



# Fed Up: Traffic on the I-95 Corridor

*Report #2: Bridgeport*

# The Human Cost of Traffic in Connecticut

By the Office of Senator Chris Murphy

## A Note to the Reader:

I launched the *Fed Up* campaign because I wanted to hear directly from commuters about their struggles. The response was overwhelming. I heard from over a thousand people who spend hours in traffic each day: a barber who travels from Waterbury to Stamford every day on the Metro-North branch line forced to choose between extra work and dinner with his family; a father of triplets who desperately needs to be home to take care of his kids; a business owner who loses revenue for his company and employees as a direct result of congestion.

Equipped with these real stories from real people, I'm bringing the *Fed Up* campaign into its next phase. My goal is to marry the voices of commuters with real data and use both to propose and advance a set of policies to improve commutes in Connecticut. As such, I will be releasing a series of reports that will each focus on specific towns along the I-95 corridor from New Haven to the New York border. It's impossible to fix the entire corridor all at once, which is why I am taking a town-by-town approach and focusing on what's fixable. This report will focus on Bridgeport.

We need a long-term vision for a people-focused transportation system—one that ensures commuters can make it home in time for dinner and safely get to their jobs and their children's schools.

I encourage you to spread the word on my campaign and to share your stories with me if you haven't already by visiting: <http://www.murphy.senate.gov/fedup>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Murphy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

U.S. Senator Chris Murphy

# Why Bridgeport Commuters are Fed Up

*“ With a shorter commute I would not have to leave my children at a babysitter at 6:15 some mornings and I could pick them up at a normal time. ”*

Andre, Bridgeport Commuter

*“ I play the bagpipes with a pipe and drum band out of Stratford and I can barely make it in time for practices anymore, and I certainly have a limited amount of time available to practice. I've enjoyed being able to participate in civic organizations such as the St. Patrick's Day parade celebration committee, but that is no longer possible. ”*

Raymond, Bridgeport Commuter

*“ The traffic is so bad that I have to leave my house two hours early, at 6 am, and I still get caught in traffic. After work I can never go out to dinner with my wife useless we go late at 8 pm. A shorter commute would make my life longer, that's for sure. ”*

Anthony, Bridgeport Commuter

*“ A shorter, more reliable commute would mean peace of mind and more quality time with my family. ”*

Ginne-Rae, Bridgeport Commuter

*“ If I step out the door any later than 6:15 am I'm stuck in bumper to bumper traffic on I-95 from Bridgeport to Stamford. ”*

Brandi, Bridgeport Commuter

## Key Findings of Fed Up Bridgeport Survey

I heard from hundreds of Bridgeport residents and commuters through multiple platforms. In 2015, I launched an online *Fed Up* survey, which received more than 400 responses. I held office hours at a Merritt Parkway gas station, live-streamed my experience of sitting in traffic during rush hour on I-95, and talked personally to Bridgeport residents about their frustrations with Connecticut's transportation. Though the experiences of individual commuters varied, an analysis of all Bridgeport commuter feedback showed the following recurring themes:

- Bridgeport residents travel using various modes of transportation, including traveling by car, rail, bus, and foot—often in the same day—and they want multiple options for safe and reliable transportation.
- Bridgeport commuters want improved accessibility to Metro-North trains.
- Bridgeport commuters remember the effects of Superstorm Sandy and are concerned about the city's preparedness for another major storm.
- Bridgeport businesses want to increase foot traffic and create pedestrian friendly roads within the city—not just roads to move cars out of town as quickly as possible.

## My Ten Recommendations to Improve Bridgeport Transportation

Based on Bridgeport 'Fed Up' Survey Feedback

1. Complete Barnum Station
2. Improve Metro-North's Waterbury Branch Line
3. Relieve highway congestion by widening I-95
4. Prepare the city's transportation infrastructure for the next superstorm
5. Widen Seaview Avenue
6. Convert specific one-way streets, like State Street, to two-way streets to help local businesses
7. Widen and deepen select railway underpasses
8. Improve Lafayette Boulevard's connection to Exit 2 on Route 8
9. Add bike lanes to underutilized Railroad Avenue
10. Complete relocation and expansion of the Bridgeport Port Jefferson Ferry Terminal

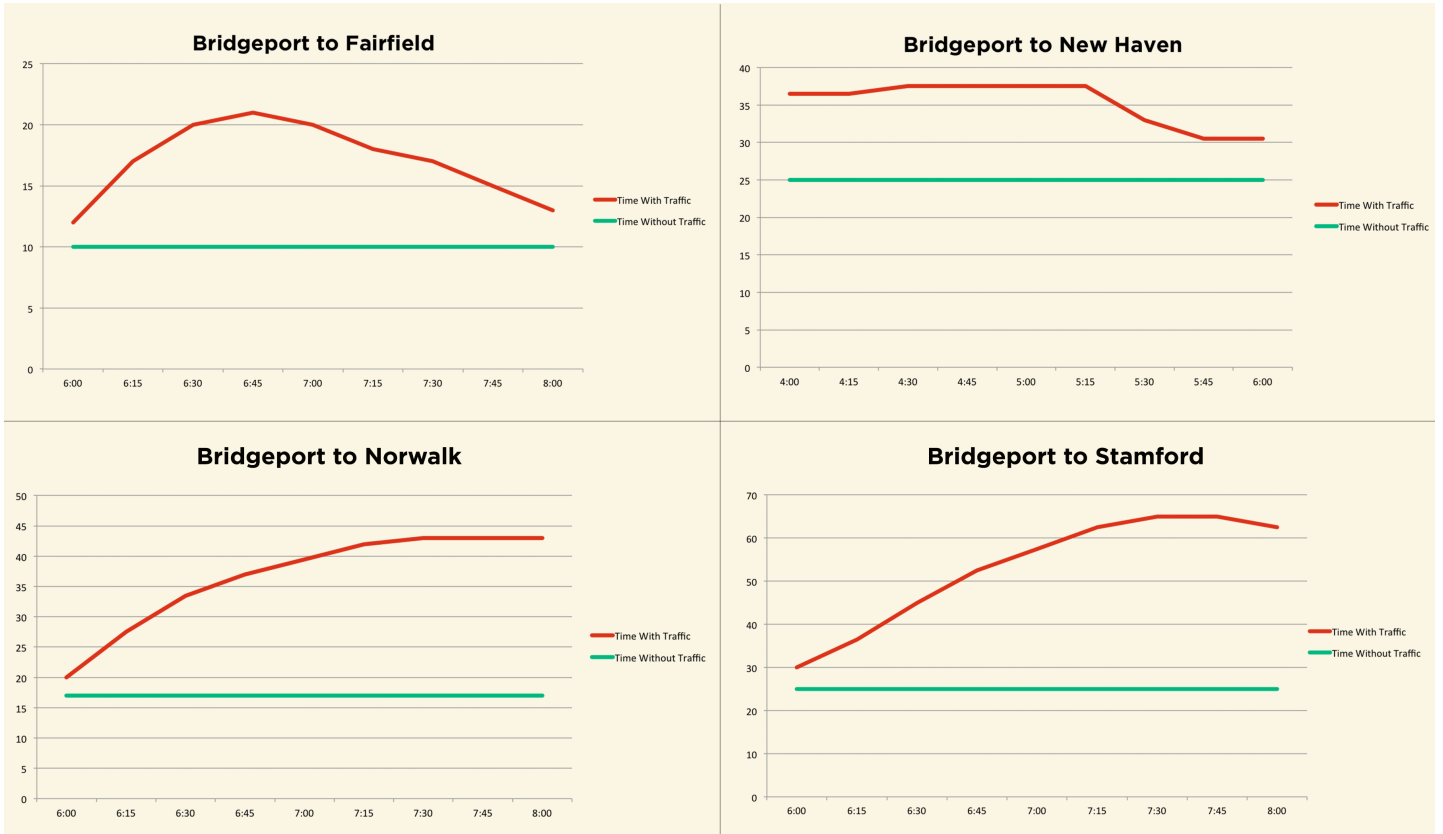
## **Interstate 95 Corridor—An Exit-by-Exit Analysis**

The United States was once the vanguard of transportation infrastructure. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, we built and boasted the most extensive and sophisticated rail infrastructure system in the world. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we executed the largest construction project—the Interstate Highway System. However, after years of underinvestment, our country’s leadership in transportation infrastructure has waned.

The busiest interstate highway in the country, I-95, stretches from Maine to Florida, cutting through southern Connecticut and following along our state’s coast. Each day, hundreds of thousands of people enter and exit the highway—by far Connecticut’s busiest. The Interstate serves as the backbone for the state and for the region, and the lives of many residents are punctuated by time spent—often exasperatingly—driving on it. But what became clear from the commuters I heard from is that this is not an “I-95” story so much as a story of specific stretches of the highway commuters see every day, making an exit-by-exit analysis more pertinent to the average commuter than a broad analysis that focuses on the entire corridor. As such, I will be releasing a series of reports that will go town-by-town and exit-by-exit to drill down on commuter experiences from New Haven to the New York border. This report will focus on exits 25, 26, 27, 27-A, 28, 29, 30. It will also focus on key features like Metro-North, the city’s elevated train tracks, preparations for storm events, and options to use transportation to increase local economic development.

# Bridgeport

Bridgeport is home to several exits on I-95—exits 25, 26, 27, 27A, 27B, 28, 29, and 30. The on-ramps and off-ramps of these exits transport people to the corridors of Connecticut’s largest city, connecting the city’s 150,000 residents to their homes, businesses, and jobs.

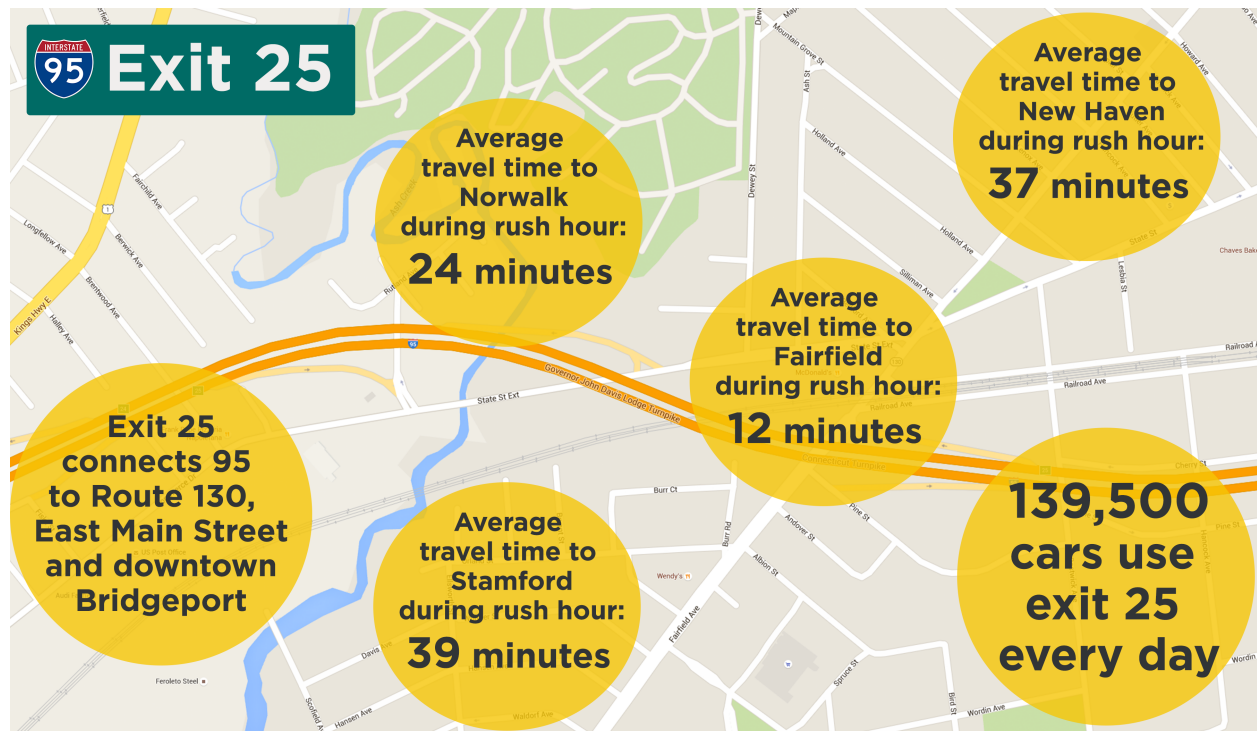


*The data above was compiled using a Google Maps analytics tool that computes average travel times*

## Exit 25

The northbound exit of exit 25 is inside of the Fairfield town line, while the southbound exit is just inside of Bridgeport city limits. The northbound exit leads to Commerce Drive and State St. Ext., and in order to get south of the railroad, drivers need to go to Black Rock Turnpike or to Fairfield Avenue. The southbound exit leads to Fairfield Avenue, where work was recently completed to widen and deepen the railroad underpass to ease congestion that used to plague the intersection of Railroad and Fairfield Avenues.

Route 130 begins at an intersection with US 1 in Fairfield and heads east into Bridgeport. In Bridgeport, it intersects I-95 before passing under Route 8 and I-95 twice without junctions before crossing into Stratford. In Stratford, it passes under I-95 again without a junction before intersecting I-95 a second and ending at another intersection with US 1. Route 130 is designated the A.W. Penn Memorial Highway from the Fairfield-Bridgeport town line to State Street. State Street provides access to Bridgeport's downtown.

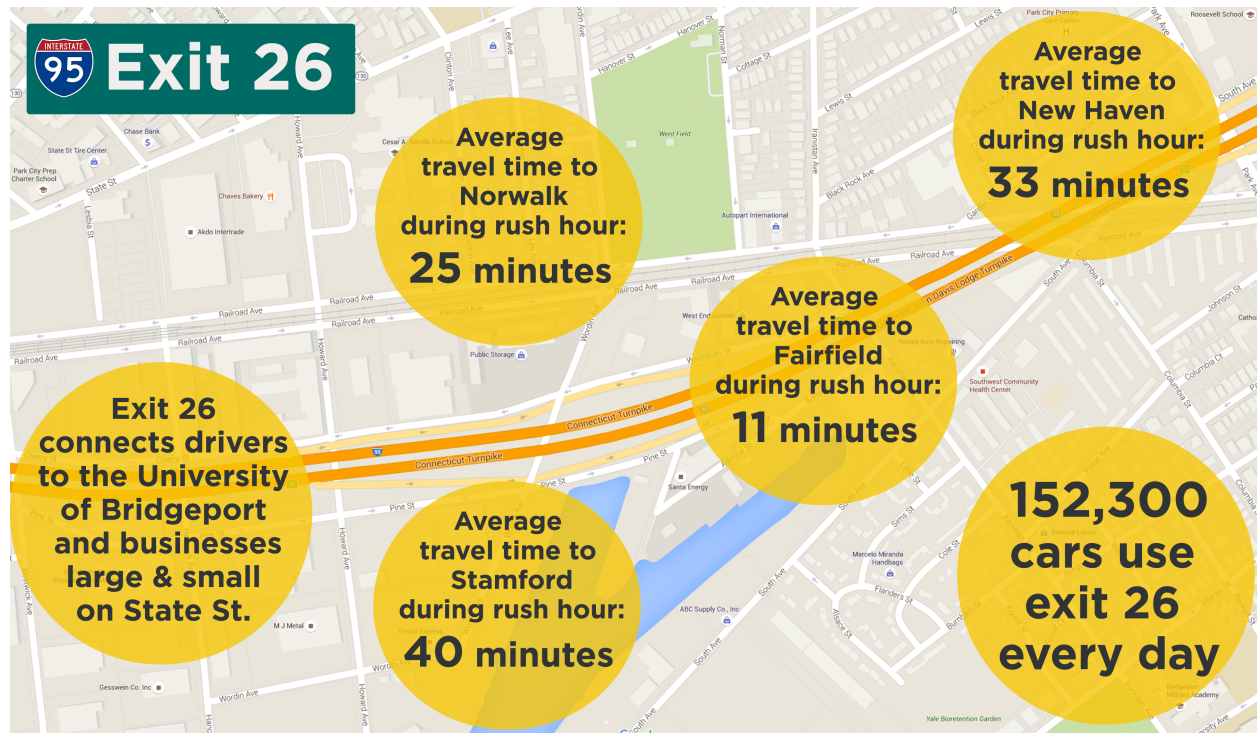


## Exit 26

Exit 26 provides access to Wordin Avenue, a largely industrial area, to the north, and Cedar Creek Reach, which feeds into Long Island Sound, to the south. The exits are in the southeast corner of Bridgeport's West End Neighborhood. Some drivers complained about the Wordin Avenue railroad underpass, which causes some congestion due to its narrowness and curved structure.

The West End neighborhood is one of two communities located on the lower west side of the City of Bridgeport. The West End neighborhood includes a municipal development area, four historic districts, longtime commercial and residential owners and renters, along with the cultural and ethnic diversity that has become representative of the City of Bridgeport. The West End neighborhood is a densely populated 1.2-square-mile area in the southwest side of Bridgeport.

Wordin Park, located at Wordin Avenue and St. Stephen's Road, is 14.3 acres of mostly undeveloped land. Went Field, at Wordin and Railroad avenues, is a park that offers ball fields, basketball courts and a playground.



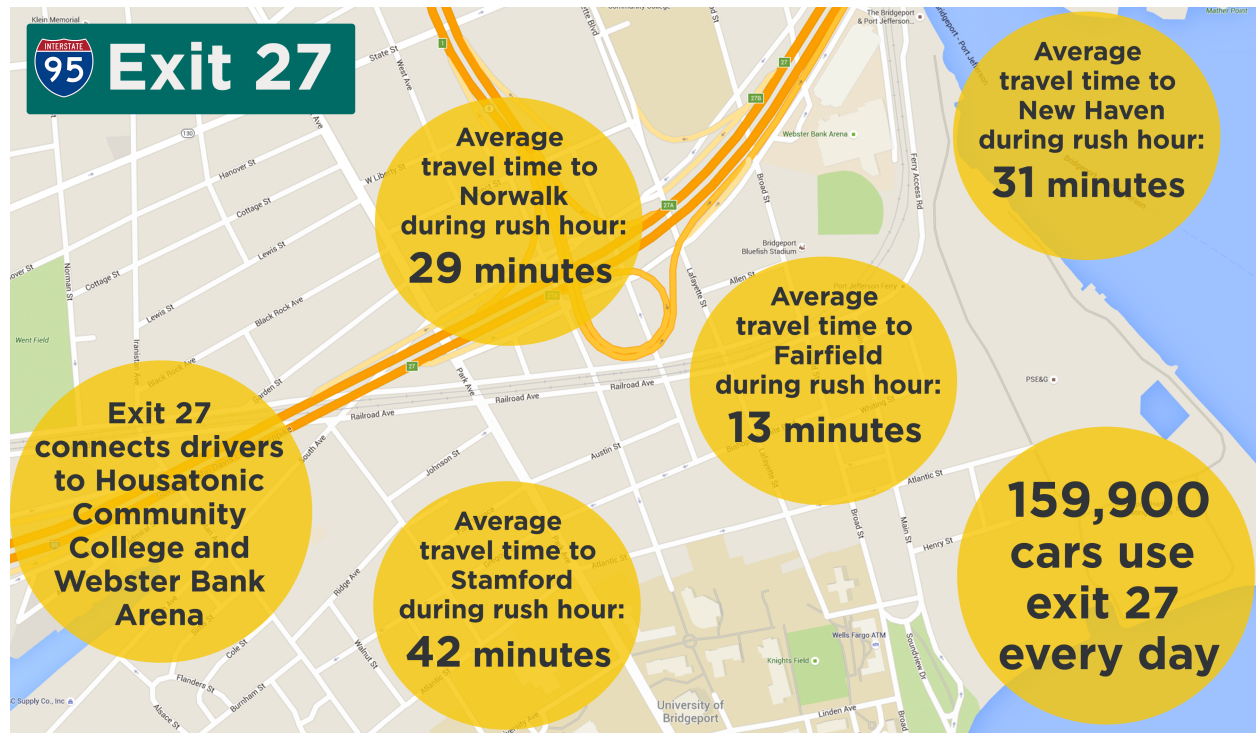


## Exit 27

The northbound and southbound exits of exit 27 do not line up; instead, the northbound exit is to the west of Route 8 and the southbound exit is to the east of Route 8.

The southbound exit offers two options for drivers—27B, which goes straight onto South Avenue, and 27C, which—which turns onto Lafayette Boulevard. The Lafayette Boulevard exit provides primary access to Bridgeport’s downtown and to Housatonic Community College, Margaret Morton Government Center, Bridgeport Public Library, as well as many offices and a growing number of residential units. Some commuters complained about the connection between Lafayette Boulevard from Exit 2 off Route 8 to I-95. The northern part of Lafayette Boulevard contains a semi-circle, which creates a traffic oddity that results in more congestion on an already busy road.

The northbound exit—west of Route 8—provides access to South Frontage Road, which runs parallel to I-95 past the Bluefish Stadium and Webster Bank Arena. It also provides access to Myrtle Avenue and Lafayette Street, which run north to south and provide access to the University of Bridgeport.

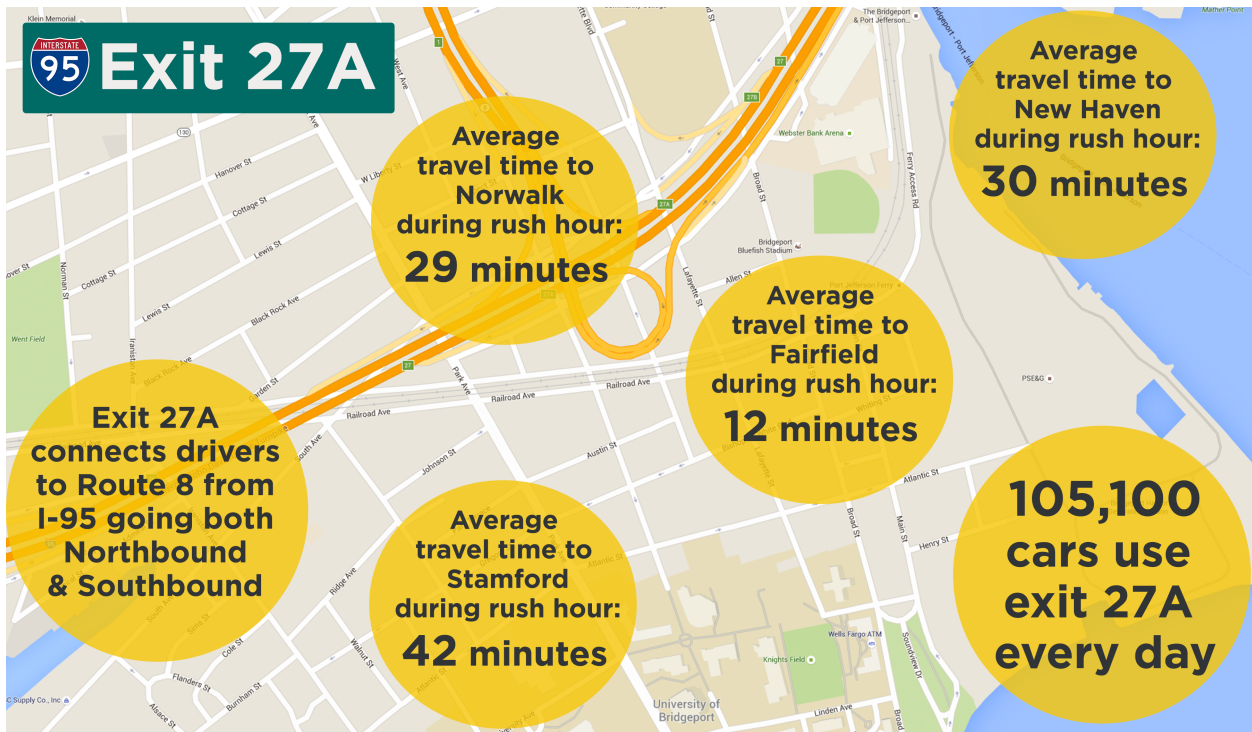


## Exit 27-A

This exit offers the primary connection between I-95 and the Naugatuck River Valley.

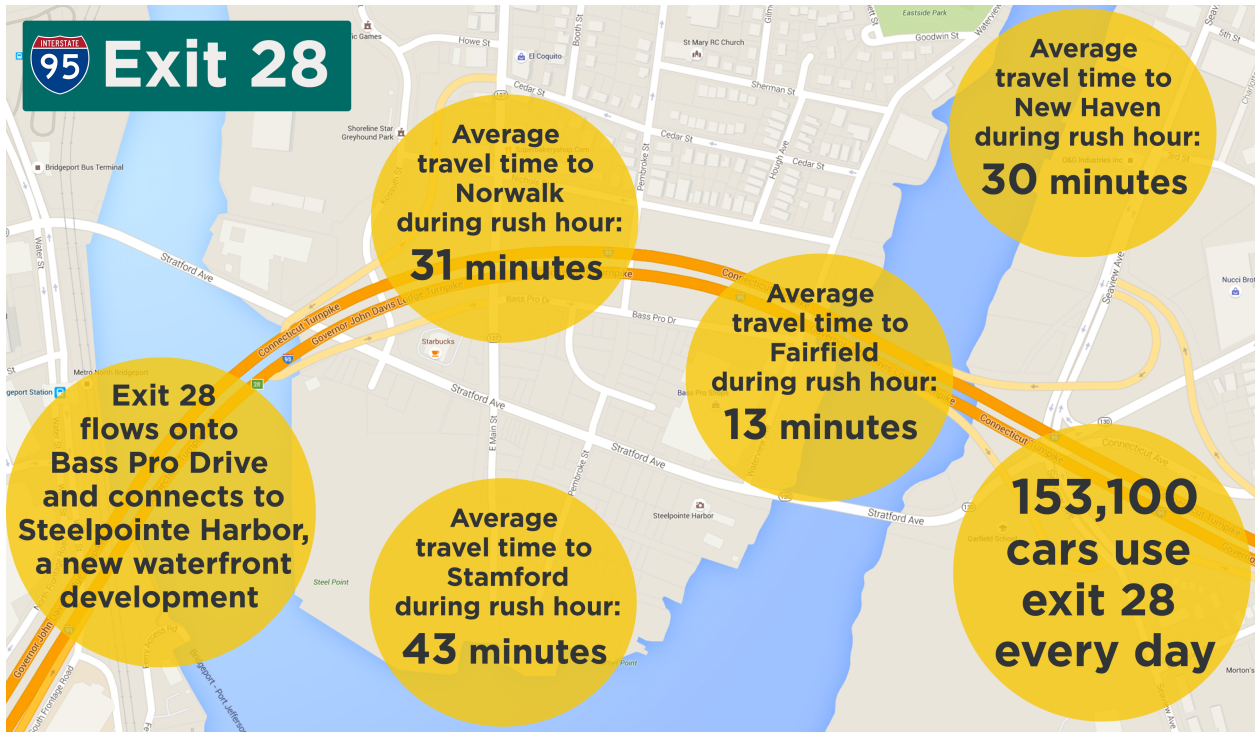
Route 8 is the portion of the multistate New England Route 8 within the state of Connecticut. It is a 67.34-mile (108.37 km) state highway running north–south from Bridgeport, through Waterbury, all the way to the Massachusetts state line where it continues as Massachusetts Route 8.

Route 25 is a six-lane freeway from Bridgeport to northern Trumbull and a two-lane surface road the rest of the way to Brookfield. Route 25 begins at an interchange with Interstate 95 in Bridgeport. For the first 3.8 miles (6.1 km) of the route, it is co-signed with the Route 8 freeway. After the split with Route 8, it continues as its own freeway through the town of Trumbull for another 6.1 miles (9.8 km). The freeway portion ends at the junction with Route 111 in Trumbull. The modern Route 25 expressway was fully open by 1982.



## Exit 28

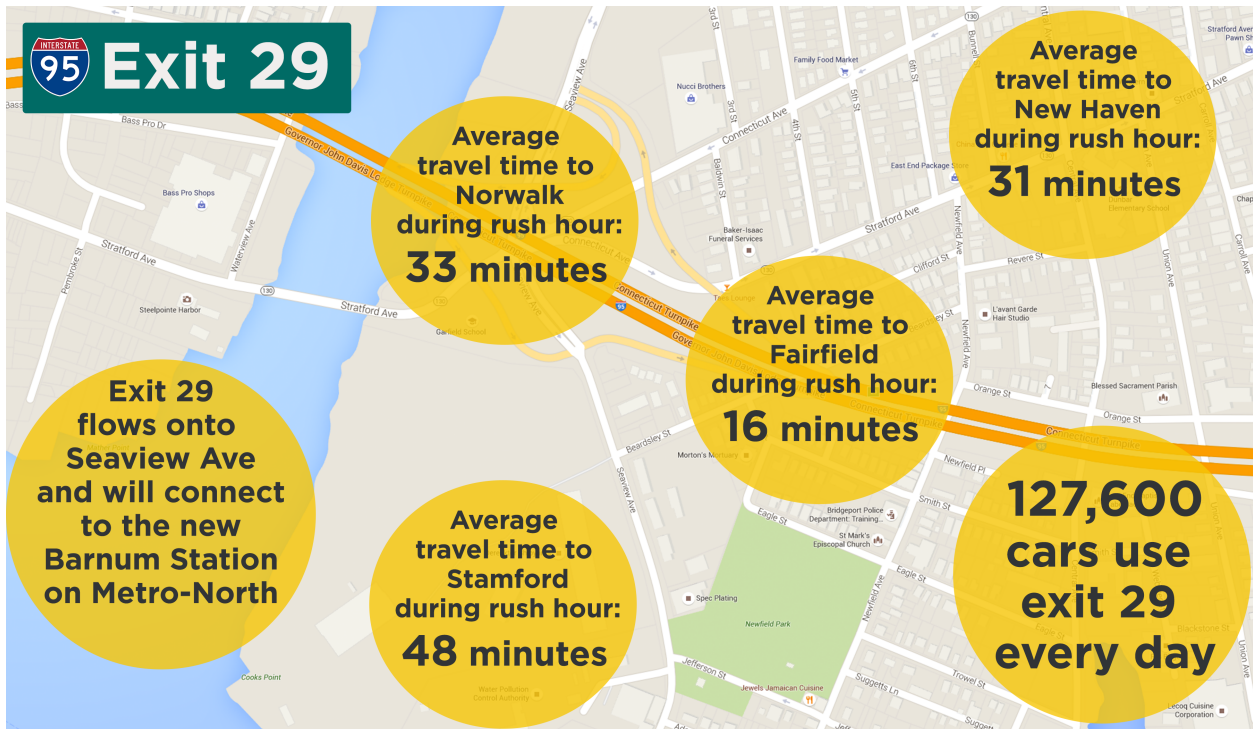
The northbound I-95 exit pours out onto Bass Pro Drive and into Steelpoint Harbor, a 2.8 million square-foot mixed-use, urban-oriented waterfront. The exit also connects the highway with East Main Street, which runs several miles north to Route 8.



## Exit 29

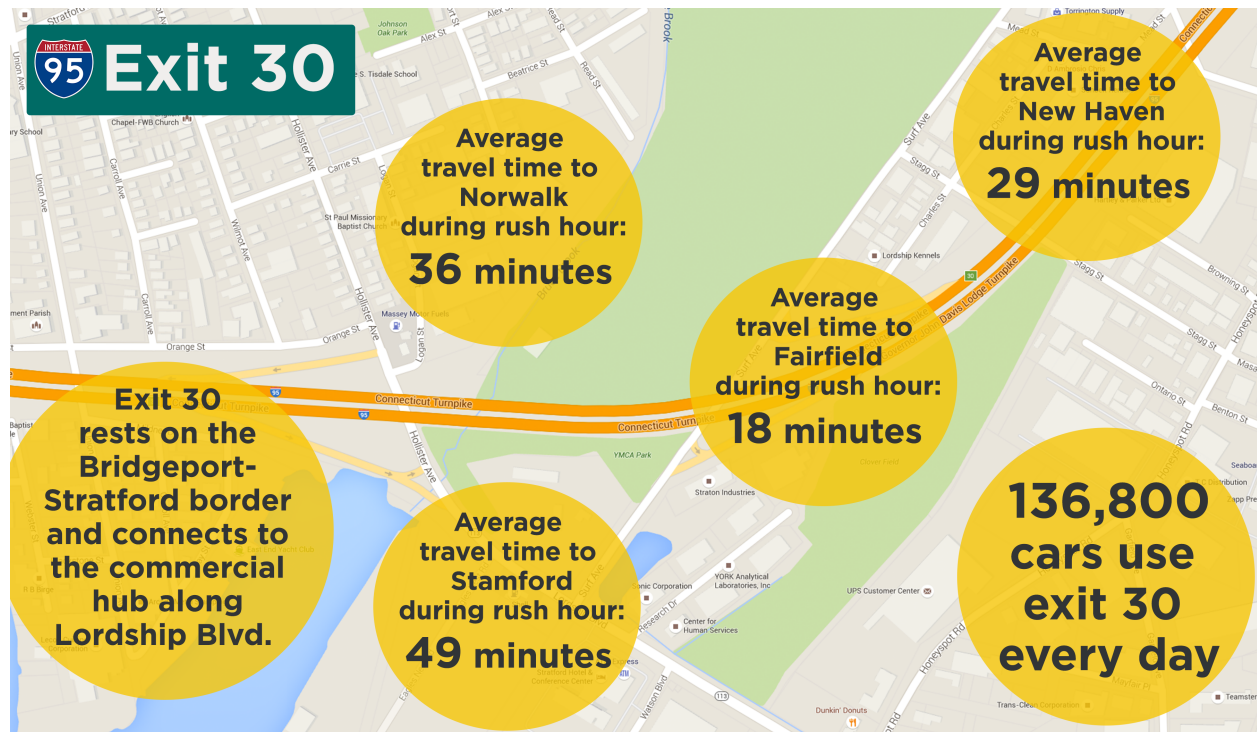
This exit is characterized by long, looping on- and off-ramps. The southbound exit flows out onto Seaview Avenue, and commuters can use either of two left turn lanes to turn onto Seaview or use a single turn lane to turn right onto Seaview Avenue. Seaview Avenue quickly constricts into a two-lane road going north from the exit, while going south off of the exit leads drivers to the confluence of Stratford, Connecticut, and Seaview Avenues, all underneath I-95.

Barnum Station, a new Metro-North station planned on the city's East End, can be accessed from Exit 29.



## Exit 30

Exit 30's on- and off-ramps straddle the Bridgeport-Stratford border. The Exit 30 southbound off-ramp is in Stratford, and it allows drivers to turn left or right onto Surf Avenue. Turning right off the exit, drivers follow the length of St. Michael's Cemetery to Stratford Avenue, which is also known as State Road 130. Turning left of the exit, drivers are led to Lordship Boulevard, which turns into Hollister Avenue in Bridgeport's East End. In Stratford, Lordship Boulevard leads to jobs and commercial hubs. The northbound exit ramp flows directly onto Lordship Boulevard and Hollister Avenue. Notably, no exits off of I-95 flow directly into the small peninsula south of the highway between Cooks Point and Johnsons Creek.



# **Priorities for Improving Bridgeport's Transportation Infrastructure**

## **Metro-North's Barnum Station**

Metro-North's New Haven Line carries over 125,000 passengers daily and is one of the country's busiest commuter rail lines. Bridgeport is currently home to one Metro-North station on Water Street. Trains to Grand Central typically take anywhere from 80 to 100 minutes, while trips to New Haven typically take approximately 30 minutes.

The city will soon be home to a second station— Barnum Station, named after the circus entrepreneur and former Bridgeport mayor P.T. Barnum—which will anchor Metro-North on the East End. The station will be on the site of the old Remington Arms factory, which produced vast amounts of bullets during World War II and was situated at the intersection of Seaview and Barnum Avenues. The station will offer both Metro-North and Amtrak service.

The planning for this project is well underway. Last year I was proud to help secure a crucial \$10 million federal transportation planning grant for the station. The total cost of the project is estimated to be approximately \$150 million.

The East End is home to approximately 850 acres of developable, former industrial land, much of which is contaminated. Making investments in infrastructure, like a prominent Metro-North Station, immediately adds value to those properties and helps spur private redevelopment. The new Barnum train station could really be groundbreaking for Bridgeport. It will give travelers more options, but perhaps more importantly, help revitalize the eastern section of the city. Given the nature of real estate in the East End and its industrial history, Barnum Station could help attract a commercial and industrial use of the nearby land.

Located just blocks away, the Crescent Crossing Development, which was funded with the help of a federal grant, recently broke ground. It will result in hundreds of units of affordable housing and, along with Barnum Station, will connect hundreds of future residents to Metro-North. The planned station's proximity to Bridgeport Hospital will also ease commutes for hospital employees.

## **Waterbury Branch Line Improvements**

As it's currently constructed, the Waterbury Metro-North Branch Line cannot accommodate simultaneous trains travelling in opposite directions. Commuters traveling between Waterbury and Bridgeport by rail must currently wait hours between trains, leaving them with few options and little flexibility. That is scheduled to change, as the Connecticut Department of Transportation and Metro-North confirmed in August 2015 that they are installing technology—specifically signalization and passing siding—

on the Waterbury branch before the end of 2018. Together with other improvements, this overhaul would cost an estimated \$350 million.

## **Improving I-95**

Interstate 95 is one of the oldest routes in the Interstate Highway System, which was originally championed by President Eisenhower in the 1950s. The 1950s highway is now home to 21<sup>st</sup> century traffic, and hundreds of commuters complained about the state of the highway in surveys and at town halls. Many recommended that the highway be widened to help reduce congestion. While we need to invest in public and alternative forms of transportation—especially rail—exploring options like widening I-95 is crucial to helping ease the stress of daily commutes.

## **Seaview Avenue Widening**

North of exit 29's southbound off-ramp, Seaview Avenue transitions from a two-lane, two-way road to a two-way road with one lane on each side. Commuters have lamented the bottleneck that this often causes and suggested widening Seaview Avenue from that point north.

Widening Seaview Avenue would allow for a smoother ride up Route 1 to the former GE site, which was razed after it officially closed in 2010. That site underwent significant remediation and is now slated for the construction of a new high school, which is funded and preparing for construction.

Just north of the GE site is 400-acre undeveloped parcel called the Lake Success Business Park, which is owned by the DuPont Corporation. Like the GE site, this parcel has also undergone extensive environmental remediation. The site of the Lake Success Business Park served as a military testing site during World War II. The piece of land is one of the biggest undeveloped parcels along the Northeast Corridor's rail line. Currently, there is no direct access to the parcel from Bridgeport; the only way to access it is through Stratford. The work relative to Barnum Station coupled with the widening of Seaview Avenue will connect the city and transportation options to the land, which presents an opportunity for remediation, private investment, and jobs.

## **Railroad Underpasses**

Train track underpasses present a unique obstacle for car traffic throughout the city because they are so low. There are problems with clearance at Seaview and Howard Avenues among other streets, and the underpasses make it hard for cars and trucks to connect from I-95 to major employment centers in the city. The tracks are built atop of concrete walls approximately 12-feet in height, and for taller vehicles to pass, either the roadways need to be lowered or the tracks need to be raised.

Work was recently completed on the railroad underpass on Fairfield Avenue, just off the Fairfield Ave exit. Fairfield Avenue was lowered and widened to ease passage under the tracks there. The project solved what had been a significant traffic bottleneck.

The cost of alleviating traffic flow at select streets—like Park and Wordin Avenues, which are both heavily traveled—is significant, as doing so necessitates lowering the road. Additionally, because Bridgeport is a coastal city, construction projects must incorporate a pumping system. Upon lowering the road, the underpass must be widened, and braces must be built to counterbalance the wider road.

## **Converting One-way Streets to Two-way Streets**

Businesses along many wide, one-way streets cited the width of the streets and the speed at which cars pass as reasons for struggling retail sales. Owners have suggested turning a couple of major one-way streets back into two-way streets. Historically, Fairfield Avenue and State Street both were two-way streets running west of the city. Stratford and Connecticut Avenues, which are east of Steelpointe Harbor and downtown, respectively, both also used to be two-way streets.

During the 1960s and 1970s, transportation planning embraced the idea of “rationalizing” transportation, by turning two-way streets into wider one-way streets. The intention was to make traffic flow quickly in an orderly fashion. These plans eliminated cars parked on the side of the street and generally afforded more service to the car and transportation speed.

While this plan did yield quicker traffic flow, it also harmed economic vitality. As opposed to encouraging foot traffic and walkability, these redesigned roads became what they were designed to be—roads that you pass through. Businesses on the East End in particular have suffered economically at least in part because of the bias towards speed and traffic flow. Some small business owners noted that “one way streets are the kiss of death” for retail.

## **Preparing for the Next Sandy**

Superstorm Sandy remains front of mind for Bridgeport commuters and residents. A lot of the areas south of I-95 are filled-in swamps and tidal areas. If your roads are underwater, getting around can be dangerous if not nearly impossible, and residents want to prepare for, rather than simply react to, the next storm.

Last year, Bridgeport joined select group of cities across the country that received money to prepare for the next superstorm. The large grant—\$35 million— will be administered by the Connecticut Department of Housing. The plan includes projects that will create berms, raise roadways, and make low-lying areas more flood resilient. The grant, which I was proud to help secure, will focus on the South End, where the University of Bridgeport and a number of developments are particularly vulnerable to a



storm. The grants will also be used to design streets that provide safe, comfortable, and convenient access to schools, stores, and jobs.

## **Lafayette Boulevard**

Lafayette Boulevard runs from Exit 25, which is the main downtown Bridgeport exit from I-95, to an on- and off-ramp at Route 8. It's less than a mile away from where Route 8 meets I-95, and Lafayette Boulevard runs parallel to Route 8 to the east of the expressway.

The boulevard comes to a circle as it reaches its northern end near exit 2 on Route 8. The circle creates unnecessary delays and makes getting to and from Route 8 more difficult. Straightening the boulevard and continuing the two lanes and a median would improve access to Route 8's on- and off-ramps, and would improve the congestion between I-95 and Route 8 on this small stretch of the boulevard. The realignment of the Boulevard would also create additional developable land downtown. This improvement would also better connect Route 8 to Housatonic Community College and the commercial areas nearby. Bottlenecks that arise from the state-owned parking garage right next to the college would also be relieved. State funds have been approved for this project.

## **Railroad Avenue Bike Lanes**

Railroad Avenue is a lightly trafficked road that runs on each side of the elevated railway parallel to I-95. For most of its length, the street is one-way going east on the south side of the track and one-way going west on the north side of the track.

Some bike enthusiasts suggested encouraging cyclists to take advantage of the underutilized road to connect Seaside Park to downtown Bridgeport. Bike lanes could also help connect to the larger regional bike network, known as the Pequonnock River Trail, which runs through Bridgeport, Trumbull, Monroe and up into Newtown. Some commuters noted that while cycling is little more than an afterthought in conversations about commutes and transportation, bike lanes should be given a closer look, as commuters continue to value proximity to their jobs and recreation more and more each year.

The Ash Creek Pedestrian Bridge, another project funded with state and federal transportation dollars, would connect Black Rock to the Fairfield Metro Rail station via a bike and pedestrian bridge over Ash Creek.

## **Bridgeport Ferry to Port Jefferson**

Some residents and commuters use the Bridgeport's Port Jefferson ferry connection to avoid traveling through New York City to get to Long Island. The Port Jefferson route is one of the most profitable ferry routes in the country, running all year and all the time.

The ferry has been located downtown for many years, and the ferry's accessibility is affected by the railroad overpasses, which make the ferry service a bit cut off from traffic. The site for the ferry is also constrained in terms of the size of the land it operates on. The Bridgeport & Port Jefferson Steamboat Company, which operates the service, has purchased a site across the harbor on the East End for its new home. The company also plans to move its administrative offices there from Port Jefferson as part of the expansion, and this move will result in jobs and economic development. The ferry's new location will be farther out near the entrance of the sound, making it easier to maneuver and dock ships while shortening the crossing time of boats by about 15 minutes. A number of permits still need to be issued for the project to move forward, but the project has also seen significant private investment.