



**Connecticut General Assembly
Transportation Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106**

February 27, 2023

**R.B. 6744 An Act Concerning Tree Removal and Vegetation Management by
the Department of Transportation**

Support in part; suggested changes

Co-Chairs Senator Cohen and Representative Lemar, Vice Chairs Senator Lopes and Representative Berger-Girvalo, and Ranking Members Senator Hwang and Representative Kennedy, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee

The Greenwich Tree Conservancy (GTC) is a 501(c)3 with over 1000 supporters. Our mission includes the preservation and protection of our town's urban tree canopy to benefit the community, its health and its quality of life. Both I-95 and the Merritt Parkway bisect our town, as does Route 1 from east to west. The vegetation lining these roads is an important buffer which acts as a sound barrier, improves air and water quality, reduces flooding and sequesters carbon. In most cases these edge forests create habitats that provide health benefits to nearby neighborhoods, not the least of which are our environmental justice neighborhoods that abut I-95 and have experienced heat island effects. They also provide an aesthetic appeal that gives a sense of place and community to all our neighborhoods and improve real estate values.

The CT Department of Transportation seems to be of the view that roadside trees and vegetation are obstacles to be removed not assets to enhance and preserve. For example, a recent proposal to resurface I-95 (Project 0056-0316) includes plans for scores of tree removals for staging of equipment and temporary utility relocation.

In the past when similar bills have been raised in the CGA, CT DOT has testified that it has effective vegetation management guidelines, but we have witnessed quite the opposite. Clearcutting has been the favored vegetative management strategy along these transportation corridors throughout the State. This management approach, by a State Department, is inconsistent with the goals of the State's Council on Climate Change report "which recognizes the importance of protecting and enhancing our forest for both climate mitigation and adaptation/resiliency benefits."

Recommended Changes:

- We ask that the DOT overhaul their existing guidelines to protect Connecticut's Transportation infrastructure while protecting and enhancing our green infrastructure to meet Connecticut's' climate adaptation /resiliency goals.
 - We believe this should be done by a multi-disciplinary effort with representatives from DOT, DEEP, Governor's Committees and other relevant organizations to mitigate risk while ensuring that our urban and edge forests are conserved, restored, and made more resilient.
- We believe that although website posting is important, it is not enough. Notification to the local Head of Municipality and Tree Warden should occur at least 60 days prior to any tree removal commencing. That notification should include the number, size and species of the trees to be removed and what the replanting plan will look like with input from the Tree Warden.
- The stipulation of an Arborist approving removal plans is only appropriate if that individual is not an employee of the Department of Transportation.
- We understand the intent of this legislation is not to limit tree work accomplished by public service companies, but we do not believe a *carte blanche* should be given to these utilities along state roads. Many of these areas have CT DOT easements and we believe the utilities should be restricted by CT DOT as to their tree trimming or more appropriately termed, clearcutting.

In summary, please preserve and enhance our state valuable assets, edge forests and urban canopies along state highways and roadways.

Respectfully submitted,

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