

CT DOT receives \$2M federal grant for autonomous bus pilot program

By [Sean Teehan](#)

The Federal Transit Authority has awarded \$2 million to Connecticut for a pilot program that will run autonomous buses on the Hartford-to-New Britain *CTfastrak* rapid transit bus line.

The planned two-year pilot program will test three electric-powered, 40-foot self-driving buses on the 9.4-mile *CTfastrak* busway, said DOT Public Transit Administrator Dennis Solensky, who added that this is the first such autonomous public bus pilot in the nation.

[HBJ reported in November](#) that DOT officials hoped to put the automated buses in service by the end of March, but the Covid-19 crisis put other priorities ahead of the pilot, Solensky said.

“We are pleased to have been selected for a federal grant to test this new technology, which we hope will aid drivers in delivering safe and efficient service,” Solensky said. “For now, our priority and focus remains supporting the men and women who are delivering essential transit services.”

DOT officials plan to run the pilot in partnership with bus maker New Flyer of America Inc. If successful, the program could be just the beginning of a larger automated-vehicle program for Connecticut’s public-transportation system, Solensky said.

Using the busway would eliminate many of the concerns that have arisen from testing autonomous vehicles on public roadways. Only DOT buses are allowed to drive on the *CTfastrak* line, which has 10 stations providing service to New Britain, Newington, West Hartford and Hartford. The bus line is protected by guardrails on each side so no other vehicles can veer onto it.

During the pilot, drivers would sit in the driver’s seat, but allow automated technology to control most of the trip, except for parts of the route through heavily trafficked downtown Hartford, Solensky said. Those buses would also collect data that New Flyer plans to share with UConn.

CTDOT is one of 25 departments of transportation, municipalities or other entities to receive part of about \$20.4 million in grants for transportation tech projects. The \$2 million grant Connecticut received was among the largest, with only four others receiving more.

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