



February 18, 2021

My thanks to the Appropriations Committee for hearing my testimony:

Testimony of **R. Bruce Donald**, Tri-State Coordinator, East Coast Greenway Alliance; Chairman, Connecticut Greenways Council, **IN SUPPORT** of H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFORE.

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The 3,000-mile East Coast Greenway became the most visited park in America in 2020 by hitting 50 million bike rides, runs, and walks as people flocked to our route as an essential haven of health, sanctuary, and sanity during these difficult times. Working toward the completion of multi-use trail networks in Connecticut over the next few years would tackle the climate and public health crises by sparking a continued rise in biking and walking on safe and equitable public space. A huge increase in trail usage has occurred from 2019 through 2020 in Connecticut. The CT Trail Census reports that usage is up more than 65% across the state-they will be publishing their complete findings soon.

As the Legislatively appointed Chairman of the CT Greenways Council, I am specifically supporting the small but crucial Connecticut bikeway, pedestrian walkway, recreational trail and greenway grant program that is run under the auspices of the CT Dept. of Energy & Environmental Protection. This program (as the CT Recreational Trails Program) has in the past made 61 grants across the state totaling over \$11 million. The Governor asks for \$3 million a year for the Greenways Account, which has not been funded for over two years. The reasons why this program is so crucial to the state are 1) that it provides for matching grants for planning, design, construction, and maintenance of recreational trails, as well as many other uses generally not served by CTDOT-sourced funding; 2) There is still an over \$11 million backlog of requests, including more than \$1.7 million in shovel-ready, highly-ranked project proposals; 3) If restored, this bonding dramatically augments federal bike/ped programs, which generally cannot fund feasibility, design, and smaller but critical connections to various state trails networks; and finally, 4) We need to protect and enhance our outdoor recreation opportunities in Connecticut as essential for health and well-being, but also as tourism and economic development projects that enhance and enliven our communities.

Thank you so much for your time,

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