

- **We do not know what the future impact of the DOT reorganization will be on our members.**
- **When more information is released we will share it with the membership.**
- **In the event that the re-organization changes any working conditions of our DOT members, the Union will demand that the state negotiate with us over the impact of the changes.**

Written Testimony of
Ron McLellan, President
Connecticut Employees Union Independent (CEUI), SEIU Local 511

Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – Agency Budgets
February 11, 2008

The Department of Transportation
-The Proposed Division of DOT

The Department of Highways & the Department of Public Transportation, Aviation and Ports

The Governor's Commission on the Reorganization of the DOT began with a bold mission to create a new DOT that was more responsive and responsible to the people of our state. The Governor appointed a diverse group of members to the Commission and even solicited the input of the general public, but fell short when asking the very people who could make the biggest difference to participate – DOT employees. While workers were asked to take part in a written survey, it was done hastily and without the involvement of union representatives. As a result, many employees were fearful and apprehensive about providing information that accurately reflected their true thoughts and sentiments. In some cases, employees were handed survey forms on the day they were due. While collecting employee input was only one item on the Commission's agenda, the top-down manner in which this process unfolded did not yield the kind of broad based information needed to justify the kinds of changes the Governor has proposed. Far different changes are needed.

Had employees been afforded the opportunity to provide meaningful insight into their own roles and work experience, the Administration would be well aware that the last thing needed to reform DOT is more bureaucracy. What the Department lacks more than anything is solid leadership, adequate staffing and sufficient resources.

With three commissioners in less than two years, DOT has had no continuous or committed leadership to guide the agency, inspire employees or articulate a clear vision. We can't condemn 3,200 employees for poor management. The state hasn't had an opportunity of late to witness what DOT can be with an energetic, determined leader who demands the best of all employees, including managers. If we want to see a culture change at DOT, we need to see vibrant, professional leadership that empowers and motivates the agency workforce.

Since its peak in the mid-1990s, the Department has lost approximately 1,000 workers. Too often it has replaced that lost workforce with an over reliance on expensive private contractors. The recent debacle on I-84 reminds us all too well of the value of in-house employees and the ability to hold them accountable for their actions. Recent state budgets have provided funding for some new employees, but only in very small

numbers. If the state wants to improve DOT's performance, it needs to invest in the agency, giving it the resources it needs to hire hundreds more employees to implement its mission.

By splitting the DOT into two agencies, the Governor proposes adding another layer of bureaucracy. Dividing functions into multiple agencies will make it more difficult to create and implement a master transportation strategy. Public transportation is important and should arguably merit a stronger focus within the DOT, but the state cannot create bus lanes without building roads. The state cannot increase rail ridership without safe roads leading to train stations across the state. These are all pieces of the same puzzle. To break them up into separate agencies would create greater fragmentation within current transportation planning.

The Governor's proposal to split DOT into two separate agencies is a bad idea. It only divides one troubled agency into two troubled agencies

Highway Work Zone Safety

CEUI is heartened by the Governor's focus on public safety this session. One of Governor Rell's central budget themes is making Connecticut's roads safer and we couldn't agree on a more important priority for our state.

More than 1,200 of the 1,500 DOT employees represented by CEUI are highway maintainers. These men and women keep our state roads safe for the traveling public, performing many of their duties in highway work zones. They face risk of injury, and even death, when they encounter hazardous drivers. By in large, motorists ignore work zone signage and posted speed limits. Many drive aggressively and inattentively, undeterred by doubled fines. As a result, Connecticut motorists cause dozens of work zone accidents and injure several highway workers every year.

The biggest deterrent to work zone injuries and fatalities is traffic enforcement. Bids for all privately contracted Connecticut highway projects must include the cost of providing work zone enforcement by state police officers. As a result, 100% of private work zones have state police coverage. But public work projects conducted by DOT employees do not enjoy the same levels of protection.

Operation Big Orange funds overtime hours for state police troopers to provide traffic enforcement in DOT work zones, but with less than \$100,000 budgeted for the program in each of the last three years, ***only about 10% of Connecticut DOT work zones are monitored by state police personnel.*** The revenue generated from the tickets written in *Operation Big Orange* work zones is ten times that amount. The program is more than self-funding and as a result, Connecticut can afford to protect every single highway worker - public and private.

This session, CEUI has proposed comprehensive highway work zone safety legislation that would:

- Increase law enforcement coverage in DOT work zones by earmarking revenue generated by *Operation Big Orange* to be directed back to the program
- Create offenses for endangerment of a highway worker and aggravated endangerment of a highway worker for motorists who willfully disobey the law
- Establish a Highway Work Zone Safety Advisory Council to make ongoing recommendations for improving highway work zone safety

- Require DMV driver education materials to include information about highway work zone speed limits, signage, penalties and the impacts of hazardous driving

I urge you to act favorably on this legislation when it reaches the Appropriations Committee and during your budget negotiations. There is no reason why we should send DOT highway workers out on our roads without doing everything in our power to keep them safe.

Thank you.