12. Implement the other recommendations of the *Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan*.

B. Improve Interregional and Interstate Transportation

The success of the Capitol Region as a regional unit in the global marketplace hinges on the ability of businesses to easily transport people, goods, services, and information into and out of the region. In order to compete, the transportation infrastructure must be in place to facilitate this movement. This was a conclusion of the *Gallis Report* referenced above and was reinforced by the regional analysis and recommendations of the MetroHartford Alliance CEDS report.

Policy Recommendations

1. Work with state and federal officials to improve truck transportation through the region.
2. Work with local, state, and federal officials to promote a multimodal strategy for Bradley International Airport and Union Station in Hartford.
3. Support improved access and continued development of Bradley International Airport as a transportation center, an employment center, and an important economic resource.

4. Encourage maintenance and expansion of rail freight service through the region.
5. Support efforts to upgrade the information infrastructure of the region to remain competitive in the new economy.

C. Coordinate Land Use, Environmental and Transportation Efforts

The coordination of land use planning with transportation and environmental planning is key to supporting desirable growth patterns at both local and regional scales. Low-density growth supported by automobile proliferation results in longer commutes, more traffic, and environmental degradation. A transportation or transit strategy must include land use, economic and environmental policies that improve convenience and quality of life, and also expand the housing, employment, and transportation choices available to the region's population.

Policy Recommendations

1. Support Livable Community and Smart Growth goals, including context sensitive solutions, complete streets, the inclusion of land use elements in studies, and training and education.
2. Work with local officials to provide mixed-use zoning in areas of existing or proposed transit centers.
3. Encourage the use of environmentally friendly transportation, including the addition of bicycle lanes to any new street development or street renovation, and the use of alternative-fuel vehicles.
4. Work with economic development planners to match businesses to regional and local transit centers.
5. Educate local officials, economic developers, and the public about the benefits of transit-oriented development (TOD).
6. Encourage infill development in areas close to existing or proposed transit.
7. Work with state and local officials, as well as community groups, to develop street and traffic improvements that are auto, bicycle, pedestrian, and business friendly.

D. Anticipate and Plan for Future Transportation Needs

As the economic and demographic makeup of the Capitol Region changes, so changes the transportation needs of the region's population. For example, the aging of the baby-boomer generation will likely result in more demand for alternatives to automobile use. CRCOG's Transportation Department prepares regional transportation strategies that detail current and anticipated priorities for the region's transportation system. The current *Capitol Region Transportation Plan* addresses transportation concerns and investment priorities through the year 2035. These efforts are crucial to coordination and allocation of state and federal funding for various transportation and transit projects.

Policy Recommendations

1. Track regional economic and demographic trends and relate them to changes in transportation patterns.
2. Encourage local officials to plan transportation projects for anticipated growth.
3. Pursue continued and increased funding sources for innovative transportation projects.
4. Support proactive policies that set priorities for future transportation patterns and systems.
5. Support the Hartford Transportation Pathways Strategy Project (HTPS), which is a plan of regional impact aiming to integrate many transportation and pedestrian improvements and TOD initiatives in the area around Hartford's Union Station.





