

# How driving on the I-84 shoulder could improve Danbury congestion without widening Mill Plain Road

By [Rob Ryser](#), Staff Writer

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DANBURY — The bad news is Connecticut has no plans to reconfigure [Interstate 84's](#) Exit 2 to reduce rush-hour backups on [Mill Plain Road](#) as part of the state [Department of Transportation's](#) [grand strategy](#) to reengineer the highway in [Danbury](#).

The good news is that Exit 2's congestion would be relieved without reconfiguring if a short-term plan to create a shoulder-driving option for the highway does its job.

“A lot of the congestion on Mill Plain Road is bypass traffic,” said Neil Patel, principal engineer for the costly and long-term [I-84 improvement project](#). “With the improvements of the dynamic lane, we’ll see a (reduction) of that (bypass) traffic.”



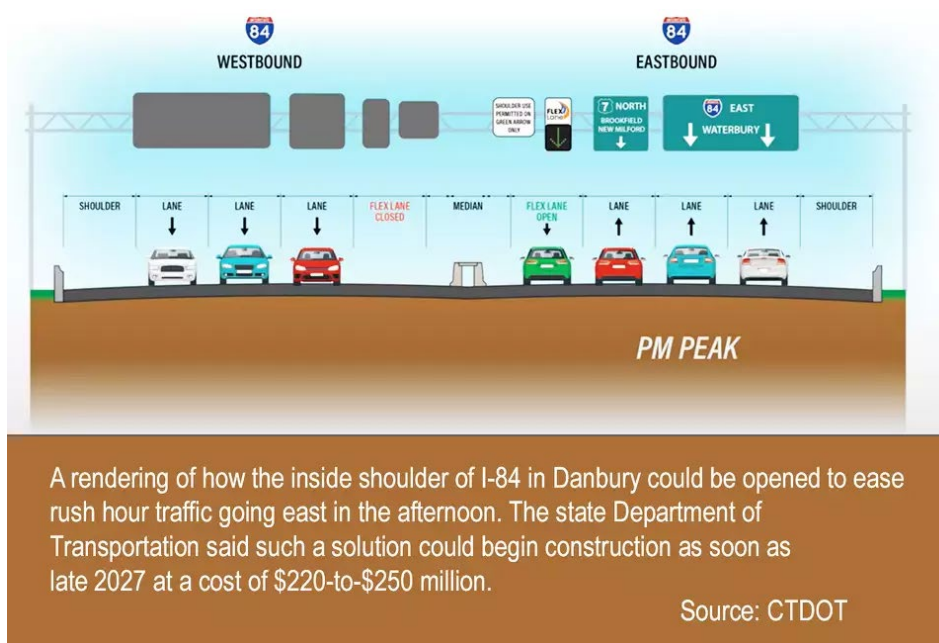
***Traffic flows along I-84 westbound at Exit 7 in Danbury, Conn., on Thursday, March 20, 2025. CTDOT is considering a plan to allow motorists to drive on the inside shoulder of I-84 during morning and afternoon rush hours between exits 3 and 7.***

***Tyler Sizemore/Hearst Connecticut Media***



A rendering of how the inside shoulder of I-84 in Danbury could be opened to reduce rush hour congestion. Note that on the right, heavy westbound traffic is using the shoulder. On the left, since traffic is lighter, the shoulder is closed.

Source CTDOT



**The Connecticut DOT is investigating several congestion-reducing solutions for Interstate 84 in Danbury while the larger project of improving the highway continues to be discussed. One idea is to open the left shoulder of I-84 when there's congestion between exits 3 and 7.**

**Connecticut Department of Transportation**

By “dynamic lane” Patel is referring to a [\\$200 million plan](#) that could begin construction in early 2028 to allow driving on the inside shoulder of I-84 between exits 3 and 7 during highway backups.

The shoulder lane, which would revert to a shoulder once the congestion cleared up, is among a handful of [short-term projects](#) to ease highway backups and related traffic jams at city exits that will be discussed during a meeting on Thursday in Danbury.

The DOT’s overall plan to straighten and widen I-84 is still a decade away from beginning construction and is expected to cost between \$3 billion and \$4 billion. The expected completion date is [in the 2040s](#).

“These are mega-projects that take time to get through the environmental review and the permitting and the construction,” Patel said.

### **More Information**

A I-84 Danbury project meeting, which is open to the public, is planned for 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday at Student Center Room 202 at Western Connecticut State University’s downtown campus, 181 White St.

The project has taken so long to plan and execute because it has grown to involve more than just I-84, which carries a daily average of up to 120,000 vehicles both ways between exits 3 and 7, Patel said this week.

“In 2018 and 2019 we pivoted ... and took a step back, taking a look at the needs of the corridor as a whole and not just the highway,” Patel said about a project that the DOT has been [studying since 2000](#). “The scope expanded.”

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The news comes eight years after then-Gov. Dannel Malloy announced [planning had begun](#) to rebuild I-84 between exits 3 and 8 in Danbury to “improve safety, increase capacity and improve operations and access to the highway.” Construction was expected to start by 2022. The project cost: \$640 million.

Today, the project extends from the New York state line to the Exit 8 interchange and includes side proposals to improve traffic patterns in [downtown Danbury](#) at Exit 5, to streamline traffic in the [Danbury Hospital](#) corridor at Exit 6, and simplify connections on Newtown Road at Exit 8, among other side proposals.

The DOT's Kevin Burnham said he understands the frustration among some in Danbury who are eager to see an end to a decades-old problem.

"Not everything about the I-84 project is long range," said Burnham, the I-84 project manager. "People may be concerned about when everything gets done, but a lot of things are going into design right now, such as the dynamic lane use and other breakout projects, that will have a more immediate impact. Those things are going to start reducing congestion in the near term."

The shoulder-driving option, once built, would be the [first of its kind in Connecticut](#). The state DOT has been looking for guidance at models in Michigan, Wisconsin and Ohio, where similar lanes are in use.

The challenge is making the concept work "in our unique situation" Burnham said.

"We want to get it right the first time," he said. "This might be something that we use elsewhere."

**[Rob Ryser](#)**

Reporter

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