FROM HERE TO THERE

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OPEN

NARRATOR: In Connecticut, nearly all roads lead to the suburbs. …

JAY GITLIN (Prof. American History, Yale): The car is absolutely essential for enjoying the fruits of American life. You know, in a sense a driver's license is our passport to citizenship. Without a drivers license, you're really no one.

NARRATOR: But the rush to the suburbs has led to a slowdown on Connecticut's roads. …

PAUL EHRHARDT (Former Chrmn., Greater Htfd. Transit District): Although our population is not growing very much at all, the number of trips that we're taking is growing very significantly and the length of those trips are growing.

NARRATOR: More than any other state service, it's the transportation system that most residents use on a daily basis. …

HARRY STRATE (VP., Wilbur Smith Associates): Transportation is at the heart of a state's economy, it's at the heart of our quality of life

DICK CARPENTER (Exec. Dir., SW Regional Planning Agency): We depend on it to get to work, we depend on it to move our goods into and out of the state, we depend on it for pleasure trips and shopping trips.

NARRATOR: Connecticut has one of the most congested road systems in the country. And things are going to get worse. …

JON COLMAN (Pres., The Rideshare Co.): I think our highway system – particularly the secondary roads will be very congested. You'll have a lot of frustrated people who are going to be sitting in traffic much longer than they are now.

NARRATOR: Experts agree that new roads are not the solution to the state's traffic problems. …

HARRY HARRIS (Chief, CT DOT Bureau of Public Transportation): We have a good system. It's in good shape but it simply is not able to continue to grow to meet all of the demands that are being placed upon it by our society today.

NARRATOR: Getting from here to there has always been a high-profile public issue. …

TITLE: "FROM HERE TO THERE"

HARRY STRATE: The automobile is just the latest in a long series of technology that we've used to let people do what they want to do. Transportation enables people to make the choices that they want to make.

OUT OF THE MUD

NARRATOR: Our love/hate relationship with the roads we use goes back more than 200 years.

Until the later 19th century, Connecticut residents depended on stagecoach and buggy travel over dirt roads. Travel was hard and mobility – at about 8 miles per hour – was limited.

In 1792, as Connecticut's population grew to about 200,000, the State government started to franchise privately owned turnpike companies in order to promote the growth of the state's road system. Over the next 50 years, 150 turnpike companies built and maintained 1,400 miles of private toll roads, looking to make a profit from passing traffic.

But the rise of the railroad in the last half of the 19th century and the increased use of free alternative roads led to the decline of the turnpike companies. By 1855, the toll roads were largely abandoned, with maintenance taken over by the towns.

LARRY LARNED (CT Transportation Historian): Most of Connecticut's roads were little more than muddy paths, which connected major towns. People living in the country, particularly the farmers, were living on muddy impassable roads during springtime thaws and unplowed roads during the winter. There were no connecting roads between the cities to speak of during 12 months of the year. This intolerable situation led to the formation of the Connecticut Highway Department in 1895 with the goal of getting the farmer out of the mud.

NARRATOR: In 1878, the Pope Manufacturing Company in Hartford manufactured the first bicycles made in the United States. Connecticut's growing middle class quickly embraced bicycling, which provided unprecedented personal mobility. Organized by Col. Albert Pope, the state's bicyclists soon became leading advocates of better roads.

By 1901, the need for improved state roads became a critical public issue as more people bought automobiles. That year, Connecticut enacted the first traffic law in the United States, limiting speeds to 15 miles per hour in the country and 12 miles per hour in the city. In 1903, the state began to register automobiles. In that first year, 1,353 vehicles were registered. In 1913, the state highway department established the first system of state highways. The new department began to modernize the 14 routes comprising the system.

LARRY LARNED: This involved eliminating grade crossings and railroads, reducing steep grades, eliminating site line problems, using the 14 trunk lines as Connecticut's basic highway system of the time.

NARRATOR: During the early thirties, many of these roads were typically clogged with ever growing numbers of automobile and increasing truck traffic causing frequent delays and numerous accidents.

HERB JANICK: We had a very active road building program quite early in the '20s and '30s so that by the time of World War II, we had 3,000 miles of paved road in a state that's only 5,000 square miles.

NARRATOR: The most heavily traveled road was Route 1 along Connecticut's coast. Route 1 had always been a busy route, used by both state residents and long distance traffic moving between Boston and New York.

LARRY LARNED: As the traffic increased, the suburbs moved out from the urban areas. Places like Glastonbury, Manchester and Redding and the towns surrounding Bridgeport and New Haven suddenly found themselves accessible by automobile. Congestion started to enter the picture.

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CAR CULTURE

HERB JANICK: The automobile of course has been the thing that really completed the suburbanization of CT very early.

NARRATOR: The heavy traffic on Rte 1 led to the opening in 1940 of the state's first modern highway -- the Merritt Parkway. The Merritt Parkway was acclaimed as one of the most beautiful highways in America.

After WW II, both the urban population and car ownership significantly increased. Massive federal and state highway programs financed the construction of new highways and the upgrading of secondary roads. New and better roads further increased mobility, allowing more state residents to move to towns farther out from the cities.

The biggest post-war road project was the construction of the Connecticut Turnpike in 1958.

MATTHEW NEMERSON (Exec. Dir., New Haven Chamber of Commerce): As soon as the movement to the suburbs after the second World War took off, CT embarked on the greatest suburban support program that any state has seen. You know, we really invented the interstate highway and a lot of people don't realize that I-95 along the shoreline was built before there was an interstate system. And it was incorporated in afterwards. That's why we had tolls. That's why there are so many exits on it because in fact it was designed for people to commute from the suburbs along the shore into the cities.

NARRATOR: The federal highway system brought Interstate 84 and 91 to Connecticut. These roads and other highways like them allowed residents to live in once remote small towns and villages across the state.

With suburban growth came increased demand for highway and road expansion. Connecticut's urban population continued to decline as the suburbs flourished. In the last 40 years, as Connecticut's suburban lifestyle evolved, we've greatly transformed how we get from place to place.

MIKE ALAN (Radio Pilot & Traffic Reporter): In my earlier days, back in the early eighties, traffic primarily traveled into downtown. All the insurance companies, large businesses were located there. Since then a lot of them have migrated to the suburbs. So the interchanges which were primarily built and designed to handle traffic just coming into downtown and dumping off, now have to be able to handle this traffic to continue through. It's really provided some new and unique traffic problems.

HARRY HARRIS: We have seen a tremendous growth in the mobility of people. We've seen a tremendous growth in where they go. The old spoke and wheel system from outlying areas into the center city to work has basically disappeared in favor of people going from one suburb to another suburb or traversing through various communities.

HARRY STRATE: Husbands and wives now typically work at two jobs. On the way to work we're dropping off our dry cleaning, we're dropping off the kids at daycare or at school; coming home we're picking up a bite to eat the convenience store and running a lot of other errands in midday. So what we would refer to as trip chaining, linking up multiple trip purposes, you could see the bias it starts to lend toward the automobile and toward a system that's able to respond to our functional demands.

NARRATOR: The number of vehicles registered in Connecticut has steadily increased at a rate much faster than the amount of road mileage in the state.

CHRISTOPHER BRUHL (Pres. & CEO, Business Council of Southwestern CT): People have their cars for a reason. We have two career families. We have had for many generations land use policies favoring the single family home. We are the oldest populated part of the nation, therefore, we have land that's been developed forever. You don't have a lot of choices about where you're going to put certain kinds of facilities any longer. The car's the way the overwhelming majority of people are going to go to work, and going to work alone is going to be the way the overwhelming majority of people go. It doesn't help us to call those people bad. They are merely coping based on the choices available.

CT '56 T-BIRD CLUB OWNER 1: "I got my car in 1962. I paid three hundred dollars for it"

CT '56 T-BIRD CLUB OWNER 2: "It's a lot of fun just driving the car, whenever you can put the top down."

CT '56 T-BIRD CLUB GROUP: "We are members of the CT area classic Thunderbird Club, and we all love our cars."

SEN. BILL CIOTTO (Chairman, Transportation Committee): What's the first thing a 16-year old kid wants? His driver's license. Go by every house in the suburb, you tell me if you see one car, if you don't see two or three cars. We have a love affair with our automobile. That's our bit of independence. We want to be able to jump into that vehicle, drive to our place of employment, whether it's an office or a shop, a factory, and we want to be able to park as close as possible to the front door there. And then comes 4:30 or 5 o'clock, God forbid we should have to wait to car pool with somebody and take them home.

THE BIG SLOWDOWN

NARRATOR: Since 1973, highway travel in the state has increased by 84% while the total road system has increased by less than three percent. The result is spreading congestion and more frequent delays.

DICK MARTINEZ (Chief, CT DOT Bureau of Policy & Planning): The state of Connecticut has about 20,000 miles of roadways, of which about 4,000 miles of it is state highways. And we really monitor the traffic that's on the state highway system itself. About 20% of those miles are under congested conditions, which primarily occur during the peak hours or the commuting hours, either in the morning or the afternoon. We anticipate about a 20 to 30% increase in vehicle miles of travel in Connecticut over the next 20-year period.

NARRATOR: Clogged roads create pollution, cause more accidents and hurt state economic development as it takes longer for people and goods to get to their destinations.

The worst traffic snarls and tieups in the state take place in the Connecticut Turnpike corridor from New Haven to the New York State Line. I-95 opened in 1965 as a toll road, with the $464 million cost financed entirely by the state.

Today, about 30% of the roadways within the I-95 corridor are over capacity, with the congestion level projected to increase up to 55% in the next few years. I-95 itself is at 180 percent of the rush-hour capacity for which it was designed.

CHRISTOPHER BRUHL: The congestion problems mean that we now measure distance in Fairfield County in minutes, not miles. That more people listen to the traffic report than the weather report. And that a typical commuter taking a 19-mile trip, for example, from Fairfield to Stamford, will expect to spend during rush hour from 45 to 55 minutes on a day without rain or accident. That's a problem.

HARRY HARRIS: Our studies have indicated that that peak hour problem which now extends for 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours at night, plus or minus, by the Year 2010 is going to extend all day long. We're going to be looking at a 12-hour a day peak hour. We're going to be looking at the same kind, albeit a couple years beyond that, in the Hartford area. So what we're looking at is a tremendous increase in the – in the volume of traffic that our system simply cannot adjust to, and there is no way that we can build our way out of the problem. We cannot build new highways to keep up with this kind of a demand.

NARRATOR: In the Capital Region, the 84 West corridor has also experienced major growth and serious traffic problems, with about 155,000 vehicles a day using the highway from Hartford to Waterbury.

In 1997, the state Dept. of Transportation began a lengthy planning process involving municipalities and agencies to determine how best to improve the overloaded corridor. This April, in a reversal of its historic role in building new highways as a solution to traffic congestion, the DOT ruled out adding a 4th lane to I-84.

FRAN McMAHON (Dir. Transportation, Capitol Region Council of Govts.): The environmental and social impacts of those major highway construction projects just are not acceptable any more. So this is giving us an opportunity to look at some alternative systems, to look at some light rail, perhaps, some bus-way type of systems.

NARRATOR: In the Southeastern part of the state, the Route 2 corridor has seen drastic increases in traffic primarily because of casino development and tourism growth. Since the casinos have opened, traffic has increased by up to 40,000 cars a day. Traffic congestion in the state is not limited to major highways.

MIKE ALAN: The secondary roadways are really, really starting to take some heat. Route 4 is one that has really, really become so heavy. I don't know how anybody drives it on a regular basis. I can see when I announce a major accident on a highway, particular exit ramps and roadways just automatically starting to build up with traffic. We're driving on roads that were cow trails, I should say, 200 years ago, now they're two-lane roads, they're trying to make them into three-lane roads, they don't have good interchanges and it's become very, very difficult to commute and it's a growing problem. I don't know what the answer is; just can't build interstates through Simsbury and Avon.

HIGH COSTS

NARRATOR: In the past, increased traffic often led to new roads or expanded existing roads.

But heightened environmental concerns, local objections and limited finances adversely affect the state's ability to increase road mileage.

The DOT's annual budget for capital projects and maintenance is about $604 million.

DICK MARTINEZ: The reality of building brand new roads or brand new transit systems in the state is very, very slim because of the dollar situation that we're in. We probably spend somewhere in the range

of 60 to 70 percent of resources as maintenance or minor improvement oriented and only about 30% of those resources are for expansion.

HARRY HARRIS: We could easily spend a lot more and certainly many of the things that we do the people don't fully understand that are essential to the operation are extremely expensive. We have a catenary system, for example, on the railroad that was built in the early 1900's. We're looking at costs like $300 million to replace that system. We're looking at bridges at $140 million to replace.

NARRATOR: Financing and the affordability of transportation alternatives is a fundamental problem.

In the Hartford West corridor study, the Capitol Region Council of Governments is planning for about $250 million in transportation improvements. But experts claim that even that may not be enough.

HARRY STRATE: At our first blush of alternatives thinking of the scope and the size of the improvements that need to be made, we'll far exceed that. So where do the funds come from? And that's a critical issue. Other parts of the country are resorting to answers that Connecticut a long time ago said that it didn't want to resort to when we took the tolls off Interstate 95 and took the tolls off the Merritt Parkway, as an example. Does the political system have the will to make the tough financing decisions? I think that's probably the critical transportation decision that we're going to have in the next decade. Can we spend the money that we need to spend?

NARRATOR: In 1983 two highway tragedies riveted state residents' attention on the transportation system.

In January, a truck slammed into three automobiles waiting at the Stratford toll plaza, killing 7 people and injuring many others. Ten months later, the state began to remove all tolls from the Merritt Parkway and the Connecticut Turnpike, resulting in a loss of $69 million in annual revenues.

Then, at 1:30 am on June 1983, part of The Mianus Bridge on the CT Turnpike collapsed, plunging four vehicles into the river. Three people died and three more were injured.

DICK MARTINEZ: With the collapse of the Mianus River Bridge back in '83, we established a major infra-structure renewal program, which provided dedicated revenues, specifically the gasoline tax, car registration, license fees, etc., that would be specifically used to improve the transportation system, both highway and transit within the state. Here we are 15 years from its inception and we've spent probably close to $10 billion on that system to do improvements to both our roadways and our transit system. And so that improvement has to continue.

NARRATOR: Financial pressures have continued to increase as state roads carry ever-increasing numbers of vehicles.

TIMOTHY WALL (Senior Engineer, CT DOT): Because of the climate and where we're situated in the northeast our roads deteriorate far quicker than say some roads out in Arizona or in Florida. On the interstates, you have a huge majority of heavy truck traffic going through there. And the bridges take a physical pounding year after year especially through the winter. And each year we're out here especially when you work on some of the interstates the, you never see the volume of traffic being reduced. It always seems from year to year pumping more cars through the projects. There's a tremendous amount of traffic.

NARRATOR: In order to help finance its $3.5 billion maintenance program, the state issued bonds in the mid eighties and early nineties. Today about 40% of the DOT budget goes to debt service for these bonds, significantly limiting its ability to do new construction.

One long-planned major reconstruction project is the rebuilding of the 50-year-old Qinnippiac River Bridge near the I-95/I-91 interchange in New Haven -- one of the most congested areas in the state.

Estimated construction costs for the project range from $800 million to one-and-a-half billion dollars.

CARMINE TROTTA (Planner, CT DOT): It wasn't designed for the type of traffic, the volume of traffic that it's carrying today particularly an extensive amount of truck traffic. During the commuter hours, inbound into New Haven you're looking at an hour to two hours of traffic congestion, and outbound in the evening about an hour to two hours that way as well. And the traffic, if there's a breakdown, in particular, since there are no breakdown areas on the bridge, traffic can be backed up for miles with just a simple problem on the bridge.

NARRATOR: All transportation projects undergo a complex and time-consuming planning process. The state DOT began a 10-year study of the Quinnippiac River bridge in 1989.

CARMINE TROTTA: You need a number of approvals on the federal level, on the state level as well as coordination with local governments to insure that what you're doing is not going to have a disastrous effect on the – on the neighborhoods. As far as number of agencies, there's probably 50. So it's the full gamut; it's the federal, state and local.

NARRATOR: After a five-year design phase, reconstruction of the Q Bridge and its surrounding highways is likely to begin in 2004 and continue for 12 to 15 years.

Plans are being made to cope with potentially massive traffic disruptions during construction.

The state transportation agenda has always been greatly influenced by federal funding. Since 1992, the annual federal transportation grant to the state has averaged about $360 million. In 1998, Congress passed a federal transportation bill that will increase the state's grant by 20% to $433 million a year.

The state's gas tax -- the highest in the country – generated $504 million in the last year. After a 3-cent reduction in 1997, the state legislature further cut the unpopular tax by another 4-cents, effective later this year. This year's reduction means $53 million less a year for the state transportation fund. Surplus state tax revenues and the pending increased federal grant will replace the lost revenues.

MAXIMUM CAPACITY

NARRATOR: Availability of financing is not the only factor limiting new construction.

DICK MARTINEZ: I don't think you're going to see very many new roads built in the state. Environmentally, socially, I think it's going to be very difficult to get those through the process. What you will see is – is relatively minor safety and capacity improvements to existing facilities. You'll see some innovative management techniques used to try to improve the flow of that traffic to get people to use a different mode of travel whether it's a bus, whether it's a rail, whether it's riding together. The I-95 corridor from New Haven to the New York State line has what is referred to as incident management within the corridor. The whole corridor is monitored by TV cameras. We have a control station down in Bridgeport which monitors that and we have signs up in the roadway, variable message signs where we

can direct traffic around any accidents or any incidences that occur. We also have the same type of system up in the Hartford area,

NARRATOR: On I-95, the Merritt and Route 1, the DOT has a goal of reducing rush hour traffic congestion by 10% within the next five years

HARRY STRATE: That fine tuning of the system is the first thing that we – we always want to do. But there are sections of the state where that's probably not going to be enough. Southwestern Connecticut, the Hartford area, southeastern Connecticut – other areas – New Haven – other areas of the state where – where demand is – is exceeding even the ability of the existing system to handle it.

CHRISTOPHER BRUHL: We're going to get at improved conditions by better management of the capacity we have. The only way to manage capacity effectively is to rethink transportation as a consumer service not as a physical fact of concrete and steel. What we have to do, therefore, is give people choices that don't force them to live substandard lives or to give up things they already have. So what we need to do instead is to maximize choice. Give people financial incentives to choose another way or another time to go to work. So what we really see, therefore, is time shifting: go earlier, go later, place shifting: work from home, and mode shifting: out of the car into the train. Those three shifts can easily get us our five percent reduction that we need for congestion and then one percent a year thereafter for about five more years. If we give more choices, more people will go in different ways and we'll continue to manage our way through the problem.

DICK MARTINEZ: Our average occupancy during the peak hour is only 1.2 people in every car, so there's a lot of cars that are just single occupancy. If we can increase that number, to 1.5, for instance, we'd have a drastic reduction in traffic on the roadways during those peak hours and actually wouldn't require any major improvements.

JON COLMAN: There are approximately 450,000 commuters daily in the Greater Hartford Area and 80 to 85% of them are driving alone. Eighty-five percent of those commuters go suburb to suburb which makes it very difficult for non-automobile systems to – to meet their needs because there is insufficient density for transit, in particular.

NARRATOR: What residents value about their mobility and where they live, work and shop, might be the most challenging problem for transportation planners.

JON COLMAN: What we find so lovely about commuting by ourselves is it's convenient and we can come and go when we want and we're very happy if we can park next to the desk for free. If we have to start paying for parking, we're not so happy. If we have to walk from the – from the car to a place where we work, we're not so happy. But we're still probably more happy than if we had to be sharing a ride

NARRATOR: In the early 1980s the CT DOT helped to start three not-for-profit corporations to encourage more people to change their commuting habits.

JON COLMAN: Basically, our mission is to get people from driving alone into an alternate form of transportation. Both for economic and environmental reasons, we're not going to take those two-lane highways and make them four-lane highways, so we've got to look at managing the system that we have in place. And when we talk about managing the system we have in place, that means we've got to get people into car pools and van pools and innovative forms of transit.

NARRATOR: Ride Share in Windsor, Metropool in Stamford, and Rideworks in New Haven publish The Commuter Register, …

JON COLMAN: The key is it's a system, it's a branded system and it's sold as a system. We don't anymore market it as van pooling because van pooling doesn't really mean much to anyone. We market it as a commuter system and we reserve a seat for you just as you would reserve a seat on a train or a bus.

NARRATOR: Financial incentives and restrictive regulations also can greatly influence driver habits.

HARRY STRATE: We have a discipline called transportation demand management where our philosophy is that we want people to pay more during peak hours, we want to change land use planning regulations to favor more transit friendly development. Politically it's very unpopular because we're intervening with people's free choice and free decision making process. The purpose of dis-incentives is to change peoples behavior. Obviously regulations are one form to do it. You can't travel or you can't take the car or only HOV's with 2 or more occupants can use this lane, those are dis-incentives. But cost is the other major factor in dis-incentives, can either be parking charges so it'll cost you more to drive your car and arrive at a certain time at the parking garage. They could involve tolls on a highway.

BILL CIOTTO: If we can make it more enticing, maybe by giving a tax credit or other incentive, maybe we'll entice, motivate more people to use these mass transits. Now, someday we have to start to begin to realize what are we doing to our children's children, what are we doing to our ecology, what are we doing to ourselves? I don't want to say mandate, it's a tough word to use, but maybe under dark condition you're gonna have to mandate. Maybe you can drive your car three days a week and he can drive his car three days a week and one day we all rest. Now, what I would be calling for maybe is people would consider giving up that car for a day and riding with somebody else or for two days. I think we can make this happen but it's going to take a little giving on all our parts.

NARRATOR: In an attempt to encourage ridesharing by commuters, the state established high-occupancy-vehicle lanes on I-84, I-384 and I-91 in the Hartford area. More HOV lanes in the area are being considered.

HOV lanes are in use in about 25 municipalities nationwide, with varying degrees of success. CT DOT officials admit that the lanes are being underutilized but say that as traffic conditions continue to worsen, more commuters will use the lanes.

JON COLMAN: You need to remember that for every vehicle that's in the HOV lane, that's two or more vehicles that are not in the regular lanes. One of the main purposes of an HOV lane is to provide relief for the other lanes. And so while you may not see as many vehicles as you'd want to see, remember it's not a vehicle count, it's a body count, it's a person count.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

NARRATOR: Today, 96 percent of the travel in the state is by automobile with only about two percent each by rail and by bus.

For the last half of the 19th century, public transit was by street horsecar. When electric trolleys replaced horsecars in 1893, thousands of working-class families were able to move to nearby suburbs for the first time.

JAY GITLIN: Real estate developers who knew where the lines were heading often bought up the land and created subdivisions in advance of the line, even. There were great profits, of course, to be made in suburban subdivisions even then. Americans loved the trolley car, thought it was a great thing. But then the car came along and then they remembered all the things they didn't like about the trolley. They were

crowded often times at rush hour when you really needed to take one. Of course, there's also the inconvenience of having to go on someone else's schedule and only go between certain points. The car offered an incredible amount of freedom and privacy compared to that. I think more or less the public simply made it clear that they preferred the car and they wanted the government to get into the road-building business.

NARRATOR: The trolley system spurred the golden age of the city. Street car railway tracks emanated out from the central city like spokes on a wheel. As the automobile grew in popularity, more and more former city dwellers moved to the suburbs, but still remained connected to the city.

HERB JANICK (Prof., American History, WCSU): They did some studies in the '30s on traffic patterns in CT and they were astounded to find that most of the traffic around the major cities in CT were in and out. People were still working down town in the business district. They were still shopping down there. And it created tremendous problems for CT cities. It changed the whole nature of the street. Instead of it being an extension of the sidewalk, it became a conduit to move traffic. And now, it is so easy to turn your back on the city because the things you used to have to go to the city to get for shopping or for employment have also gone to the suburbs. So, most people can turn their back on the city without any ill effects to their lives.

NARRATOR: As dependence on the automobile has increased over the years, there has been a corresponding decline in public transportation systems, leading to hardships for some. In Connecticut, ___#_____ households do not own an automobile.

TOM LEWIS (Prof., of Geography, MCC): We're so spread out, you know, the buzz words that we use: sprawl, suburbanization, decentralization, the outer city, the edge city, slurbs, rural urban fringe - we're so spread out that it makes it very difficult to provide mass transit systems that will be available to everyone.

BILL CIOTTO: Only six percent of the people on welfare have an automobile. If these jobs are out in the suburbs, how do they get to these jobs? You know, it's easy to take a bus and get out to a mall at 10 o'clock in the morning. If you're coming home at 10 o'clock at night, it's not so easy.

HARRY HARRIS: The bus system really follows the same patterns as the old trolley systems. It's all based on center city and getting people to spoke and wheel system. We're now engaged in a major study to take a look at whether or not we can and how should we change the system to meet the demands of people today.

NARRATOR: Unlike other states, where regional and local municipalities help fund mass transit, operating costs for public transit in Connecticut is almost wholly funded by the state. About 40 percent of the state Department of Transportation's $298-million operating budget subsidizes the state's two commuter rail services and 20 bus-transit service providers

JON COLMAN: There's no municipal support. There's no regional support. And the State, I think, you know, reaches a point where it says well if you want to do these things, you're going to have to start anteing up and so far this region has not chosen to do that nor has any region in Connecticut. Transit will simply not make money; there's always going to be a subsidy.

NARRATOR: In the mid 1970s, the Greater Hartford Transit District began a project with the goal of building a modern electric trolley system from downtown Hartford to Bradley Field. The 19-mile mass-transit project was to have been built on the old Griffin rail line right of way. It had been hotly debated from the start.

Griffin rail proponents claimed the $452-million project would attract about 18,000 riders a day and create a variety of benefits.

PAUL EHRHARDT: We need to make a different kind of strategic infrastructure investments so that in fact we can get out of the box that we've put ourselves in over the last 50 years. One of the interesting features of a rail line is that inherently it creates points of commerce. Wherever the community chooses to have a station means that people are going to walk there, they're going to ride their bike there, the bus stops are going to be established there, and there will be some park & ride facilities at that point of commerce. And it really creates a whole new inviting investment environment for real estate developers. It's complicated. It costs hundreds of millions of dollars and it takes years simply to do the preliminary planning let alone the engineering, design and construction. The fact of the matter is State participation is the lynch pin, unfortunately our State Department of Transportation hasn't seen the overall value of such an investment.

NARRATOR: In April, under unrelenting opposition from the state DOT, the Capital Region Council of Governments rejected the Griffin Line project, leading some to accuse the DOT of a continuing obsession with building highways at the expense of mass transit. DOT officials deny a road-building bias.

DICK MARTINEZ: That corridor is not a major corridor of congestion. It would be very difficult for us to allocate scarce federal and state resources to that particular corridor.

HARRY HARRIS: While I can salute the idea, I find it difficult to justify the economics even for someone like myself who is a strong proponent of public transportation.

NARRATOR: DOT support for commuter train travel along the shoreline has been substantial.

In 1985, the DOT and the Metropolitan Transit Authority of New York jointly created the Metro North Commuter Railroad. Today, about 90% of Connecticut's commuters to New York use the train..

HARRY HARRIS: Right now we have probably the largest, close to the largest and most successful rail line in the country in Metro North, the New Haven line. We have 28,000 people a day traveling on that line and we lose $26 million a year. That's the subsidy. Every time a passenger gets on Metro North it costs a dollar-ninety in state subsidy to subsidize their operation..

NARRATOR: In 1990 the state started a second commuter rail service – the Shore Line East, providing service between New London and New Haven. The line carries about 600 commuters daily and is subsidized at $5.5 million a year.

HARRY HARRIS: The subsidy from the taxpayers on Shore Line East is more than $16. So every time someone gets on that train, the taxpayers are subsidized to the effect of $16. We have got to do things to increase the number of riders on that road to make it viable for the long term.

NARRATOR: Two weeks after the death of the Griffin Line proposal, the DOT announced that they were rejecting widening I-84 in favor of other options, including HOV lanes, bus or light-rail mass transit.

DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

NARRATOR: Economic development typically follows transportation improvements. In 1999, Amtrak plans to initiate high-speed train service between Boston and Washington, leading some to predict related development and greater demand for housing in state coastal cities and suburban towns along the line.

Increased mobility leads to increased suburban development. Towns in the most rural parts of the state have become more susceptible to change, as sprawl continues to invade more parts of the state.

JON COLMAN: The reason we have suburban sprawl and now rural sprawl is because we built a significant highway system at tremendous public subsidy, put the access out there, and then allowed the development to take place on a helter-skelter basis along those highway corridors. And so we don't have real density to support at this point other alternative forms of transportation which require density to be successful. I think that we either have to decide that we're going to move towards a development pattern that allows both walking and alternate means of transportation or we're going to be sitting in traffic much, much more than we are now and much, much more than we ought to or want to.

NARRATOR: Suburban drivers and their many destinations present the biggest challenge to transportation planners. Without a significant change in residential and commercial development patterns, congestion will continue to grow and suburban sprawl will further threaten the loss of the state's historic character.

JON COLMAN: It's a land use decision first and then a transportation decision. What we have done in this country is we create a residential zone, we create an office zone, we create a manufacturing zone, we create an industrial zone and they're apart. We need to begin thinking about in terms of getting away from the separatives of land use and begin to have land uses that are next to each other, interwoven with one another so that you have choices. You don't have to get into your car to go to work or to go shopping or to go to a movie or to go to a playground.

DICK MARTINEZ: Probably the ideal from a transportation standpoint would be to have certain areas that would be very high concentration of employment, high concentration of residences, that kind of a thing, in fact, could occur on a regional basis, county type basis. We do have regional planning agencies that attempt to do that both from a transportation standpoint and development standpoint. They've had limited success with that.

NARRATOR: Transportation issues are increasingly the focus of regional groups composed of local governments.

Land use, planned growth and transportation are among the regional groups' biggest challenges. Those decisions are primarily made by town planning & zoning commissions.

DICK CARPENTER: That's a very closely cherished job. They don't want to give that up to anyone else. People want to respect each others borders but sometimes the zoning is different historically along a border and it's harder to make it as compatible as it would be if the zoning was similar.

FRAN McMAHON: Individual communities essentially rely on property taxes so that communities tend to chase what they would consider desirable development: manufacturing plant, an office building

CHRISTOPHER BRUHL: Municipalities willing to dance with the market will create development sites that may or may not be the best for the region.

NARRATOR: In late 1996, 11 environmental, business and civic planning organizations based in towns from Branford to Greenwich organized into a group called the Coastal Corridor Coalition, with the common recognition that congested roads were threatening the economic and environmental health of coastal Connecticut.

CHRISTOPHER BRUHL: It's very difficult because people are crazed commuters twice a day and they are protective homeowners the balance of the time. And we have a very strong tradition and self-image of home rule in this state and there's an aversion to certain kinds of regional solutions. On the other hand, we are seeing that the economy has become regional, that services are delivered on a regional basis. So if we can try for some regional solutions that don't require governmental structures, we will find people willing to cooperate.

NARRATOR: In the Capital region, CRCOG, a 29-town organization of mayors and first selectmen, regularly addresses transportation issues.

FRAN McMAHON: There certainly is a willingness among the communities to talk among themselves. I think as suburbanization has continued to occur in this area, there is a realization that it doesn't make a lot of sense to keep duplicating a lot of public infrastructure investments; transportation being one of them. So I guess we've had some success in terms of beginning a dialogue but I think, you know, we still have a ways to go on that. And I think the conversations that we've facilitated have – have made those communities take a real hard look at the way they function, the way they allow development to occur and the real impacts of that development.

THE SUBURBAN BOX

NARRATOR: The typical suburban lifestyle requires a car. Getting people to change how they live, work and travel is acknowledged by all to be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

LAURA WEIR CLARK (CT Trust for Historic Preservation): We've built ourselves into a corner or a suburban box and it's going to take a while for us to dig our way out of it. If we are not careful in the next 20 years, the indications are that we will lose much of our rural lands, our small towns will lose their character It's a very complicated solution. It has to become a - patterns of land use from a transportation standpoint, from a tax incentive stand point.

HARRY HARRIS: Well, I think realistically people are going to continue to expect to be able to drive wherever they want to go and it's going to become increasingly difficult. But I think increasingly a number of people are going to realize that they can't do what they've been doing and continue to maintain the quality of life. So I think that we're going to see, particularly in those areas such as along the coast or in the Hartford area where there is sufficient number of people, we're going to see an expansion of our public transportation system.

HARRY STRATE: Maybe we should think of alternative patterns not only in land development but also in transportation development. The question isn't how do we do away with the automobile, it isn't how do we stop suburbanization, the question is what's the next logical step in our technological evolution? And that's what we're struggling with around the state. It's going to require a fundamental change though in – in how the public thinks, what the public values, what the market requires us to provide. Can we make that change? There are a lot of professionals that think we can. Will we make the change? That's probably a matter of political will.

CREDITS