

Tracking the Dollars: A Review of Projected Transportation Spending in Connecticut, 2010-2013

The collage features several key elements:

- Highway Interchange:** A red circular inset showing a multi-level highway interchange with cars.
- Train:** A blue circular inset showing a red and blue passenger train.
- Bicycle Lane:** A green circular inset showing a white bicycle symbol painted on an asphalt road.
- Budget Documents:** Multiple overlapping spreadsheets and reports, including:
 - APPENDIX A - GLOSS**: A list of regions (01 SOUTH-WESTERN, 02 HOUSATONIC VAL, 03 NORTH-WESTERN, 04 LITCHFIELD, 05 COUNTCY, 06 VALLEY, 07 GREAT) and a table with columns for years 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013.
 - CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**: A document with the state seal and the motto "QUI TRANSTULIT ENSTINET".
 - PM2.5**: A document with a map of Windham and New London counties and a table of data.
 - PERSONNEL SUMMARY**: A table with columns for years 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013.
 - FINAL 2011 STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT PROGRAM**: A large table with many columns and rows of data.

**Tri-State Transportation Campaign
March 2010**

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Introduction

The current capital budget for the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) is about \$5.25 billion while the transit operating budget is just over \$442 million.

To understand where these dollars are going, Tri-State Transportation Campaign analyzes Connecticut's Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), a compilation of upcoming transportation projects and anticipated construction spending that ConnDOT publishes every two years in conjunction with the state's eleven metropolitan planning organizations and four rural regional planning organizations. **It is the best single indicator of where the state is putting its transportation dollars.** But while the official document itself resembles a telephone book or set of coded ledgers, this analysis of the Program is designed to provide a summary picture of where the money is spent, and what the state's current transportation priorities are. This year's analysis is especially important considering it is the first STIP release during ConnDOT Commissioner Joseph Marie's tenure.

The current STIP covers fiscal years 2010 to 2013. It lists all of the construction and equipment-purchase projects expected to be funded during this period, along with expected expenditures and funding sources. This year, in order to get a clearer picture of the state's infrastructure priorities, we also included projects receiving only state funds.

Part of our analysis compares the 2010-2013 STIP to a similar analysis we undertook for the 2007-2010 and 2000-2002 STIPs, to show whether and how the state's spending emphasis has changed.

We shared preliminary findings with ConnDOT staff and made several changes to our analysis to reflect their suggestions.

Commissioner Marie has been vocal in advocating for a more multi-modal approach to solving Connecticut's transportation problems. This report gives a first glimpse at how much progress ConnDOT has made toward that end.

Summary of Findings

- **Connecticut allocates the majority of transportation capital funding to highways and bridges**, with approximately 54 percent of funds in that category of projects. Thirty-nine percent of capital funding is dedicated to mass transit projects, while 1.1 percent is devoted to bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- Of the portion set aside for bridge and highway spending, **almost 50 percent is dedicated to maintenance and repair projects**, with nearly 47 percent dedicated to expansion projects. The maintenance percentage is greater and the expansion percentage level far lower than 2007-2010 STIP levels. Even this lower amount does not necessarily reflect the priorities of ConnDOT under Commissioner Marie: the ongoing Q-Bridge replacement and expansion and the I-95/91 interchange in New Haven, projects he inherited from the previous commissioners, account for almost 94 percent of all highway and bridge expansion dollars.
- According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), **more than 75 percent of Connecticut's roadway lane miles are in "less than good" condition, while over 33 percent of the state's bridges are deficient**. Connecticut's road and bridges compare poorly with roads and bridges nationally, where approximately 45 percent of roads are deemed "less than good" and 25 percent of bridges are deficient. But the recent shift in funding priorities toward more maintenance and repair spending should help the state make progress on improving road and bridge conditions.
- Connecticut is making significant steps towards spending its transportation capital dollars in a more sustainable manner. **Projected capital funding for transit projects is up significantly, and funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects has also increased**. In addition, the state is taking greater advantage of its flexible funding allocations to support bicycle and pedestrian projects. Federal funding, per capita, for bicycle and pedestrian projects has increased by 73 cents from 2007-2010 STIP levels.

Summary of Recommendations

- **Continue with Fix-it-first:** ConnDOT should reduce the size of future components of the massive Q-Bridge reconstruction project and divert excess funds to road and bridge maintenance. Going forward, the state should cap spending on highway expansion projects at 5 percent of overall transportation capital spending.
- **Develop more effective tools to manage congestion:** The state should consider sustainable congestion relief measures, including more coordinated and efficient land use planning and roadway pricing along the most heavily-traveled routes.
- **Continue efforts to create a robust bicycle and pedestrian program:** ConnDOT and the Connecticut General Assembly should pre-designate 10 percent of two flexible federal programs (Highway Safety Improvement Program and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality programs), to bicycle and pedestrian projects and new initiatives like Safe Routes for Seniors and Safe Routes to Transit. This would provide an additional \$4.3 million (in FY09) for bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- **Ensure greater transparency at ConnDOT:** ConnDOT should combine all federal and state expenditure plans into a single, easy-to-read document and improve its website. This will enable the public to more accurately assess the state's transportation priorities.

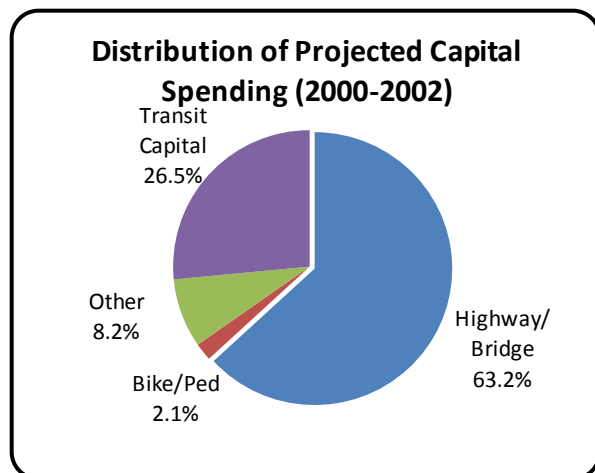
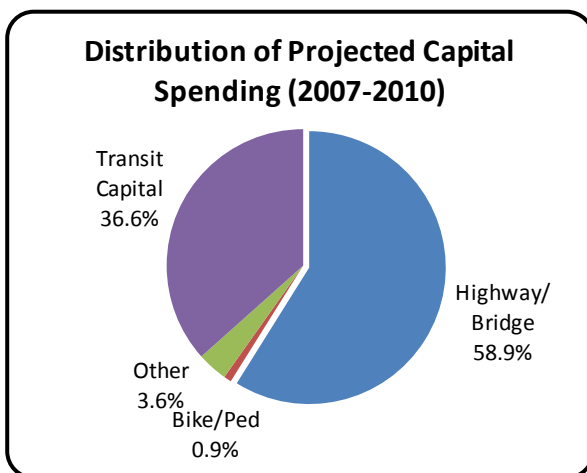
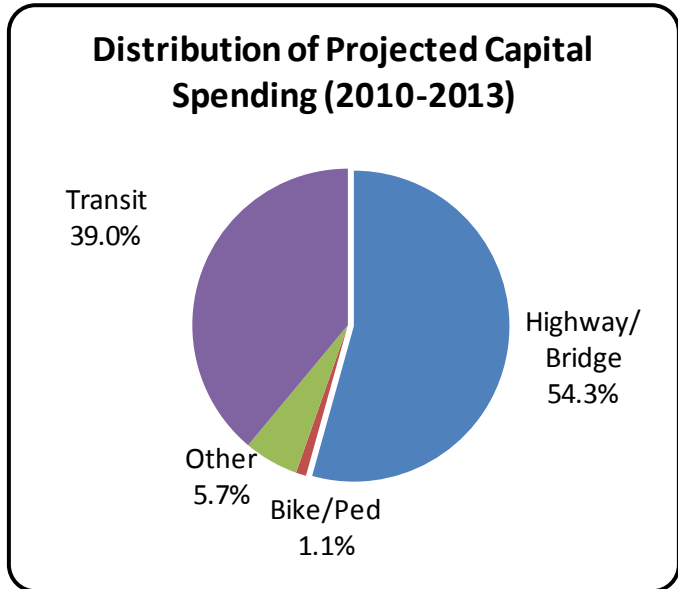
Transportation Capital Spending by Mode

According to our analysis of the 2010-2013 STIP, Connecticut allocates the majority of federal, state and local transportation funds to highways and bridges.

A rough breakdown of the \$5.25 billion capital program authorized for fiscal years 2010-2013 finds that just under 55 percent of the total amount is allocated to highway and bridge projects. A significant portion of the anticipated roadway spending is in fact allocated to a few, extremely expensive, highway expansion projects (see next section).

Thirty-nine percent is dedicated to mass transit projects, with large sums for new rail stations, new bus purchases, maintenance facilities, bridge rehabilitations and track work on Metro-North Railroad's New Haven Main Line and branches. The recently awarded federal high speed rail grant for the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield rail line is also included.

Bicycle and pedestrian project funding is still a small percentage of Connecticut's transportation spending accounting for only 1.1 percent of total.



Other types of projects, including transportation demand management, signalization, streetscaping and environmental mitigation, receive just under 6 percent of total funding.

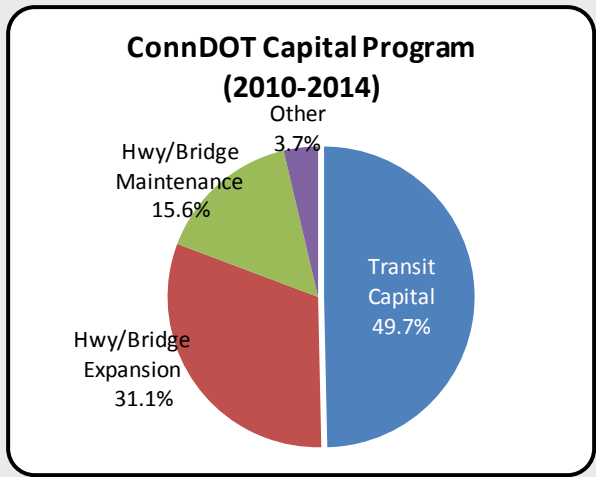
The share of funding dedicated to highway and bridge construction and repair has fallen from 2007-2010 STIP levels, to 54.3 percent from 58.9 percent in the previous STIP. Meanwhile, the transit share of funding has increased significantly from 36.6 percent in 2007-2010 to 39 percent in the 2010-2013 STIP. While spending on bicycle and pedestrian projects ticked up somewhat from 2007-2010 STIP levels it continues to lag behind the 2000-2002 STIP levels of 2.1 percent of overall funding.

Other Clues to the ConnDOT's Priorities

We focus our analysis on the STIP because it is the federally approved transportation document for Connecticut. However, there are other project lists of planned projects that are also indicators of ConnDOT's transportation priorities. There is considerable overlap among these documents and the STIP, but in some ways, these other lists may better reflect the state and Commissioner Marie's priorities for future transportation investment, as they do not include previous allocations by earlier commissioners, and are not as heavily influenced by the federal transportation funding process.

The much larger Transportation Infrastructure Capital Plan for 2010 to 2014 reflects the state's priorities given ongoing funding commitments and anticipated federal and state revenue. It shows a very strong commitment to transit, with nearly half of funding going toward transit capital projects. Highway and bridge expansion projects make up nearly one-third of the program, with maintenance consuming nearly 16 percent. Other projects such as bicycle and pedestrian projects account for the remaining 3.7 percent.

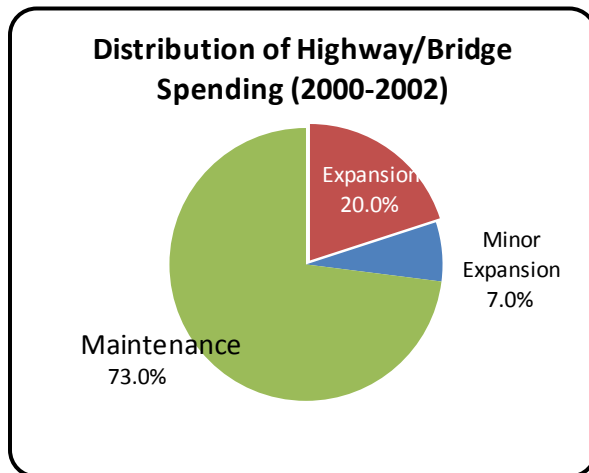
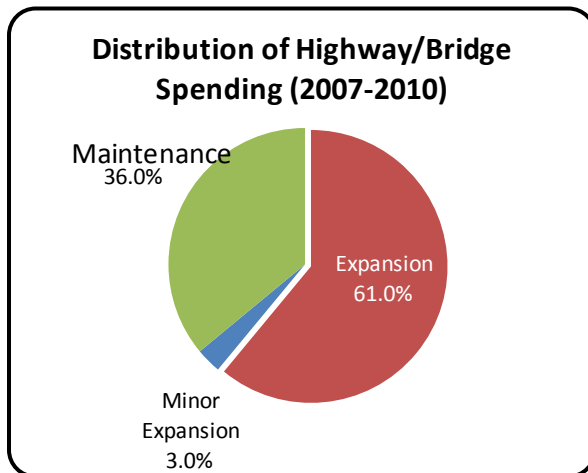
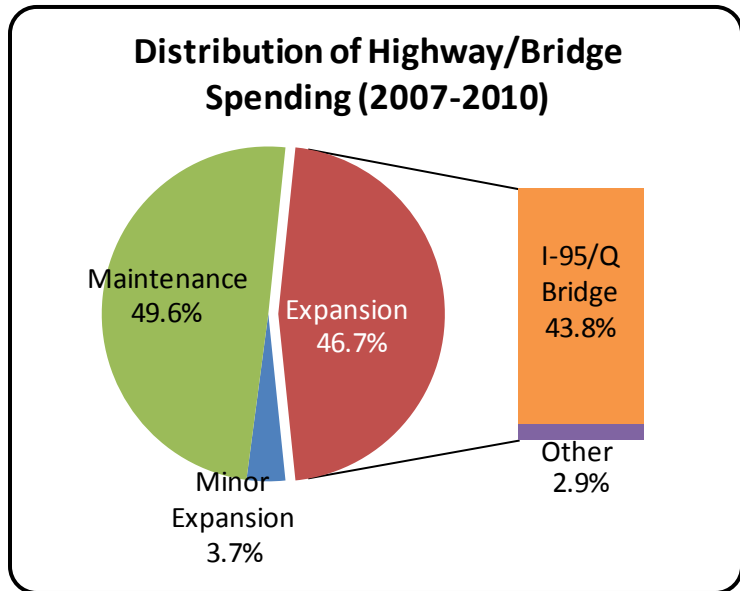
When looking at projects funded solely by the state, the transit commitment is even more striking. Of those 28 projects, 24, accounting for 97 percent of the funding are dedicated to transit capital projects such as a new West Haven Rail Station.



Fix It First

Our analysis of the 2010-2013 STIP shows that Connecticut has dramatically shifted its spending on highway and bridges, putting much greater emphasis on repair and maintenance projects than in the previous spending plan. Nearly half of highway and bridge spending is designated for repair and maintenance projects, up from just 36 percent in the 2007-2010 STIP.

However, even with ConnDOT's recent decisions to scuttle expensive expansion projects like Route 11 and I-84, the massive Q-Bridge expansion from six to ten lanes, and the I-95/91 flyover interchange projects continue to consume significant amounts of funding. Those two projects alone account for nearly 44 percent of the state's highway and bridge spending (and almost 94 percent of expansion dollars), making it difficult to return to the historical maintenance spending levels of 73 percent in 2000-2002.



New Emphasis on Road and Bridge Conditions

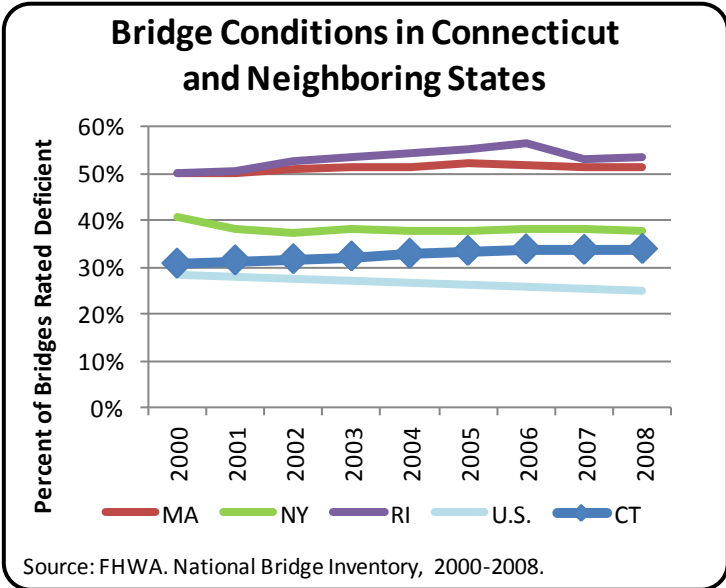
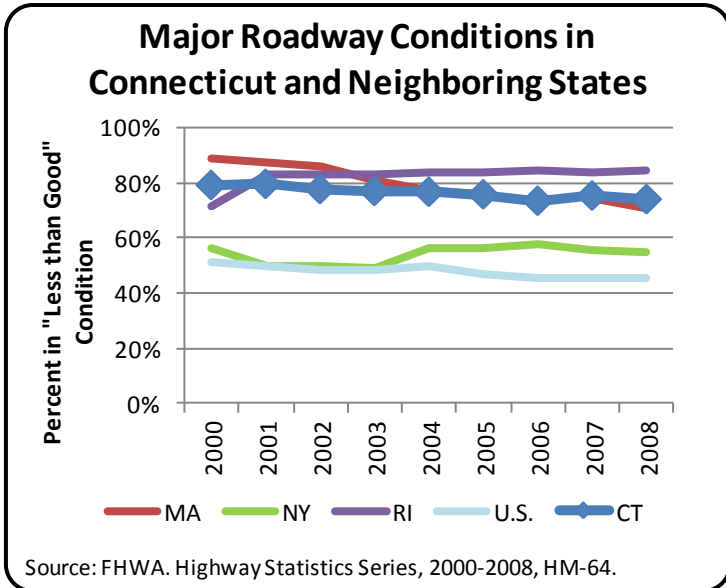
Huge annual expenditures on the inherited Q-Bridge and I-95/91 flyover interchange expansion projects come at the expense of the vast majority of Connecticut’s road and bridges that are in need of maintenance and repair. While neither bridge nor pavement conditions have deteriorated dramatically in this decade, neither have they improved significantly. That said, ConnDOT’s new commitment to fix-it-first stands to

improve road and bridge conditions in coming years.

Connecticut continues to rank fifth worst in the U.S. in terms of the percentage of major roadway lane miles in “less than good” condition (scoring 95 or greater on the International Roughness Index). In fact, the pavement on nearly three-quarters of the state’s highway lane miles was in “less than good” condition in 2008 according to FHWA data.

The state’s road conditions have improved somewhat since 2000, with the percentage rated in less than good condition dropping by 6.6 percent. Still, the nationwide share of less than good roads has fallen by nearly double that rate, and Connecticut’s neighbor to the north, Massachusetts, has seen a remarkable 20 percent drop in the percentage of roads miles rated in less than good condition.

Connecticut bridge conditions steadily worsened from 2000-2006, with a tenth of a percentage point improve-



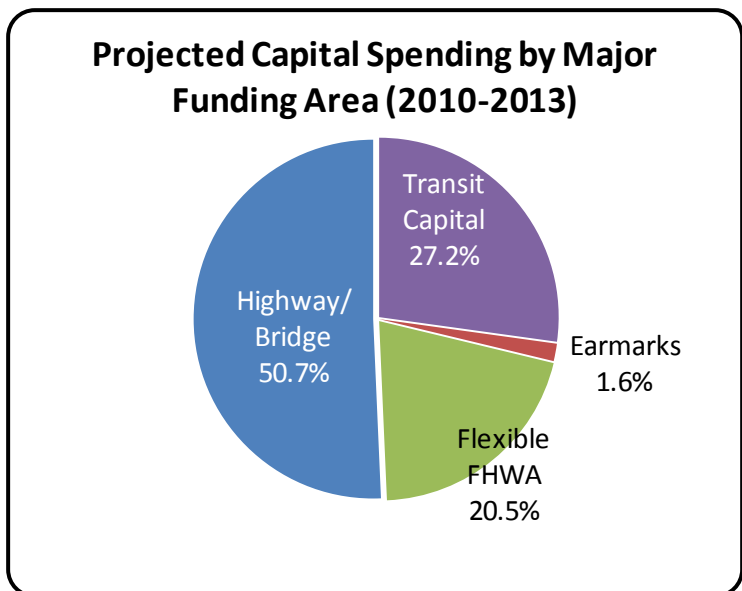
ment in 2007. In 2008 Connecticut gave back that gain and added a tenth of percentage point to the percentage of state's bridges rated deficient. The percentage of bridges rated as deficient now rests at nearly 34 percent. The vast majority of those bridges are faulted for being functionally obsolete, indicating they don't conform to modern bridge design standards.

ConnDOT's recent shift in infrastructure priorities, with a greater emphasis on bridge and highway repair and maintenance, will take years to make a dent in the state's enormous backlog of road and bridge repair needs. Still, we would expect to see slow, but steady progress on road and bridge conditions in future years.

Flexible Funding

We also analyzed capital spending according to which federal-aid account monies were authorized from. Major projects in Connecticut generally have a significant share of federal funding. In federal transportation authorizations (most recently, the "SAFETEA-LU" act of 2005, although as of this writing Congress has extended this act and is set to debate a new authorization in 2010 or 2011), Congress authorizes specific spending levels for each of dozens of funding categories. The largest of these are the "Interstate Maintenance," "National Highway System," "Bridge," "Surface Transportation" and "Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement" programs. Transit capital and small amounts of special transit operating funds are also specified in the law.

Roughly fifty percent of total proposed capital spending in the STIP is from relatively inflexible federal highway and bridge funding catego-



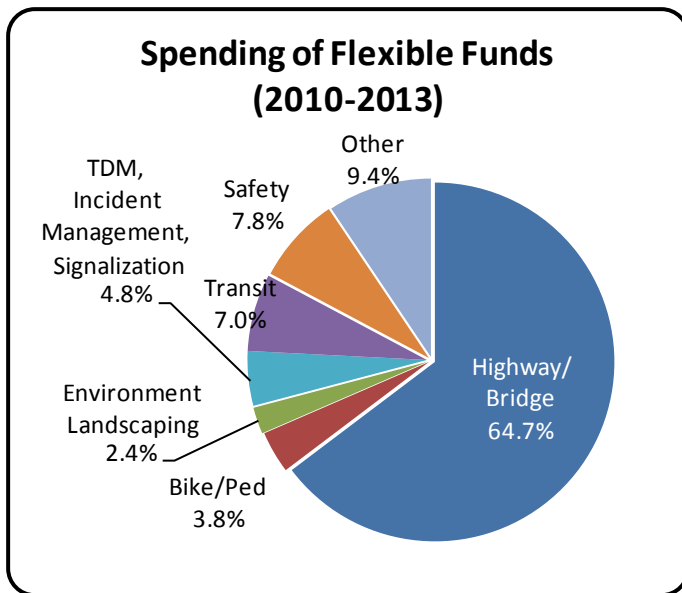
ries such as the National Highway System (NHS) and Interstate Maintenance programs. Those programs generally pay for traditional highway infrastructure needs, although NHS allows for a variety of mobility strategies within key highway corridors (for instance, Manhattan’s heavily used West Side bikeway, alongside NY Route 9A, was built with NHS funds. A local example where this could potentially occur is the proposed Merritt Parkway multi-use trail.)

Approximately 27 percent is authorized in programs specific to mass transit. Congressional earmarks and “demonstration” projects make up about 3 percent of total capital funding.

The remaining 20.5 percent of capital funding is comprised of highly flexible funding programs such as the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement and Surface Transportation programs. These flexible funds may be spent on highway expansion or maintenance, but they were established to give states the opportunity to shift funds to less traditional projects such as transportation demand management programs, safety projects, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), and particularly to bicycle and pedestrian and mass transit projects.

In the 2007-2010 STIP, highway and bridge projects received the lion’s share of flexible funding at 72 percent of the total, while transit received

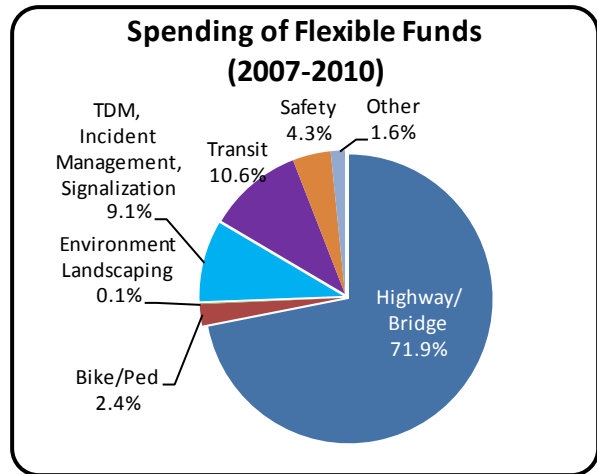
10.6 percent and cycling and pedestrian projects only received 2.4 percent of funding. Our analysis shows that the Department plans to use this funding in a more balanced manner in the 2010 to 2013 period covered by the STIP. Flexible funding dedicated to highway and bridge projects was reduced by about 10 percent to just under 65 percent of the total allocation while funding for transit dipped 7 percent. Monies received for cycling and pedestrian projects, however, rose sharply to 3.8 percent.



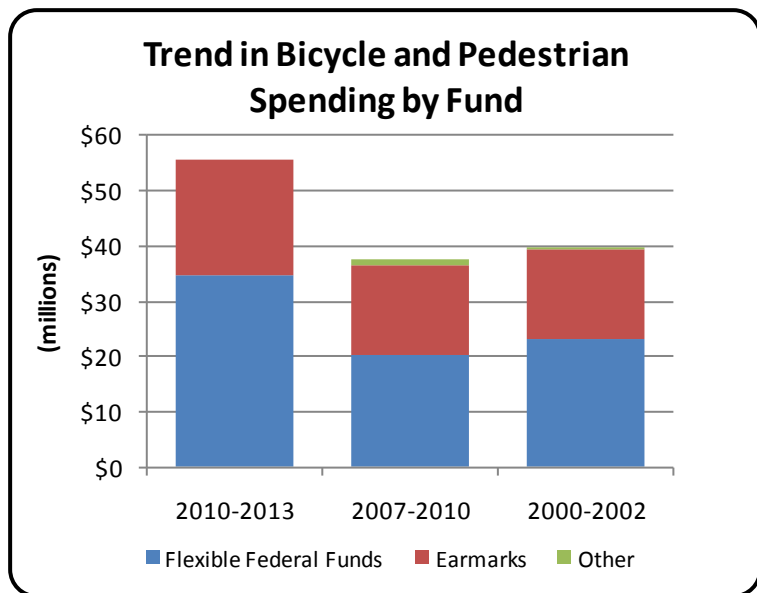
This is a promising trend, especially considering the state has incurred a signifi-

cant opportunity cost by largely failing to take advantage of flexible funding to promote a more balanced transportation system in the past. However, there is still much progress to be made.

Connecticut’s federal expenditures on bicycle and pedestrian initiatives is only \$1.67 per person. While an improvement over previous years, it still falls well behind neighboring Rhode Island (\$6.12 per person) and states of comparable population like Iowa (\$3.92 per person). Even when state and local funding support is included along with federal funding, Connecticut only spends \$4.04 a person, still below Rhode Island’s contribution from only federal dollars.



Another promising trend found in the current STIP is that unlike previous years, Connecticut has moved away from relying heavily upon one-time federal earmarks as a primary means of funding bicycle and pedestrian projects. In the 2007-2010 STIP, earmarks made up 43 percent of funding for bicycle and pedestrian initiatives. In the current STIP, almost 38 percent of bicycle and pedestrian funding comes from earmarks. While reliance upon earmarks as a funding source is still quite high the shift away from this, and greater reliance on programs found within flexible funding sources, is an improvement nonetheless.



Recommendations

Continue with Fix-it-first: The state continues to spend an overwhelming amount of its dollars on highway and bridge expansion, mainly because of the Q-Bridge replacement and expansion in New Haven (the Q-Bridge is slated to be expanded from six to ten lanes). Connecticut should reduce the size and scope of the project to save money, and utilize those savings to repair its existing road and bridge infrastructure. With Connecticut's roads ranked fifth worst in the country and a third of its bridges deficient, Commissioner Marie has stated that preservation of the existing infrastructure is ConnDOT's top priority. However, his ability to shift funds is limited if this single project continues to absorb so much of the capital program.

Looking forward, ConnDOT should cap highway and bridge dollars dedicated for expansion at 5 percent of Connecticut's transportation funds. The remaining funds should be dedicated to maintaining and repairing the state's existing road and bridge infrastructure and expanding transit, biking and walking projects. These actions would go a long way towards transforming Connecticut's roads and bridges from among the worst to among the best in the country.

Develop more effective tools to manage congestion: Consider sustainable congestion relief measures, including efficient land use planning. Establishment of a ConnDOT administered transit oriented development (TOD) program that targets transportation dollars to municipalities interested in promoting smart growth development at transit stops and in downtowns would be a good first step and potentially an easy one. For example, there is \$10 million in unauthorized funding for a TOD program currently in the State Bond Commission. If this funding were to be released, the TOD program would be housed in the Office of Policy and Management (OPM). Shifting management of these funds from OPM to ConnDOT could streamline the process and ensure ConnDOT was linking land use to transportation policy. Another example ConnDOT could emulate is Pennsylvania's Smart Transportation Program. (<http://www.smart-transportation.com/>)

ConnDOT should also create a process that evaluates whether conventional highway expansion serves any long-term public purpose and publicly declare when new highway capacity is expected to become fully utilized by new traffic. One area to do this could be along the Route 11 corridor, where design study funding remains even though Commissioner Marie has effectively killed the project. In lieu of this study, ConnDOT should conduct a corridor plan to identify sustainable solutions for congestion and development.

ConnDOT should also lead efforts to implement roadway pricing in Connecticut. High speed tolling measures, like conversion of High Occupancy Vehicle lanes to High Occupancy Tolling lanes, implementing congestion pricing on I-95 and CT-15 in Southwest Connecticut and/or tolling all limited access highways in Connecticut would reduce congestion on the State's roads and serve as a revenue generator for the state's almost bankrupt transportation coffers.

Continue efforts to create a robust bicycle and pedestrian program: Passage, and ConnDOT support, of *An Act Concerning Bicycle and Pedestrian Access*, aka "Complete Streets," was a momentous first step towards promoting cycling and walking as a viable and safe transportation option for Connecticut's residents. ConnDOT and the Connecticut General Assembly should continue this effort by pre-designating 10 percent of Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) programs, received as federal flex funding, to bicycle and pedestrian projects and initiatives like Safe Routes for Seniors and Safe Routes to Transit. These programs would increase the State's bicycle and pedestrian investments by approximately \$4 million a year, a modest amount when compared to the State's other transportation spending priorities.

Ensure greater transparency at ConnDOT: 1) Streamline reporting by producing one document of all state and federally funded projects that is easy to read and includes layperson's descriptions of projects. 2) Include an additional field in the STIP database in which projects are classified according to federal project improvement type (i.e. classify projects by type including expansion, maintenance and repair, reconstruction, repaving, rehabilitation, transit, bike and pedestrian project, etc.) This classification system will enable the public to more accurately assess the State's transportation priorities. 3) Improve ConnDOT's website to make it more accessible and user friendly to the general public.

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