

It's the Sprawl Stupid!

What's Driving Connecticut's Traffic Congestion

Stuck in Traffic!

Eighty-eight percent of Connecticut voters believe that traffic on the state's highways is a very serious or somewhat serious problem, according to a recent Quinnipiac University poll. Drivers in the Constitution State have long endured traffic jams that bring highways to a standstill and threaten to dampen economic growth. Even as far back as the late 1920s, drivers complained of bottlenecks on the Boston Post Road. New roads were built to ease this traffic

Traffic costs Connecticut \$477 million annually.

— the Merritt Parkway and then later, I-95. But these roads soon filled with traffic as well.

Today, traffic in the state's major metropolitan areas — Bridgeport-Stamford, Hartford and New Haven — costs the state \$477 million annually in lost productivity, extra shipping costs, and excess fuel consumed. And beyond the economic costs, traffic congestion impairs quality of life, as air and noise pollution worsens and commuters spend **more time on the road and less time at home with their families.**

But even as policy-makers, business leaders, and your neighbors fume about congestion, few understand its root causes. This fact sheet attempts to address that gap in understanding and offer solutions to help Connecticut rein in traffic and preserve a high quality of life for all of its residents.



Commuters on I-95 waste hours stuck in rush hour traffic instead of spending time with their families and friends (not to mention the gallons of wasted gasoline and lost productivity).

Traffic Congestion by the Numbers

- The number of miles driven in Connecticut annually grew from more than 22 billion in 1985 to over 31 billion in 2002, a jump of nearly 41 percent in less than two decades. This 9 billion mile increase translates to ***an extra 2,100 miles driven per person every year.***
- Commute trips lengthen as workers move farther from their jobs (and jobs move farther from the cities) and traffic congestion further extends long commute times. Commuters added four minutes to their one-way trip from 1980 to 2000, an increase of nearly 20 percent. While four minutes

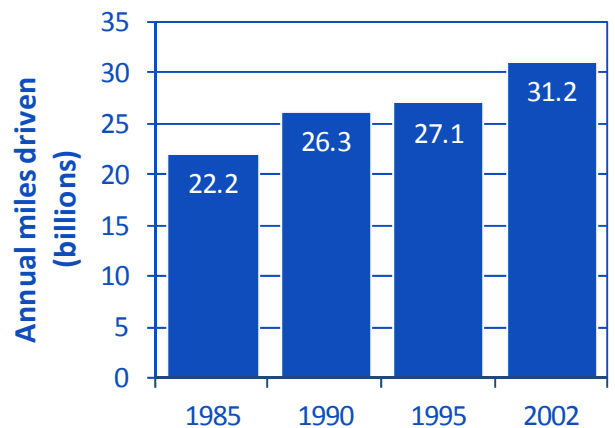
Connecticut residents drive 31 billion miles annually, a distance equivalent to 170 roundtrips to the sun.

doesn't sound like much, it adds

up to **32 extra hours spent driving** over the course of a year.

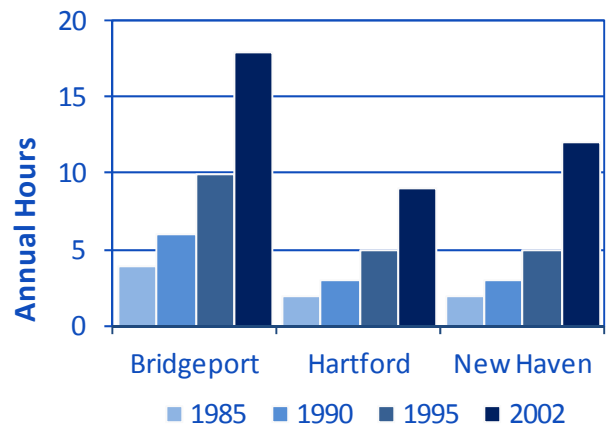
- Traffic delays have grown significantly across the state. The Texas Transportation Institute's study of congestion examined travel delays in Connecticut's three major urban areas — Bridgeport-Stamford, Hartford and New Haven — finding dramatic increases in the number of hours spent stuck in traffic. In Bridgeport and Hartford, travel delays grew by 350 percent from 1985 to 2002. In New Haven, the number of hours spent stuck in traffic grew five-fold.

Miles Driven Skyrockets



Source: Connecticut Department of Transportation

Traffic Delay per Person Grows



Source: Texas Transportation Institute. Urban Mobility Study.

Ever wonder why widening roads doesn't seem to help the traffic situation at all?

New roads induce more travel in the near term, and more development in the long term, which then results in even more traffic.



1. Congestion



What Causes Traffic Congestion?

Uncoordinated and spread out residential and commercial development — is a fundamental cause of traffic congestion. Sprawl creates and aggravates traffic congestion in two ways:

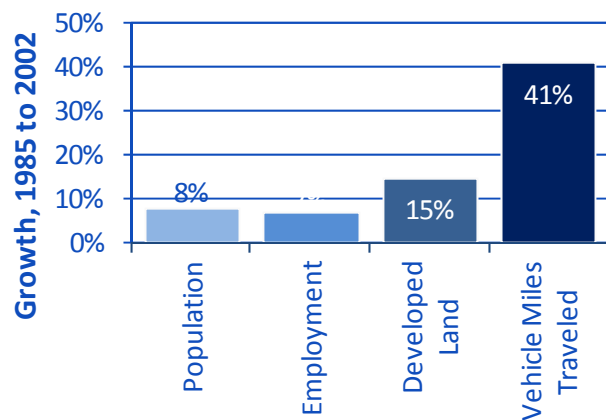
1. **It is almost entirely car-dependent.** Mass transit cannot efficiently serve scattered, low-density homes and jobs. Transit service, if available at all, is sparse and inconvenient. Walking and bicycling is often not a viable option because the distances are too great, and the lack of sidewalks, bike paths or adequate road shoulders makes it dangerous.
2. Many sprawling areas feature disconnected and **inefficient street networks that funnel all drivers from local roadways onto a few major roadways.** With few alternative routes, these larger roads fill up quickly with cars.

It's no secret that sprawl is a root cause of traffic congestion. A recent study found that as residential density doubles, vehicle use declines by 20 to 40 percent. More compact, village-like development generally creates fewer car trips because it offers more travel choices and walking is a more viable option. Another recent analysis concluded that sprawl has a far more significant influence on the number of miles driven than other variables commonly related to driving such as population size and income.



How do residents in a development like this one get around? The sprawling design forces people into their cars to meet all of their daily needs.

Developed Land Grows Far Faster than Population or Employment, and Driving Increases



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates; CT Dept. of Economic and Community Development; Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR); FHWA. Highway Statis-



But What Can We Do About the Traffic?

Efforts to relieve traffic congestion will have little impact unless Connecticut gets the land use right. New lanes will quickly fill up with traffic, new transit service will be underused, and the number of miles driven will continue to grow until Connecticut embraces smart growth development strategies. Governor Jodi Rell has recently proposed new policies to encourage smart growth and has called for “a more responsive, more responsible DOT and a DOT that will continue to broaden its focus beyond highways.” These are promising steps in the right direction, though much more needs to be done. Below are some recommendations for reining in Connecticut’s sprawling development:

- ConnDOT should embrace context sensitive design and work more collaboratively with municipalities on transportation projects and development plans that minimize new car trips and encourage transit, cycling and walking.
- Governor Rell should create a transit village program modeled after New Jersey’s which provides state funding and incentives for developments located near transit stops and stations.
- ConnDOT should use a larger share of flexible federal funds for bicycle and pedestrian projects, and also add a bicycle-pedestrian grant program to its Town Aid for Roads.
- ConnDOT should adopt a fix it first policy, shifting infrastructure investment further toward roadway infrastructure maintenance and away from new roads and additional highway capacity.



Main Street in
Wethersfield,
Connecticut

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



350 W 31st Street, Suite 802 • New York, NY 10001
(212) 268-7474 • www.tstc.org