

The Hour

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PARTLY SUNNY AND
COLD. PAGE A2



TODAY'S DRAWING: KAYLA ANGRAND, GRADE 5,
ALL SAINTS CATHOLIC SCHOOL, MRS. WIENN

Gov to ramp up Rt. 7-Merritt overhaul

By **ROBERT KOCH**
HOUR STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — The long-planned overhaul of the Merritt Parkway/Main Avenue/Route 7 Connector interchange in Norwalk stands to get a \$200 million boost under "Connecticut's Bold Vision for a Transportation Future" as unveiled by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy in Hartford on Wednesday.

"It gets it's going. It gets it moving," Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff, D-25, of

Norwalk said of the proposed investment. "They're already in early design stages and process, so this actually bumps up the timeline to get this thing done."

On Wednesday, Malloy presented a 30-year transportation investment plan as part of his biennial budget presentation in Hartford. He focused on a number of transportation projects, including the Merritt Parkway/Main Avenue/Route 7 interchange.

"Currently, too many

drivers are forced to get off the highway in order to navigate between two roads and leading to unnecessary traffic and accidents," Malloy said of the current interchange.

Malloy counted the interchange overhaul as among projects he'd like to see begin within the next five years as part of a "ramping up" of his proposed \$100.3 billion investment into Connecticut's transporta-



Hour photo/Erik Trautmann

Gov. Dannel Malloy gives his budget address to the joint legislative session Wednesday at the state capitol in Hartford.

Malloy unveils \$40B budget

By **KEITH M. PHANEY**
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Gov to ramp up Rt. 7 overhaul

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tion infrastructure over the next 30 years.

The interchange overhaul project calls for building final connections to and from the Route 7 Connector and enhancing the Main Avenue/Merritt Parkway interchange.

The interchange overhaul has been on the Connecticut Department of Transportation's (ConnDOT) drawing board for years and was poised to proceed a decade ago until a lawsuit brought work to a halt.

In 2005, the Merritt Parkway Conservancy, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Norwalk Land Trust, Norwalk Preservation Trust and Norwalk River Watershed Association sued the Federal Highway Administration in effort to downsize the project.

In March 2006, U.S. District Court in New Haven found that the Federal Highway Administration had not met its legal "obligation to ensure that all possible planning was done to minimize harm prior to approving the in-

terchange project."

Since the lawsuit, the DOT has considered 15 designs. In 2009, when ConnDOT decided to postpone the project after evaluating the department's capital plan and funding levels, a design alternative known as 21C enjoyed "broad public support," according to state officials.

Malloy's 30-year transportation investment plan, as unveiled in Hartford on Wednesday, calls for investing \$29.5 billion into transportation infrastructure between the New York border and New Haven.

Projects include reconstructing Route 7 from Grist Mill Road in Norwalk to Route 33 in Wilton, widening Interstate 95 from the New York border to New Haven, creating new rapid transit bus service between Bridgeport and Stamford, building new rail maintenance facilities along Metro-North Railroad's New Haven Line, improving the New Canaan Line and electrifying the Danbury Branch.

State Rep. Gail Lavielle, R-143, expressed disap-

pointment that many initial dollars are targeted upstate.

"I'm a little troubled by the thought of spending a lot of money on projects that aren't being used yet and not fixing the ones we have first," said Lavielle. "There's a lot in the first five years going to New Haven-Hartford-Springfield, but I don't see anything about electrifying the Danbury Branch."

Lavielle was among several Fairfield County Republicans who recently called for upgrades to Metro-North Railroad's New Canaan and Danbury lines.

Duff focused on the local projects within the 30-year plan.

"(Malloy) talked about priorities, especially transportation and he mentioned a number of important Norwalk projects — the Merritt 7 train station, the interchange, the Walk Bridge and widening I-95 in our area where congestion is so prevalent," Duff said. "Having a vision for transportation over the next 20 or 30 years is extremely important."