

# New Britain Herald

## I-84 concerns voiced

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**SOUTHINGTON** - CSEA President Michael O'Brien and his organization have had enough with the problems on Interstate 84 through Waterbury.

They've had enough of the traffic congestion, they've had enough of rising costs and, most importantly, they've had enough with the safety hazards.

On Tuesday, Democrats, Connecticut Department of Transportation workers and members of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 gathered at the DOT rest stop at Exit 28 on I-84 East to voice their demands for transportation project funding reform.

The conference was held in protest of Gov. M. Jodi Rell's decision to veto three reform proposals in the wake of an ongoing scandal involving the \$65 million widening a three-mile stretch along I-84.

"This whole problem is a direct result of the governor not being able to manage the state's business," said Mary Glassman, Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor.

"She is not focused, she is not listening and she is disconnected."

Glassman said the problem is more than just a traffic issue and financial burden, but has been a safety hazard that Rell has not addressed properly. She added that Rell had the opportunity to bring today's best and brightest into the DOT, as well as creating jobs for graduating college students, and failed to take advantage.

The I-84 project has suffered from constant delays, missteps, financial difficulties and accidents that made contractor L.G. DeFelice halt all operations on I-84 and other state projects in the spring and caused Rell to eventually fire the New Britain-based Macguire Group Inc., which held a \$6 million contract to serve as the project's inspector, in September.

State Sen. Donald DeFronzo, who serves on the senate's Revenue and Bonding and Transportation committees, said the problem lies in the state's current contract regulations and procedures, noting that he has helped propose three separate bills which have been vetoed by Rell.

Jay Doody, PE & PLS, a transportation principal engineer in the DOT, said the state's outsourcing and inspection practices are costing taxpayers at least \$7 million a year, adding that reform could lead to 16 percent savings.

The information is highlighted in Doody's revised report, "Highway Robbery: How Connecticut Wastes Millions on Contracted-Out Transportation Reports."

Doody's report added that such practices have also led to failure of accountability during inspections and are creating a safety hazard for many residents.

"The issue of privatization is woefully wrong," said Dave Zoni, Democratic candidate for State Senate in the 16th District.

"The General Assembly has made three bills outlining proper procedures for outsourcing, which would bring a level of accountability back into the system and Gov. Rell has let us down," Zoni said. "She has done a bad thing by not signing the bill and now we must consider a complete reform."

With Rell announcing on Tuesday that the Federal Transit Administration has authorized the DOT to begin a final design for the New Britain-Hartford Busway, Glassman, DeFronzo and Zoni all said failure to create a solution to the problem could prove detrimental to the project's completion.

The project, which is estimated at a cost of \$458 million, would create a 9.4 mile dedicated route with 11 stops between downtown New Britain and downtown Hartford and is expected to draw commuter traffic off of congested roads.

Approval still remains dependent on support and funding of the FTA following completion of the final design.

"The Busway is a large part of the state's multi-billion dollar transportation program and it's important that reform steps are put into place before we get too deep into a project like that," said DeFronzo.

"We are hoping to work with the administration in January and solve these issues before a contractor is selected."

DeFronzo said reform is especially important not only for the Busway construction, but the rest of the state's over \$4 billion transportation program.

He hopes that the administration would not allow the same mistakes to be made, regardless of whether a reform bill is signed in advance.