

March 31, 2010. Statement to the Press in Support of Transit Investments in Connecticut.

My name is Amanda Kennedy and I ride a bus every day in Stamford. I'm also a planner with Regional Plan Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life in the tri-state NJ/NY/CT region through economic growth and environmental protection.

I'm here today to speak about why it is so important that Connecticut recognize the value of its bus system and continue to invest in providing transit options throughout the state.

The fuel cell bus behind me and the coming New Britain Hartford Busway are emblematic of the new era Connecticut is entering. We're working to turn the bus experience of the past into something new. The bus system of tomorrow needs to be clean, frequent, and attractive to ride. Our goals of responsible growth and carbon emissions reduction depend on our ability to support community development that reduces the amount we have to drive and which supports ridership on a more robust transit network.

Over the past 15 years, I've lived in 3 Connecticut cities: New Haven, Hartford, and Stamford, and in each city the local bus system has helped me get to jobs, to shopping, and to trains that link me the northeast's bigger cities. I've even spent one summer taking the express bus from Enfield to a job in downtown Hartford.

Riding the bus in Stamford means my transportation costs are lower, so I can afford to live closer to my job, and to feel a part of a community in which I live and work. It means that I feel tied to my neighborhood and to downtown, and it encourages me to do my shopping within my community instead of getting on the highway. It also reduces my impact on Stamford roads, prevents the inevitable fender benders or worse, and means I don't have to take up a parking space in downtown. My favorite part of having a good bus system to use is that I can go wherever I want without dealing with driving directions or having to find a parking space.

For many Connecticut residents, having bus access means the difference between having a job and not having a job. It means opportunities for teenagers to get to jobs and internships when parents are working full-time. It means being able to get to the train station every day when parking is unavailable or expensive.

I'm really optimistic about the excitement that Connecticut cities and town are feeling now for transit. There is talk of light rail in several places, new bus facilities are planned or funded, and in Stamford we are working on improving bus service between Norwalk and Stamford through prioritized signaling for buses and other improvements on our most heavily traveled route. Tonight I'll attend a hearing on a study to improve Stamford's Transportation Center, which will hopefully recommend upgrades to our bus waiting area that can connect more Stamford neighborhoods to train services without expanding the need for parking.

Here in Hartford, in 3 years commuters to Hartford from New Britain, Newington, Bristol, Farmington, and West Hartford will enjoy a level of bus service that is brand new to this state: service to downtown as often as every three minutes. The busway is the first of what I hope will be many transformative investments in our bus and rail system, but given the financial situation this state will be in over the coming years, it is even more important that we recognize the tremendous value our transit system has and to see transit as an investment in our economic future and in our quality of life. Thank you.