

Remarks

**Kip Bergstrom, Deputy Commissioner, CT Department of Economic and Community Development
Bike Walk Connecticut Annual Meeting
Tuesday, November 12, 2013
Alumni Hall, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT**

I could tell you that I am a passionate cyclist and hiker, and that would be true.

I could tell you about how we are promoting cycling and hiking in our tourism efforts, and I will later.

But what I most want to tell you—and this may be a surprise coming from a state economic development official—is that I believe that making our cities and towns more bikeable and more walkable is essential to the economic future of the state.

Here's why:

As Americans, we move around a lot. While this happens throughout our lives, for most people, it is especially intense in the decade from age 25 to age 34. We've finished college, we're starting a first and second job, we're single and maybe looking for a partner. We haven't started families yet. We shop around in this period for where we ultimately want to live, and for most of us, by the end of that decade, we've picked the general area where we want to spend most of the rest of our lives, if not the specific city or town.

In the first half of this decade of intense mobility, there is an overall pattern of migration to bigger cities, where the largest number of first jobs and available partners exists. By age 30, with a job or two under our belt, and perhaps a relationship with a life partner formed, many of us downshift to smaller cities and towns, places of connection at a more intimate scale, where we have more opportunity to have individual impact.

Eight years ago, when I was working in Providence, RI, I was part of a study of the migration patterns and location preferences of 25-to-34-year-olds that was a collaboration among the cities of Providence, Richmond, Philadelphia, Chicago, Memphis and Portland, OR. We called the study *The Young and the Restless*. As part of that work, we conducted 20 focus groups with college-educated 25-34-year-olds in the six cities. I was particularly interested in a subset of that group: those who were downshifting from big cities like New York and Boston to small cities like Providence. Why were they doing it? What were they looking for in a place?

Overwhelmingly, what they told us is that they were moving to a place where they thought they could have an impact, where they could make their mark. This resonated with me because it is exactly why, in 1976, aged 24 and just out of grad school, I chose to move from Boston to Hartford. As a freshly minted city planner, I saw it as a place that was big enough to have all of the typical urban problems, but small enough to solve them. I thought I could make my mark. And I believe I have.

In developing our state brand, *still revolutionary*, we talked with over 1,200 residents about what Connecticut means to them. They told us this is place where you can make your mark. And most of them felt that they were in fact making their mark, that the predominant feeling as a resident is a sense

of efficacy. In this, we are inspired by the marks left by our predecessors that we see etched onto our landscapes and into our buildings.

Now here's the thing about a desire to leave your own mark on a place: the place needs to be done enough, but not completely done. They want to help make a good place great. They want it to have a basic level of clean and safe. They want to be able to send the kids that they may have some day to good schools somewhere nearby. Most of all, they want to be able to live their values, both in the present and with increasing intensity over time. And the values of most 25-34-year olds these days are very green, including a strong preference for places that are bikeable and walkable, or which are sort of bikeable and walkable, and which they can help make more bikeable and walkable through their own direct action.

Connecticut and its cities and towns are in a competition with other regions for this young, mobile talent, who are the fuel for the growth of the next economy. It is essential that we win this competition in order for us to succeed economically. We have some inherent competitive advantages. First of all, if you had to choose between having a stronger hand in the first five years of this decade of intense mobility, as the big cities do, or in the last five years, as we do with our small cities and towns, it is obviously much better to have strength in the second half of the decade, when the final selection of a place is made.

We also have advantage in that most of our cities and towns were originally built around transit, and therefore have good bones for bikeability and walkability. It's just fundamentally easier to make Hartford bikeable and walkable than it is in a place like L.A. and its suburbs. [There is a point here about the relationship between walking and transit that needs to be underlined: all transit begins and ends with walking. And putting a whole lot of pedestrians on the sidewalks is one of the primary benefits of transit, in terms of its contribution to the vitality of places. It is precisely because London has such a terrific transit system—both the Tube and the buses—that virtually all of its sidewalks are filled with pedestrians virtually every hour of the day, every day of the week. It also helps that the sidewalks are wide, clean and well maintained, but it is transit that generates the pedestrian traffic. As we think about transit-oriented development, we need to do both the transit and the sidewalks well. And as we think about walkability, we need to think about making cities more transit-oriented.]

Finally, in terms of advantages, it's also fair to say that all of our cities and towns, even after 300 years or so of development, are still works in progress. They are good, but not great, in terms of realizing their full potential as places. There is work to do, still opportunity to leave a mark.

We give this last advantage away to the degree that we don't let young newcomers into leadership roles in our initiatives. Mobile, young people, especially downshiftners, are extremely good at reading the receptivity of places to outsiders. Places that won't let them in to decision making on the critical stuff, including the greening of the city through bikeability and walkability initiatives, will not get the vote they make with their locational choices. So my key advice to you, and to other local and state leaders, is to let them in. Make your leadership circles porous and welcoming. Let them know you want their help.

The City of Buffalo just produced a short video that does this as well as any I've seen. It's called "Buffalo: the Best Designed City in America." In it you can hear the roar of an emergent Rust Belt city that seems to be saying to the Sun Belt: "We have water and character. You're a frigging desert." They talk about their remarkable city plan of radial parkways, designed by an associate of L'Enfant. As a result of those parkways, the everyday experience of walking the dog in Buffalo is a kind of spiritual nourishment. They talk about the park system that Olmsted designed for them, attracted by the

underlying city plan. And how the plan and Olmsted's parks in turn attracted the three giants of American architecture—Richardson, Sullivan and Wright—to create some of their best buildings there. They also talk about the mistakes that were made along the way—expressways that cut off the city from the lake, and which destroyed some of the original parkways and sliced through some of Olmsted's parks. Then they show how some of the old manufacturing areas are being reborn as places of art and innovation. And finally, they boldly suggest that they plan to undo the mistakes of the past, including taking down the expressways, *and they invite outsiders to join them in doing it*. This is about as pitch perfect an appeal to what motivates young, mobile talent as any I've heard.

Every one of our cities can and should make a similar appeal to young, mobile talent, based on their own unique assets and story. And part of that should be to set explicit goals to move themselves up to the top of the national rankings of bikeability and walkability. We need to do that to win the battle for young, mobile talent, without whom our economy will starve.

So that's the economic, instrumental case for bikeability and walkability. But biking and walking obviously also have intrinsic value as healthy, fun, spiritually rejuvenating things to do. So let me talk about that for a few minutes. You may have noticed in our fall tourism ads that we feature a bike club racing through New Milford and cruising through the West Cornwall covered bridge. We are showing that Connecticut is one of the best places in the world to bike, and that's not hyperbole. I've biked in many places and have yet to find one better for biking than Connecticut. A few years ago, I was training for a 300-mile, four-day charity bike ride from London to Paris. Since I live in Old Saybrook, my training ride was a 32-mile loop on back roads up the west side of the Connecticut River, over the ferry from Chester to Hadlyme (probably the best \$1 ride in the world), and then down the east side of the river on back roads to the bike path over the Baldwin Bridge to Old Saybrook. What I realized after I did the charity ride, which took me on back roads through Sussex and Normandy, is that the landscapes of my training ride were actually more exquisite than those I rode through in England and France. We passed by Monet's garden in Giverny, the inspiration for our Impressionist colony in Old Lyme, the landscapes of which were part of my training ride. I am here to tell you that Giverny has nothing on Old Lyme.

We have a tendency as reticent New Englanders to sell Connecticut short as a tourism product. So what is that product? What do we walk and bike to see? I believe it is a singularly happy marriage of nature and culture, to borrow a phrase from the new book by my colleague David Leff, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Deep Traveler Explores Connecticut*, which I highly recommend. Boston and New York have culture; New Hampshire and Vermont have nature; we have both.

Take New Britain, for example. Just at its western edge is the New England Trail, which runs from Guilford on the coast up the trap rock ridges of central Connecticut and western Massachusetts to the New Hampshire border. The views from that trail are some of the finest in New England, because the tree cover is sparse enough on the trap rock so that you can see through it to the landscapes below, while most of the Appalachian Trail is a tree tunnel. A wonderful set of large format photographs of vistas from the New England Trail by Barbara Bosworth called "At the Farther Edge" is on exhibit now at the New Britain Museum of American Art, one of the state's cultural treasures. You can walk to it from the New England Trail. You can walk to it from here. Bosworth's large format images, developed from 8 by 17 inch negatives, capture the rich, subtle, sweet texture of the Connecticut landscape in a way that no words I have read or images that I have seen have ever been able to capture before. Check it out.

Also at New Britain's western edge is the Farmington Canal Bike Path. If you happened to be biking up from New Haven and wanted to stop for lunch in New Britain, you could have some Bigos or Golabki at

Cracovia, a restaurant on Broad Street in the largest Polish neighborhood in the state, another cultural treasure. Perhaps you would then bike over here to CCSU, to see the 100 murals on this campus, the largest concentration of mural art in New England, at one of the few schools in the country that teaches mural art. Many of the artists are immigrants, and their murals tell stories from their homeland and stories of their new life in our state. I mention the Broad Street Polish neighborhood and the immigrant mural art at CCSU because they are emblematic of a key element of our collective Connecticut culture, shaped by over 100 ethnic nationalities, and summarized by our state motto, which I translate into modern parlance as “Where the Immigrant Prospers.” I think that is the coolest state motto in the country.

The New England Trail links three of Connecticut’s Blue Trails. The Blue Trail system, totaling some 830 miles of hiking trails, is maintained by your “country cousins”—the Connecticut Forest and Park Association. Every year, we promote their National Trails Day events on our CTvisit.com website. This year, 150 of our 169 towns had at least one hike of two hours or more. Think about that: there is a place to hike for two hours in 150 of our towns. Actually there is probably a place to hike for two hours in every town. The 19 towns that didn’t participate do not lack for hikes, just for hike organizers. CFPA is striving to get all 169 towns to participate next year. Already, there are more hikes in Connecticut on National Trails Day than in any other state in the country. I am not talking per capita. In absolute numbers, Connecticut has the most National Trails Day events, more than states many times our size. That speaks volumes about us as a place and a people.

Likewise, Connecticut is one of the best places to bike, not just because of landscapes and hidden cultural treasures, but also because we have so many back roads to choose from. You can get from here to there and back by a variety of routes and a range of difficulties. We have something for everyone: easy rides along the coast and the river valleys, challenging rides in the northwest and northeast hills, and everything in-between. My office is working with the B&B division of the Connecticut Lodging Association to create a set of itineraries, of various difficulties, that offer inn-to-inn experiences such as are available in Vermont, with van service to schlep the luggage. We also funded the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation to create the Barn Trail, available as a free phone app, that suggests several bike routes around the state that take you past dozens of picturesque barns, including ones you can stop at to get ice cream, do a winery tour, go through a corn maze, or buy local farm produce.

Since I met Aidan Charles, one of your members and my coach on Bike to Work Day, we have been working with him and his racing buddies to promote competitive cycling events in Connecticut on our website.

I could go on, but the point is that there is an open door at the Connecticut Office of Tourism to promote biking and walking in Connecticut.

And there is a personal commitment on my part to work with Bike Walk Connecticut to make our cities and towns more bikeable and walkable. Our future depends on it.

Thank you.

