



Peter Casolino/Register photos

The state and Project Serve are rebuilding all 23 rest stops in Connecticut, such as the one on Interstate 95 south in Milford.

## New rest stops lack thought, design standards, beauty

**C**ASTING negative aesthetic judgment on highway rest stops might seem like clubbing baby seals. But, consider the fact that tens of millions of dollars were spent on two new rest stops on Interstate 95 in Milford, and Connecticut had all the cards to determine the nature of the development.

The new Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge could have been a non-event, or worse, an eyesore, but, thank goodness, care has been taken to make it a point of pride.

Not so for these roadside disappointments.

The Milford rest stops were built as part of the state's partnership with a company called Project Serve to rebuild all 23 rest stops in Connecticut. Despite their shiny newness, the Milford service plazas have all the charm and appeal of the most garish strip mall on nearby Route 1.

Crudely detailed, awkwardly-formed, they are aesthetically deaf, dumb and blind to either a comforting past or an invigorating future. These buildings offer thin "Arts and Crafts" assemblages of stock components as dumbed-down park architecture.

Adding disingenuousness to clumsy aesthetics, solar panels are slapped upon the roofs for the fuel pumps in an attempt to create some form of "in the moment" relevancy to a crude retail-driven environment.

It may be that those photovoltaic panels are a politically correct necessity, but the irony of fossil fuels being pumped under icons of "sustainable design" is unavoidable.

The grotesque signage pushed into our view make the bland architecture an enabler for ugliness. Given every product and service offered on I-95 is a virtual monopoly for the interstate traveler, the signs' necessity seems absurd.

It did not have to be this way. The state controlled these sites and could have imposed some aesthetic standards for their development. It could have written the rules that detoxed the signage and made these buildings more than tacky boxes. But that did not happen, and we see the results, which look no better at 55 mph than they do in repose.

Given that the new rest stops were conceived during the first decade of the 21st century, these sad manifestations of our cash'n'carry culture may be depressingly appropriate.

Like so many other buildings built during the last decade's building boom, cost and content were far less important than instant gratification. Just as McMansions carpet-bombed our suburbs to the great profit of their builders, these tacky buildings reflect the dark side of the American dream.

A free market economy means being able to drive where you want, when you want and the freedom to own an electric car or use public transit or just stay home. Somewhere along the way, the state of Connecticut assumed no one cares about what we see as long as the cash flow goes the right way.

What we build reflects what we value. It's depressing to think that millions of out-of-state drivers assume the Milford rest stops reflect any value but ignorant expediency.



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The newly renovated rest stop signs on Interstate 95 south in Milford.