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# Connecticut Wins \$22.6 Million For Freight Rail, Riverfront Work

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Connecticut on Tuesday landed nearly \$23 million in federal grants that advocates say will help transform Waterbury's riverfront and dramatically improve a key freight rail line from New London to Massachusetts. advertisement

The state overcame stiff competition from around the country to get a share of the so-called TIGER grants — transportation investments generating economic recovery.

About \$14.4 million of the money will go toward Waterbury's waterfront renaissance and transit center project, which Mayor Neil O'Leary has said could be the biggest catalyst to revive the city in the past half-century.

Another \$8.2 million will be used to install heavier rail and new ties on part of the New England Central Railroad's tracks in eastern Connecticut. That would vastly improve the rail link from New London to the Massachusetts line, potentially boosting freight business through New London's deep-water port.

Tuesday afternoon, Connecticut's congressional delegation was jubilant about securing a healthy share of the \$600 million that the U.S. Department of Transportation had offered nationwide. The agency was buried with nearly 800 applications totaling \$9.5 billion, roughly 15 times more the entire budget.

"These federal grants are game changers for the Waterbury area and eastern Connecticut, revolutionizing rail transportation, reconnecting and revitalizing underused industrial sites and neighborhoods, and providing unparalleled opportunities for economic development," Sen. Richard Blumenthal said.

Rep. Joe Courtney, who had lined up New England Central's business customers along with community leaders to endorse the railroad's request, predicted major benefits for towns between New London and Stafford.

"Trucking is still the workhorse of transportation, but there are a lot of businesses here that want to use rail as a cheaper, more reliable option," said Courtney, citing the Scotts Co. facility in Lebanon and US Foods in Norwich. "And Electric Boat is going to be building Virginia-class submarines for the next five years. That will mean brining a lot of large goods into southeastern Connecticut."

Community officials along the New England Central route also are hoping that modernizing the tracks eventually could lead to passenger service linking New London with the casinos, the University of Connecticut and the University of Massachusetts.

When federal Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx visited Hartford this summer, he lamented that other countries are investing far more heavily in transportation infrastructure. He specifically mentioned that China is investing heavily in rail lines that connect inland cities with ports.

"I told him, 'Have I got a project for you,'" recalled Courtney, who has been pressing federal DOT officials ever since to fund the New England Central work.

Rep. Elizabeth Esty predicted that the Waterbury project will foster new housing development by reclaiming the Naugatuck River waterfront and better linking downtown to the train station.

"I hear from people in my district every day that transpiration is one of the three biggest issues to them. Business owners, young people looking for jobs, senior citizens who want to stay in the city but don't want to drive — this is going to help all of them."

Waterbury is putting \$10 million toward reconfiguring streets between downtown and the train station and building a riverfront bike and pedestrian trail. The state has put money into bus service to make the station a full-scale transit center.

In this year's round of TIGER funding, Connecticut came away with about 4 percent of the total pool of money. It has gotten more than \$53 million in TIGER funds since 2011, and Gov. Dannel P. Malloy said that money spent on strengthening the transportation network will create jobs and improve economic competitiveness.

"These projects reinforce our commitment to modernizing Connecticut's transportation infrastructure by investing in rail and finding smart, practical ways to connect housing and employment centers to intermodal transit hubs," Malloy said.

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