



Wednesday,  
April 14,  
2010 3:13  
AM EDT

'Anti-planner' has vision for state's traffic problems

**BY KEVIN LITTEN REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN**

HARTFORD — Randal O'Toole has visionary ideas about how to fix the state and the nation's traffic problem.

O'Toole, an author and a fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, is a self-described "anti-planner." He doesn't like zoning laws or the concept of smart growth, and he definitely doesn't like the idea of expanding the nation's rail system.

On Tuesday, he took that message to Trinity College, where he warned about 100 students that government officials planning for rail expansion "want to change not just how we get around, but how we live."

In some ways, O'Toole is correct: In Connecticut, where Gov. M. Jodi Rell and legislators have signed off on plans to reinvest in a state rail system expansion, officials make no excuses about trying to get people off the road and onto trains. Backups on the state's major roadways — Interstates 84 and 91, the Merritt Parkway and especially I-95 — have become commonplace, making commutes a grinding ordeal for drivers.

But while O'Toole sees rail expansion as a struggle to undercut automobiles, state Department of Transportation spokesman Kevin Nursick said the state views trains as a complement — not a conflict.

"It's never fair when one mode of transportation is pitted against the other," Nursick said. "From a planning standpoint, the use of mass transportation is really a must when you talk about reducing the level of congestion on our roadways."

For O'Toole, comments like Nursick's miss the point. He contends that while officials say they're providing more options to commuters by expanding access to rail, they're ignoring cheaper road-based alternatives even as the state looks to spend more than \$800 million to expand the Metro-North commuter train lines.

"When I look at the highways here in Hartford I have to roll my eyes," O'Toole said. "You have (high-occupancy vehicle lanes on I-84) that are so poorly designed, it's a wonder anyone uses them."

O'Toole said the state should follow the lead of counties in Northern Virginia, where HOV lanes can be used by single-occupancy vehicles if they pay a toll. O'Toole also advocates for public-private partnerships, in which the private sector builds public roads and charges users tolls over a 40-year period before turning the road over to the state.

To read the complete story see Thursday's Republican-American or our electronic edition at <http://republicanamerican.ct.newsmemory.com>.

What do you think? Share your comments using the form below.