



CRCOG Weekly Legislative Report

2019 Legislative Session

March 21, 2019

Weekly Legislative Feature Issues:

Another week at the Legislative Office Building has been another busy one. The Appropriations Committee continued its work group meetings focusing on specific items that were raised when the executive agencies gave their presentations during the public hearing.

The Passing of a State Representative

In a shocking development, State Representative Ezequiel Santiago from Bridgeport died from a heart attack on Friday, March 15th at the age of 45. He was survived by three daughters. Rep. Santiago began the session as the new co-chair of the Banks Committee. House Majority Leader Matt Ritter said: "He was so proud to represent the City of Bridgeport, and he was so excited about this new role as the chair of Banks." Gov. Ned Lamont made a statement on Friday. "We were terribly saddened to learn this morning of the sudden passing of Representative Ezequiel Santiago, a man who truly loved public service and his hometown of Bridgeport," Lamont said. "The State of Connecticut has lost an outstanding advocate, and our hearts are broken today as we mourn his loss. He was a devoted father, fighter for his community, and a dedicated public servant. Our prayers are with his family, friends, and constituents at this difficult time." Lamont ordered flags to fly at half-staff in Santiago's memory.

Statewide Tolls Update:

On Wednesday, March 20, 2019, the Connecticut General Assembly took its first steps toward implementing tolling legislation. Voting along party lines, three bills were approved to move out of the Transportation. All three bills, if passed in the General Assembly, would allow the state Department of Transportation to develop and present a tolling plan to the Federal Highway Administration.

One Senate bill [SB No. 423](#) (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR CONNECTICUT'S TRANSPORTATION FUTURE (TRA) **(JF) Passed 23-13-** would require the full General Assembly to vote twice; they would vote once this year on approving tolls, and another later date on a more detailed final plan.

The two House bills—bills favored by the Governor and Democrats—would only require one vote now to approve tolling and hearings later to identify the final location and pricing of toll gantries. These two bills are:

[H.B. No. 7280](#) (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SUPPORT FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE CREATION OF THE CONNECTICUT TRANSPORTATION FINANCE AUTHORITY. (TRA) (JF) **Passed 23-13**

[H.B. No. 7202](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CONNECTICUT'S TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE. (TRA) (JF) **Passed 23-13**

The House bills would create an authority overseeing implementation of tolls; the Senate bills would not, keeping that power with the legislature.

Under all three bills, tolling would be limited to highways frequented by out-of-state drivers: the Merritt Parkway, I-84, I-91, and I-95. Tolling revenue likely will not be collected until 2023. At least 30% of that revenue is expected to come from out-of-state drivers. Governor Ned Lamont has reiterated that he will be “aggressive” in protecting Connecticut drivers and providing them with discounts. These bills will now go to the Senate (SB 423) and the House (HB 7280 and HB 7202) for further consideration.

This past week has revealed new developments of particular interest to you:

DOT Eyes 2023 Rollout of Tolls, but What the Legislature will Vote on Remains a Question

At this point, we’ve all heard about the tolls proposed by Governor Ned Lamont that would collect revenue from drivers on I-84, I-91, I-95, and Route 15. Many are pointing to a bill that would create a Connecticut transportation authority as a toll bill in disguise. They worry that critical decisions about tolling could be delegated to that authority rather than voted in the General Assembly, where legislators can be held accountable. Toll supporters say that the estimated \$800 million per year revenue from the tolls is a necessary component to continue funding necessary repairs and upgrades of state highways and bridges. “It’s not about what people like. It’s about what’s necessary,” says Sen. Carlo Leone, who supports state tolling.

Opponents of the tolling proposal say that Lamont broke his campaign promise, which was to only consider tolling out-of-state trucks. They also argue that all-vehicle tolls would place yet another tax on heavily-taxed Connecticut residents. Based on pricing information provided by the Department of Transportation, a round-trip daily commute from Hartford to New Haven could cost \$823.46 annually. These rates are subject to change. The density of the tolls is another debate. Massachusetts has 17 total tolling locations; Connecticut, with “half the size and half the people” according to Rep. Themis Klarides, is proposed to have 50 locations. Discounts are in the works for off-peak travelers and frequent travelers. DOT officials have also confirmed that implementing broad tolling will not jeopardize federal government funding for transportation.

Lamont hopes to raise public opinion for tolls by assuring voters that the revenue from tolling will be allocated solely to reinvestment in transportation infrastructure. In fact, a referendum last year was passed creating a transportation “lockbox” for exactly that purpose. Republicans argue that, instead of broad tolling, revenue from the auto sale tax alone could fund transportation infrastructure. The Lamont administration insists it is not enough. The administration is also hesitant to fund infrastructure improvements through bonds since the state is already “mired in debt,” according to Lamont’s budget

director Melissa McCaw. Many legislators have yet to take a stance on the creation of a transportation authority and a plan for broad tolling.

[Hartford Courant: DOT eyes 2023 rollout of tolls, but what the legislature will vote on remains a question](#)

A Milestone for the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, the largest lobbying group for the state's city and towns, now counts all 169 municipalities in CT as dues-paying members, thanks to the recent addition of Windham. Executive Director Joe DeLong called it a "milestone moment." The organization's primary mission is to advocate on behalf of property taxes. The CCM is tracking bills that would allow for local-option taxes on hotels and motels, proposed overhauls in funding teacher retirements and municipal pensions, and a host of other issues.

[Hartford Courant: A milestone for the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities](#)

Lamont Softens Stance on Consolidating School Districts, but Only Slightly

After backlash from both legislators and the public, Governor Ned Lamont has finally softened his stance on school district consolidation. This comes after a closed-door meeting Lamont had with dozens of concerned Fairfield County municipal leaders. The revised version of Lamont's bill would create a Commission of Shared School Services that would only have the power to "develop recommendations" rather than mandates about school district consolidation. Lamont says he wants to "highlight and incentivize" efficiencies districts implement, such as backend sharing of administrative services, software, staff, or transportation contracts. This is in line with Lamont's language at the Fairfield County meeting that he wants a "carrot, not stick" approach to regionalization.

However, bill language is still in place that would allow the commissioner of education to withhold funding from small school districts that do not share a superintendent with another district. "My revised proposal seeks to strike that balance through a collaborative process that preserves the feisty independence of our towns while providing them the tools they need to accomplish our shared vision of focusing resources on the classroom," Lamont says.

[CT Post: Lamont softens stance on consolidating school districts, but only slightly](#)

Lamont Leads CT Debt 'Road Show'

Governor Ned Lamont, Treasurer Shawn T. Wooden, and other senior state officials are spending the weekend on an "investor road show." They have scheduled investor meetings in Chicago, Boston, and New York City. These meetings are in advance of the sale of Connecticut general obligation (GO) bonds—bonds used to finance state projects and programs—which open on a priority basis on Wednesday, March 27th. The bonds are due to close on April 11th. Last week, S&P Global Ratings projected Connecticut's financial outlook as "stable." Wooden hopes the optimistic projection will draw

national attention from investors, helping to supplement the state's finances in light of Lamont's "debt diet" proposition. "The next step is to follow through on plans to address our current economic challenges and continue building a stable foundation for future growth and financial sustainability," Wooden said in a statement.

[Hartford Business: Lamont leads CT debt 'road show'](#)

Tracked Bills:

Please see attached document.