

Connecticut DOT History for AASHTO Centennial Book

In 1895, Connecticut's Governor signed legislation creating a three-member State Highway Commission. At the time, there were some paved streets in every city, but in between, the roads were muddy in wet weather, dusty in dry weather and bumpy everywhere.

Getting out of the mud was serious business. The 1895 law specified that new paving should be macadam, telford or other stone "that will at all seasons of the year be firm, smooth and convenient for travel."

By 1901, the Connecticut highway commissioner and the new State Highway Department had proposed a system of "trunk lines" which embraced some 1,400 miles of highways. Formal designation of a trunk line system did not come until 1913 when 14 routes aggregating about 1,000 miles were approved by Connecticut's General Assembly. While heavy commercial use of the state highway system had not yet developed, the period following 1913 saw an insistent demand for more and more miles of hard-surfaced roads.

Making Connecticut's trunk line system passable during New England winters became a goal and a challenge when state forces and equipment were called upon to remove snow and ice beginning in 1917. Plowing equipment consisted of four- and six-horse teams hitched to non-motorized road graders.

A period of modernization followed, including the removal of railroad grade crossings, the elimination of sharp curves and steep grades, and the widening of high-crowned narrow roads in the interest of safe highway travel. Aesthetics were considered important too, with the creation during 1925 of the Division of Roadside Development which took charge of tree care, roadside stabilization work and erosion control.

A highlight of Connecticut's modernization program was the 1940 completion of the 38-mile Merritt Parkway built to alleviate traffic congestion on U.S. 1. The Merritt's design was a product of the City Beautiful Movement and included 60 bridges reflecting many different design styles, including neo-classic, neo-gothic, Richardsonian rustic and art deco. Parkway development in Connecticut was interrupted by World War II and essentially superseded by the planning, design and construction of the Interstate Highway System through the state.

Following World War II, the Connecticut Highway Department gave special emphasis to highway improvements intended to relieve congestion in compact urban areas. During 1949, the Wilbur Cross Parkway, including the West Rock Tunnel, was completed and opened to traffic.

A high standard of design for the multilane, controlled-access expressway was emphasized as Connecticut was recommending locations for its share of interstate highway mileage. During the mid-1950s, Connecticut continued the improvement of its highway system, including sections on the locations selected for the interstate system. The Connecticut Turnpike, later to be named the John D. Lodge Turnpike, was placed under construction during this same period for its 129 miles. Ultimately,

89 miles of the turnpike were incorporated into the interstate system as Interstate 95. Following its completion in 1958, the Turnpike became the subject of a research paper titled "The Ribbon of Hope."

As Connecticut proceeded to plan, design and construct its 342 miles of interstate highway, a severe shortage of trained engineering personnel developed. This was alleviated with the active recruitment of highway technicians and graduate civil engineers from technical institutes and colleges throughout New England.

Safety and beautification were not overlooked during the interstate era as Connecticut completed one of the largest programs in the nation for the installation of median barrier rails. It was also the first state highway department in the nation to receive approval of a landscape development project under the 1965 Highway Beautification Act.

The year 1969 marked a transition when the various state-operated transportation modes were made bureaus and placed under a new Connecticut Department of Transportation, 74 years after the creation of the original State Highway Department. In a broad sense, the Connecticut DOT was established to serve and to integrate the overall transportation needs of Connecticut, consistent with the elements of public safety, service and convenience.

In the 1980s, following the collapse of an I-95 bridge in Greenwich, Connecticut embarked on a 10-year, \$7 billion program to provide for the repair and rehabilitation of the state's highways, primary and secondary roads, transit system, state and local bridges, and aviation system. The Transportation Infrastructure Renewal Program provides for not only repair and rehabilitation, but also for their improvement and maintenance. The cost of this program was and is still supported by a Special Transportation Fund.

Since the 1983 bridge collapse, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on bridge maintenance and inspection through the establishment of a bridge safety and evaluation unit. This unit includes field engineers permanently assigned to each of the state's four DOT districts to provide direct supervision and technical expertise to field forces. The program has received special recognition from the Federal Highway Administration.

Another major change in the area of public transportation was the decision to subsidize both bus and rail mass transit services with state dollars. This resulted in the continuance of needed transit services during a period when economic conditions were causing the decline of these services provided by private operators. The New Haven commuter rail line between New Haven and New York City is the busiest commuter rail line in America.

Today, the Connecticut DOT is making major investments in public transportation. Among today's priorities are:

- Establishing higher speed intercity and commuter rail services between New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, Massachusetts. The new service will begin in 2016 and is

expected to make travel more convenient, take cars off congested highways in the corridor and reduce emissions

- Upgrading the New Haven Line with new train cars, new catenary, expanded and new rail yards, new and redundant power supply, Positive Train Control, rehabilitated bridges, and expanded parking. The three New Haven Line branches to New Canaan, Danbury and Waterbury, are also being upgraded and more service is being added.
- Adding more service on Shore Line East, the commuter rail line between New Haven and New London.
- Establishing a true bus rapid transit system in central Connecticut to be known as CTfastrak. This service will begin in early 2015 and will serve as a key intermodal corridor linking several bus systems in central, western and southern Connecticut, connecting to the rail line between New Haven and Springfield as well as the Waterbury Branch, and providing connections to Bradley International Airport. CTfastrak will speed commuters to their destinations and reduce traffic congestion.
- Implementing Complete Streets on all projects
- Planning for and building bicycle and pedestrian trails and including bike/ped options in new construction projects.
- Establishing transit-oriented development at major bus and rail facilities. A major TOD project is now getting underway at the Stamford Transportation Center.
- The department also sponsors and promotes annual campaigns for work zone safety, seat belt use, anti-drunk driving, texting and driving and motorcycle safety.

Connecticut's airports, including Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, were under the aegis of the DOT for many years but are now overseen by the Connecticut Airport Authority.

Over the past five years, the Connecticut DOT has invested billions in rail and bus operations, bus rapid transit, some 4,100 miles of roads, 5,300 bridges, two ferries across the Connecticut River and the State Pier in New London.

From an agency with a single focus of building, maintaining and regulating roads, the Connecticut DOT has evolved into a true multimodal agency with widely diverse transportation responsibilities. Now into its second century, the department's commitment to meeting Connecticut's transportation needs and to solving Connecticut's transportation problems will continue to drive its decision making and policies.