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By James P. Redeker

Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Transportation

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) is in the process of transforming the Stamford Transportation Center into a place that will better serve commuters, the City of Stamford, the people of Southwestern Connecticut and the taxpayers of Connecticut. Faced with the need to replace a deteriorating and a too-expensive-to-maintain 1987 garage, we embarked on a bold strategy that will replace and add commuter parking spaces at the same time that we provide opportunities for Transit-Oriented Development near the Stamford Transportation Center. We launched this endeavor in cooperation with the City and after consultation with many stakeholders, including the Connecticut Rail Commuter Council, an organization which purports to advocate for rail commuters.

Here is what the DOT has proposed: The State owns the Stamford train station and significant property adjacent to the train station, including Station Place, the parking decks and other land and air rights that could be used for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and the provision of additional parking. Rather than prescribe an outcome, i.e., building 1,000 spaces at the existing 1987 garage site, we requested proposals from the private sector who have demonstrated records as developers, builders, and operators of parking and facilities. We set forth clear goals: 1) replace the old garage that has 727 parking spaces and provide *at least* 1,000 spaces; 2) implement a best-in-class parking management system; 3) operate and maintain the existing 2004 garage, new garage or garages and Station Place to the highest standards of customer service; 4) implement improvements focused on safety, customer convenience and amenities, improved pedestrian and vehicle flow, and general upgrades to the station environment; 5) implement a TOD consistent with the vision of the city, that capitalizes on the train station as an economic driver; 6) provide the best long-term economic value to the State of Connecticut.

My entire career as a public servant has been dedicated to the highest standards of customer service; *particularly* committed to ensuring that our transit riders are afforded the best possible service from home to their ultimate destination, every single day. I spend countless hours attending Rail Commuter Council meetings along with staff and with key leadership from Metro-North listening to the council members and addressing their concerns. The Council's recommendation for the new garage is among the documents being made available to proposers. Further, I personally attended the last council meeting to present our approach in detail, answer questions and explain the requirement that a successful proposer must engage in an extensive public participation and communication plan as they undertake the project.

Despite all of this attention to detail and our desire for the best outcome for our customers, the Connecticut Rail Commuter Council is criticizing the DOT long before any final proposals have been received or final decisions have been made.

The Council's Chairman, Jim Cameron, claims the DOT values money over customers, citing our intent to weight financial proposals 66% and weight the technical proposals, which include customer convenience and considerations, 34%. He has intentionally distorted the facts. The truth is that our customers are paramount in our evaluation process. Any proposal must pass a rigorous set of criteria that focus entirely on the customer, quality of the facility, and the daily customer service experience provided by the operator. If a proposal does not meet these standards, the financial component of the proposal will not be considered, and the proposal will be eliminated from further consideration. So, assuming we receive several excellent proposals that meet all the customer standards, I stand resolute that selecting the proposal that then provides the best financial return on investment is absolutely the right answer. Incentivizing proposers by setting a very high bar for the financial portion of the evaluation (yes, it is 66%), is not only appropriate, but fundamentally in the best interest of all taxpayers and users of the Stamford Transportation Center. It is responsible and responsive government delivering the highest quality product, maximizing service to the customers, and minimizing the burden on taxpayers.

The Council has also made it clear that the only solution that is tenable is to replace parking exactly at the existing 1987 garage site, and that this solution is the highest and best outcome for the Stamford Transportation Center. "This existing garage site is too valuable a resource to not be used for the highest purpose, i.e. car parking that provides ease of access to the station," quoting from a letter to me from Mr. Cameron. I respectfully differ, as I have an open mind to consider what the developers will propose that meets ALL our objectives.

I am confident that the ultimate Stamford transit-oriented development will enhance the experience of ALL customers, not just those who park their cars, and add new walkable, bike-able, livable development in this area that will have a transformative impact on the City of Stamford and be a model for the nation.