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OP-EDS OPINION

U.S. Rep. John Larson: A long-envisioned hope is now becoming a reality for Greater Hartford

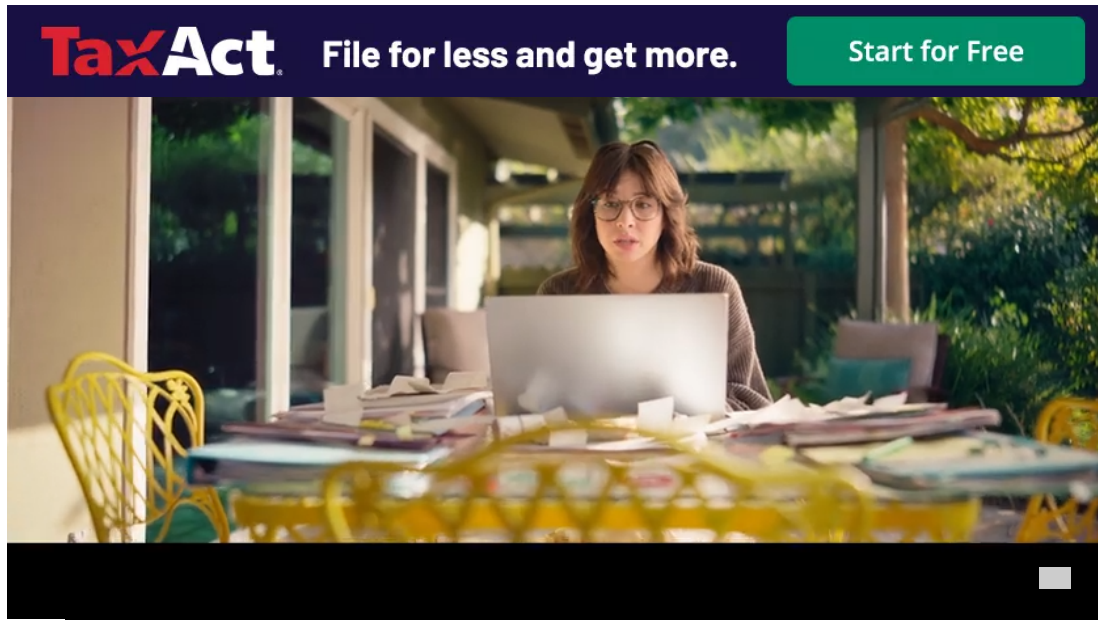
By **JOHN LARSON**
HARTFORD COURANT | JAN 31, 2022



The No. 1 traffic congestion chokehold in Connecticut is the I-84 and I-91 interchange. It also holds the distinction of the most congested chokehold in New England. The Bulkeley Bridge, which connects the interchange, has achieved national notoriety, ranking No. 3 in the United States for truck congestion. The neighborhoods of North Hartford and East Hartford's Meadows have been isolated by the interchange, with detrimental results for commerce and development. The aging levee systems in East Hartford and Hartford, which are in danger of collapse, only heighten the concern and underscore the urgency for action.

Congress has passed the nation's largest infrastructure investment, sending billions to our state. We can now rebuild our transportation system, refortify our levees, reconnect our communities, eliminate congestion, and transform the region. Gov. Ned Lamont and commissioner Joseph Giulietti are committed to achieving these goals, and our federal delegation is working with them to bring these plans to fruition.

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Past planning mistakes have robbed our communities of their potential. East Hartford's massive interchange takes up valuable land in the South Meadows equivalent to the size of downtown Hartford, and it has blocked the community from the river and commerce. The status quo has created racial isolation in a once thriving North Hartford. The North End was cut off from the city's central business district by I-84 and is blocked from the riverfront by I-91, depriving residents of economic opportunity and downtown amenities. As a result, the 06120 in North Hartford is Connecticut's poorest ZIP code.

Interstates I-84 and I-91 in and around Hartford are among the country's most egregious design flaws. We now have a historic opportunity to correct the injustices they caused. We can end the racial isolation, fulfill a 50-year goal to reclaim the riverfront, and build a multimodal transportation system that serves pedestrians, bicycles, cars, buses, planes and trains.

The bipartisan infrastructure law sends \$6 billion to Connecticut. This funding bolsters the Greater Hartford Mobility Study, which will advance the Hartford400 proposal, a comprehensive multimodal transportation and economic development plan to revitalize the region and provide benefits for its residents. Revitalization will not happen overnight, rather it will take place one project at a time. This requires extensive outreach and engagement with the community.

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Achieving the Hartford400 vision is critical to the long-term economic growth, health, and well-being of our region, and it will benefit our neighborhoods in countless ways. Without vision, there is no victory.

Here's one example: The intersection of Main and Albany by Keney Tower in Hartford will become a gateway to the North End with a new connection to Riverside Park. You will be able to walk from the new Joe Marfuggi Riverwalk on

the Hartford-Windsor line all the way to Coltsville National Historical Park without ever having to see a highway.

President Joe Biden and Secretary Pete Buttigieg's plans to reconnect neighborhoods across the country make the I-84/I-91 corridor well-positioned to compete for new federal funding. President Biden delivered on his promise by signing the infrastructure bill into law, and by doing so created a path forward for Greater Hartford to transform itself. A long-envisioned hope is now becoming a reality.

Congressman John Larson represents Connecticut's 1st District.

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