

Riders attack CDOT station garage plan

Relocating commuter parking: Called a disservice

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STAMFORD -- Relocating commuter parking farther from the railroad station in order to enable development of its garage site would be a disservice to rail riders who already have long work days, Stamford resident [Mark Holzweiss](#) said Thursday.

"The parking garage has to be a parking garage," he said.

Holzweiss, who works in banking said he is been surprised by the lack of public notice of state [Department of Transportation](#)'s plan for the garage site, which he said would result in much more difficult commuting for many railroad users.

"If I miss the train and it isn't peak hours I can end up waiting half an hour or more," he said. "I know a certain number of people might ride transit, but I never will. I have to drive to the station because I work very early and I come home very late."

[Martin Levine](#), another Stamford resident, scoffed at the idea of the DOT considering a Transit-Oriented Development project that would displace parking close to platforms, which he said was the single most attractive aspect of the oft-troubled station.

"Why would you expect commuters to accept a walk of up to a quarter of a mile away when office developments would never accept that?" Levine said. "Transit-Oriented Development is a slogan, a bumper sticker, but it doesn't really make that much of a difference."

Levine and Holzweiss joined a group of commuters and transit advocates who asked state Transportation Commissioner [Jim Redeker](#) at Thursday night's public hearing at [Stamford High School](#) to scrap the idea of Transit-Oriented Development at the station garage site in favor of replacing the garage at its current location.

In two weeks, the DOT will begin considering proposals from five pre-qualified bidders on how to demolish the run-down, 727-space garage and provide 1,000 spaces within a ¼ mile of the station while also offering various scenarios for redeveloping the garage site on [Station Place](#) or other state-owned parcels around the station into residential, office and commercial space.

State Rep. [William Tong](#), D-Stamford, said he and other residents expect the DOT to conduct additional public hearings and outreach to get feedback on plans to redevelop the station.

"The commuters on the train have to be part of the process and have to be included and have a substantive role and to borrow a presidential term, be a decider," he said. "From our perspective,

commuters are the key stakeholders not because we see this as an extremely valuable piece of real estate but because this is our home."

While the hearings official topic was on an environmental impact evaluation of the station project, most commenters voiced broad objections to the concept of using the garage land for a mixed use development and relocating parking.

With bids due on the project in October, the evaluation created by the DOT and released last month concluded building a new garage on the site is not feasible, because there is nowhere close to the station to accommodate commuters during construction.

The evaluation also shows a developer could build a structure of up to 1 million square feet, with up to 2,180 parking spaces, in place of the existing commuter garage.

[Jim Cameron](#), chairman of the [Connecticut Rail Commuter Council](#), and others have expressed concern about the DOT's interest in commuter needs because the request for proposals issued in July dictates approval of a development plan will hinge two-thirds on financial benefits to the state and one-third on design, including commuter convenience and safety.

"The fact that there are so many people here is due to the efforts of the commuter council and the media coverage we received and quite frankly very little thanks to the DOT," Cameron said.

"If the DOT really cared about what the commuters thought there would be signs up in the station last week about this hearing."

Redeker told the audience the proposals being made by developers might include plans to incorporate commuter parking into another structure on the site of the existing garage on Station Place.

He said the evaluation's findings have caused alarm the DOT had already discarded keeping commuter parking on the current site.

"Our priority is selecting the best value, and in selecting the best value, the first and foremost consideration will be meeting the commuter's needs," Redeker said.

Zoila Atenico urged Redeker to scrap any plan that would relocate parking from the station site.

Atenico said she spends \$10 a day for parking south of the station, and said she believes the DOT would not be able to assure public safety for those who had to walk up to ¼-mile to and from the station.

"This is very serious and you need to talk to the people who use the station," Atenico said. "I am going to be riding these trains for 30 or 40 more years and this is a monumental decision."

Read more: <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Riders-attack-DOT-station-garage-plan-3882200.php#ixzz276kcAhEW>