

Jeff Jacobs: For UConn men, 'vibes' good, results bad

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The Norwalk Hour

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Cars pass under toll sensor gantries hanging over the Massachusetts Turnpike in 2016. Massachusetts generates \$434 million a year from tolls. A number that has encouraged Democratic leaders to push for tolls in Connecticut.



AP photo / Elise Amendola

OUR CAPITOL BUREAU

Democrats: Tolls key to economic survival

Could bring up to \$800M in state revenue, proponents claim

By Ken Dixon

After years of controversy and numerous rejections in the General Assembly, Democrats on Monday said high-speed tolling is the key to Con-

necticut's economic survival.

Republicans, however, are not so certain, standing pat on a three-year-old proposal that would support transportation projects without tolls.

"We as legislators have to do the right thing," said Rep. Antonio Guerrero, D-Rocky Hill, who as co-chairman of the legislative Transportation Committee has tried and failed in recent years to persuade

lawmakers of the need for toll revenue to help fix the state's transit infrastructure. "If we do this, this state will thrive."

Guerrera said as much as \$800 million a year in See Tolls on A5

WAVE HILL BAKERY



Alex von Kleydorff / Hearst Connecticut Media

Pizza is ready for the oven during the "Go Bananas with Monkey Bread" kids' workshop at Wave Hill Breads in Norwalk on Jan. 21. Below, Jacob Molaver puts his tray of monkey bread onto the rack.



YANKEE DOODLE BRIDGE

Plan diverts polluted runoff

DOT will pipe stormwater to retention basins

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — After pressure from local officials, the state Department of Transportation has come up with a plan to keep contaminants from running off the Yankee Doodle Bridge into the Norwalk River.

Representatives of the Norwalk Harbor Management Commission met with DOT engineers to discuss how to reduce contaminated runoff from the bridge, which carries Interstate 95 and roughly 150,000 vehicles over the river each day.

"The meeting with the DOT was very good," NHMC planning consultant Geoffrey Steadman said. "They proposed capturing the drainage from 85 percent of the bridge surface with under(deck) piping and construction of stormwater retention basins on both sides of the bridge, under the bridge, which would retain that runoff."

See Runoff on A5



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

The state Department of Transportation has a plan to keep contaminants from running off the Yankee Doodle Bridge into the Norwalk River.

CLAY STREET, GIBSON COURT

Traffic authority limits parking

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — No-parking signs will go up along Clay Street and Gibson Court next month to discourage train commuters and others from clogging on-street spaces.

The two dead-end streets are off Flax Hill Road, between the South Norwalk Train Station and Ben Franklin Center, and draw rail commuters as well as people attending basketball games at the center, according to Clay Street resident Barbara Atkinson.

Last week, Atkinson told the Norwalk Traffic Authority she does not have a See Parking on A5

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

Effort to dispel fear, misinformation

DACA, TPS Community Conversation at City Hall

By R.A. Schuetz

NORWALK — Every year, the Rev. Pierre D'Haiti, and other Haitian pastors throughout the state organize a harvest festival for their congregations. At a recent DACA and TPS Community Conversation, he shared how attendance had begun to fall.

"They're scared," murmured a man in the audience Friday.

"It's not because pastors aren't doing their part in inviting people out to that event. It's because people are thinking, what if I get out, I get a knock on the door of my car, and someone tells me: 'Look. You're facing deportation. This is what we're dealing with,'" D'Haiti said.

"Let's speak up — because this affects all of us. This affects the American fabric." At the evening panel in the Community

Room of Norwalk City Hall, immigration attorneys, representatives from the office of Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., and organizations including the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants and the Department of Children and Families gathered to share resources for undocumented immigrants. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Temporary Protected Status, which had allowed immigrants to live and work in the U.S., will soon expire for a large See Immigrants on A5

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IMMIGRANTS

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number of recipients.

Recurrent throughout the Friday gathering were themes of fear and misinformation.

Kislene Bosse Belizaire, a caseworker who helped organize the event, shared the story of a distraught mother who had called her the previous Sunday. The mother had a 2-year-old son who had the flu for days, Belizaire said.

“She was scared that if she took him to the doctor that someone would call immigration on her, and she would be deported,” Belizaire said.

Belizaire said when she told the mother she would not be deported for getting her son medical care, she could hear the relief in the mother’s voice.

“That broke my heart.”

Belizaire and Francise Jean-Louis began planning the event last year. A group of caseworkers and advocates began talking, and Jean-Louis said, “We noticed there are a lot of resources and a lack of connection.”

Jean-Louis, who grew up in Norwalk, remembered the now-closed Haitian Community Center in Stamford as a place where immigrants could go with all of their questions and be connected to other resources. The group decided to organize a panel that could do the same — although Jean-Louis and Belizaire emphasized the resources provided were for all immigrants and not only the Haitian community.

A year later, with DACA in flux and TPS programs for immigrants from Haiti, Sudan, El Salvador and Nicaragua coming to a close, the conversation seems especially timely.

Experts urged undocumented immigrants to learn their rights and prepare for the worst.

The Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI, formerly known as IICONN)



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Health care provider Rev. Pierre D’Haiti speaks during a Community Conversation for DACA and TPS recipients on in the Community Room at City Hall in Norwalk on Friday.

offers workshops on legal rights, and its director of legal services, Alicia Kinsman, shared quick pointers.

There is a difference between a judicial warrant, which is relatively rare and allows someone to enter your home, and an administrative warrant, which does not. She recommended those in danger of losing their Temporary Protected Status or Deferred Action consult a lawyer, but first ask an organization such as her own to make sure the person is a qualified, accredited immigration attorney.

“Know what your options are

— or know that you don’t have any options, so you don’t spend money on bad advice,” she said.

William Rivera from the Department of Children and Families underscored the importance of undocumented immigrants making plans in case they are deported — especially if they have children.

If a parent is deported and his or her children don’t have arrangements for another guardian, the Department for Children and Families is forced to step in.

“What it generally means is foster care,” Rivera said. The department and immigration nonprofits

can direct families to the correct paperwork for preventing such a situation.

Finally, immigration attorney Philip E. Berns urged those in the audience not to give into fear. While Donald Trump campaigned on removing immigrants, the total number of deportations in the 2017 fiscal year decreased slightly from that of the year before, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement statistics. What had increased was the tension for those on either side of the issue.

“If you’re feeling helpless, it will make your situation feel ten

times worse,” Berns said.

But he believed no matter the situation, people could still take action.

“There are 11 million undocumented citizens living in the United States,” said. “None of them can vote. But every one of them has two or three or four friends, relatives, acquaintances, coworkers who are citizens and not voting. And if the undocumented immigrants were to influence their friends to vote ... you can change the government.”

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TOLLS

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new revenue is being left on the table because the state, which has not had tolls in more than 30 years, continues to balk.

He stressed recent polls indicate the public is ready for the type of high-speed tollings that provides hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue throughout the region.

“Our roads and our bridges are in bad shape,” he said. “Our funds are drying up. We cannot sit here, as a legislative body, and wait for something bad to happen before we have the guts, and I will say that again, before we have the guts to make a vote that will put this state on good ground. Why would any company want to move to the state of Connecticut, if they can’t bring their goods and services throughout the state in a timely fashion?”

He estimated about 40 percent of state traffic comes from outside the borders. Legislative proponents say state residents would get a discount or rebate on any tolls.

“It’s common sense,” said House Majority Leader Matt Ritter, D-Hartford. “It’s high time.”

While state voters will have the opportunity in November to vote on an amendment to the Constitution to create a so-called lock box for transit-improvement funding, the issue remains a tough vote for lawmakers, who have continued to defeat the proposal in recent years even as the Special Transportation Fund is on track to become insolvent.

No Republican lawmakers joined Guerrero and other Democrats, including Rep. Dorinda Borer, of West Haven, and Chris Perone, of Norwalk, during a morning news conference in the Legislative Office Building.

“We’re paying those tolls and we’re helping to fix those bridges and those roads in the other states, while here in Connecticut we’re saying c’m on through, we’ll pay the tab, you don’t have to pay a dime.”

State Rep. Dorinda Borer, of West Haven

The state Department of Transportation is working on a study of possible locations for the electronic gantries over state highways. A previous draft plan included several tolls along the Merritt Parkway and more on Interstate 95 between Greenwich and New Haven, as well as I-91, I-84 and limited-access highways including Route 8.

“Our roads and bridges are crumbling, along with our state’s economy if we fail to act,” Perone said. “We’ve gotten to a point now where it is a critical stage. We are in a situation where failure to act now means we are going to pay

a price that nobody in the state wants to pay in terms of lack of job growth, in terms of taxes that are too high.”

Borer said while Maine tolls generate \$133 million a year from tolls, Massachusetts reaps \$434 million and New York collects \$2.7 billion.

Connecticut’s Special Transportation Fund, where petroleum and gasoline taxes are funneled, is on track to run at a \$75 million deficit by 2020.

“We’re paying those tolls and we’re helping to fix those bridges and those roads in the other states, while here in Connecticut we’re saying c’m on

through, we’ll pay the tab, you don’t have to pay a dime,” Borer said. “It’s time to tell all those cars and those trucks that come through and use our roads and don’t pay a dime, and if they want to roll, you gotta pay the toll.”

Republicans were lukewarm. House Minority Leader Themis Klarides, R-Derby, said in 2015, GOP lawmakers offered a plan to stabilize transportation funding without bringing back tolls.

“This issue will certainly be debated in the coming legislative session, and public opinion will likely move around once the location and number of tolls are defined and we learn how much revenue they will generate,” Klarides said in a late afternoon statement.

Senate Republican Leader Len Fasano, R-North Haven, said without knowing the DOT plans, it would be “irresponsible” to approve tolls without

knowing its full effect on the state.

“They’ve been taxed enough,” Fasano said in a statement. “I understand some people are desperate to look at tolls as a cure-all for a state that has been damaged by years of failure under Gov. Malloy and a Democrat controlled Legislature. But it’s reckless to rush to approve tolls before even understanding the economics of how they would work.”

Fasano said the state receives federal funding for not having tolls. He is worried Connecticut tolls would “far exceed” prices in other areas of the country.

“Instead of blindly pushing for a drastic new money grab, I wish lawmakers were more focused on getting answers and considering solutions that would be less painful for Connecticut residents,” Fasano said.

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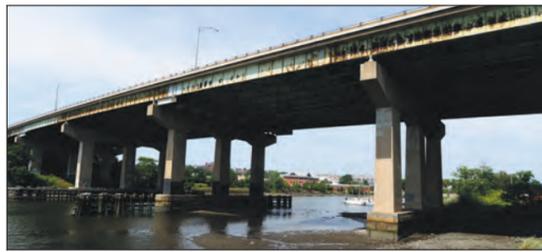
RUNOFF

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Steadman said the plans call for installation of rip-rap and detention ponds, with the larger pond being created on the west side of the Yankee Doodle Bridge.

“The 15 percent of the bridge surface that they are not able to capture from is right in the middle over the channel,” Steadman said. “In addition to capturing the runoff of 85 percent from the bridge surface, they’re capturing 85 percent of the stormwater volume ... the first 1 inch of rainfall in a 24-hour period, which causes the most issues with runoff and pollutants.”

The 911-foot bridge, which was built in 1958, has 92 bridge deck drains, many of which dump water directly into the harbor. The NHMC has long argued the unfiltered runoff is bad for the environment, as well as for the city’s pocketbook. Contaminated sediment beneath the bridge added \$200,000 to the city’s cost of the most



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

The state Department of Transportation has come up with a plan to keep contaminants from running off the Yankee Doodle Bridge into the Norwalk River.

recent federal dredging of the harbor.

DOT spokesman Judd Everhart confirmed the upcoming overhaul of the bridge includes measures to protect the Norwalk River from contaminated runoff.

“By our proposed plans to rehabilitate and improve the treatment of the bridge drainage, we are now able to direct 85 percent of the storm runoff through scuppers and into sedimentation ponds adjacent to the bridge (on both ends),” Everhart wrote in an email. “Any solids or other contaminants will sink to the bottom of the ponds and

the remaining water will either overflow or evaporate. The sediment in the ponds will be cleaned out periodically.”

The estimated \$30 million project is not among the projects put on hold by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and DOT Commissioner James Redeker for lack of funding, and work is expected to start this year.

The bridge rehabilitation will repair the bridge’s structural steel, underside deck concrete and deck expansion joints, paint its structural steel, upgrade median barriers and replace the channel fenders.

PARKING

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driveway or garage and must rely upon on-street spaces to park her vehicle.

“We have a lot of people who like to go to the train station in the morning and they park on our street,” Atkinson said. “I do not have too much of a problem with that because it just makes the street look full and like there’s people home and they’re just there during the day, generally. But we also have basketball at the old Ben Franklin and that’s a real source of irritation if you live on Clay Street.”

Atkinson said driving to the grocery store often means coming back and having no place to park. She asked the traffic authority to direct people attending events at Ben Franklin Center to park on site — “there is a parking lot for that school.” She asked if Clay Street residents could be issued parking stickers and on-street spaces be marked for “resident park-

ing only.”

Mayor Harry Rilling, chairman of the traffic authority, said there is only so much the city can do, given Clay Street and Gibson Court are public streets.

“If it’s a legal parking place, anybody in the world is allowed to park there, whether they live there on Clay Street, Gibson Court or not,” Rilling said. “Quite frankly, even if they go to Ben Franklin School to play basketball, they’re still allowed to park there.”

At the end of the discussion, the traffic authority approved the installation of signs reading “No Parking Monday-Friday, 9 A.M. to 10 A.M.” on both sides of Clay Street and Gibson Court.

“That is to allow the residents to park, but to control commuter parking, because somebody going into New York on the train is not going to be able to park there between 9 and 10 (a.m.), and they’ll probably be leaving on the train at about 8 o’clock or so, so that prevents them from parking there,” Rilling said.

Atkinson said the measure would not deter commuters from parking on the streets, but would be a detriment to residents, such as herself, who don’t have off-street parking.

“It shouldn’t be a hardship to a homeowner,” Atkinson said. “What if a tenant is sleeping and they’ve got to get up and go away for an hour because they can’t park there?”

Adequate on-space parking isn’t residents’ only concern. Dorothy Hall, who lives on Gibson Court, said firetrucks would have a problem getting onto the street.

“If there was a fire, the way the cars are parked, you’re so jammed on each side that a firetruck could not get through there,” Hall said. “It’s very frightening. That bothers me a lot.”

That’s another matter for public works officials to explore, according to Rilling.

“Maybe you need to limit parking on one side of the street if there’s truly an emergency vehicle restriction,” Rilling said.