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Hartford is at a crossroads, figuratively & literally, due to major transit systems crossing through it

August 18, 2011 - Connecticut

Hartford was settled in 1623 as a Dutch post called House of Hope. The new settlement was located at the end of what was the navigable portion of the Connecticut River, and for many years provided the means of transportation for its evolving agricultural economy. Over the following decades Hartford developed into an important trading center primarily due to its proximity to the river, which provided it access to the world. On a daily basis ships would sail from Hartford ports and travel to places like England, the West Indies and the Far East exporting local products and trading in commodities like molasses, spices, coffee and rum. As a result, many new businesses sprang up and clustered in and around this emerging community, and it became a thriving economic center for merchants.

Over the following three centuries Hartford grew and prospered becoming an important center for trade and commerce due to its proximity and use of the Connecticut River and other means of mass transportation, like railroads. The foresight, imagination and innovation of its business and political leaders, as exemplified by the pioneering manufacturer, Samuel Colt, brought the city to the heights of economic power. Hartford grew to become a major industrial manufacturing center with scores of products being exported throughout the world, and ultimately an insurance and financial powerhouse.

Today, Hartford has lost a lot of the glory from its days as an international trading center for a region that was poised on the edge of the industrial revolution. The city's manufacturing base has shrunk significantly due to competitive changes caused by economic globalization, and the insurance industry has diversified throughout the world due to highly competitive conditions. However, this is not to say that Hartford cannot regain its former glory and become a competitive economic center and regional powerhouse in the future. The Hartford region comprises a high caliber and highly educated labor force servicing aerospace, engineering, IT, the medical and health care industry, banking and financial services, insurance and manufacturing.

Also, Hartford's location, about 100 miles, or a two hour drive, from two of the country's largest cities, New York City and Boston, is one of its biggest assets. The city is also located on two interstate highway systems (I-91 and I-84), including feeder connectors which pass through it, has freight and passenger rail service, a good transit-bus system, and an international airport less than 20 miles away. The city also has several institutions of higher education, two major hospitals and several large multi-national corporate headquarters located in it. These elements, combined with an innovatively active political and business leadership create a great recipe for future success. However, the city is at a critical juncture. It can take advantage of the economic expansion and dynamism New York and Boston have experienced by intelligently investing in an efficient mass transit/public transportation and highway systems, and the infrastructure necessary to make it work.

Moving forward to greater success means having the ability to attract new businesses, not only from the surrounding region, but also from across the entire country and even from global markets. And success means improving our mass transit system on a statewide basis, but most importantly in the Hartford region. Only through the development of a more efficient state transportation system geared towards worldwide markets will Hartford, and the entire state, truly position itself for future success. Currently, there are several major ConnDOT projects in the works specifically designed to meet the needs of our growing transportation demands. The New Haven-Springfield High-Speed project and the New-Britain-Hartford Busway project represent two such projects either currently in design and/or preliminary agency planning, which when completed will provide a more efficient means of transit across our state, especially with respect to Hartford's connection to New York and Boston. The high-speed/light rail project is designed not only to open up faster and more efficient passenger and freight transit between these major metropolitan areas, but when coupled with the busway project will allow a greater flow of passenger access to mass transit for thousands of people living in Hartford's surrounding communities. We should not look at these projects in isolation, but rather as a combined opportunity to make big improvements to the state's mass transit system, especially if we tie the results of these projects into future improvements and expansion of Bradley International Airport. Besides, "Regionalism", or true regional commitment and cooperation on such matters as mass transportation, economic development and global competitiveness cannot be held hostage to parochial town or city mindset interest only. A regional or statewide approach is the only way to truly attract new businesses to Connecticut.

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