



## It's All About Housing

Whether by car, by train or on a bike, the reason we must commute is that, most often, we don't live where we work. So any discussion of our transportation problems must include an understanding of our housing crisis in this area.

A [recent report](#) showed that housing in lower Fairfield County is the most expensive in the nation. You need an income of \$70,000 just to afford a two bedroom apartment in the Stamford – Norwalk corridor.

So, people who come to work here can only afford to live further afield. Their daily drives / rides contribute to our congestion. The solution? More affordable housing!

A recent [conference](#) sponsored by SWRPA held some startling examples in that poster-boy of affluence, Greenwich. This 67 square mile city of 61,000 has 5545 town employees... teachers, cops, firefighters and the like. However, 67% of those workers don't live in Greenwich, but commute daily from Danbury, Bridgeport, Westchester and even Long Island.

They spend an average of 103 minutes per day just getting to and from work, paying more than \$2000 a year for gas. Combined, they add 15,000 tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, just by their commuting.

In a city where the median home price is \$2 million, the average Greenwich city worker makes \$65,000. And because these teachers, civil servants and such have to come so far, they have to be paid more. The average teacher in Greenwich earns \$12,338 a year more than their counterparts elsewhere in the state. These higher wages cost city taxpayers almost \$19 million a year. But their larger paychecks come at the cost of lost time and expense on the road.

The Greenwich schools spend \$10,000 to \$15,000 recruiting and training each new teacher. But after five years of commuting (75% of the 912 teachers don't live in Greenwich), they burn out, leave and find jobs elsewhere. Between 1998 and 2007, 581

teachers left Greenwich for reasons other than retirement and 81% of them had less than eight years on the job.

EMS workers in Greenwich have it even worse, averaging 151 minutes (2 ½ hours!) commute time. Just how fresh and ready for life-saving work do you think you'd be with a commute like that?

Greenwich is not unique. All of the towns on "the Gold Coast" rely on importing personnel from far afield. Schools in Darien often announce "snow days" not because its roads are impassable, but because teachers can't drive through the snows farther north from communities like Danbury where can afford to live.

And what about the people that bag your groceries, clean your home or pump your gas? Where do you think they live? Just drive the Boston Post Road some morning and you'll see them waiting for the bus.

Fairfield County has its own "migrant workers". We couldn't live with out them, but apparently we don't want to live with them. Just listen to the local debates about adding "affordable housing" in these affluent towns. Whether because of their nationality or economic status, the expressed aversion to "those people" living in "our" towns is clearly xenophobic if not racist.

So how do we solve our transportation problems? Well, one solution is clearly related to affordable housing. Allow folks to live closer to their jobs and they won't have to be in that car in front of you on I-95 or the Merritt at rush hour.



*JIM CAMERON has been a Darien resident for 18 years. He is Chairman of the Metro-North Commuter Council, a member of the Coastal Corridor TIA and the Darien RTM, but the opinions expressed here are his alone. Reach Jim Cameron at [jim@camcomm.com](mailto:jim@camcomm.com) or [www.trainweb.org/ct](http://www.trainweb.org/ct)*