

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Bad Year Shaping Up for NJ Pedestrians

New Jersey bicyclist and pedestrian deaths are up significantly in the first five months of 2006, compared to the same period last year.

As of June 5th, **69 pedestrians and cyclists have been killed in New Jersey traffic crashes**, compared to 55 in 2005, a 25 percent increase. The 2006 figures include the tragic May deaths of Vanessa and Hector Montes, 5 and 2-years old respectively, who were killed by a hit-and-run driver while crossing the street near their Elizabeth home.

Despite a pledge by former Governor Christine Whitman to halve pedestrian fatalities, the state has made **little progress toward this goal**. Annual bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities have hovered around 170 since the 1990s; if fatalities continue apace for the remainder of the year, 2006 will be the deadliest for cyclists and pedestrians in more than a decade.

Building more bike routes and sidewalks, providing more crosswalks, implementing traffic calming measures to slow speeding traffic and getting a lot more serious about traffic law enforcement can help lower fatalities. Many New Jersey cities have over-engineered streets that encourage speeding and create very tough pedestrian conditions.

Regarding infrastructure, the DOT's 2007 capital program recognizes the need for more projects, and significantly increases bike/ped funding to more than \$33 million in FY 2007 (though this represents only a slight uptick in the *share* of total funding going to bike/ped projects because of capital program expansion).

A 2005 study by the Tri-State Campaign showed high demand for such project funding by New Jersey towns and cities, but relatively low state funding in the area (see *MTR #499*).

Yet, **state funding** for bicycle and pedestrian projects drops to **zero in 2007**, and one-time Congressional earmarks account for more than a third of funding. If this "green pork" can't be secured for each year of the state capital program, New Jersey's bike/ped program will be left with a big hole to fill at a time when both municipal demand and the need on the street, demonstrated in a growing fatality toll, is very high. The state will have to do significantly more on a sustained basis to get anywhere near Governor Whitman's original goal. ❖

Corzine, Kolluri Talk Transit Village Changes

In *MTR #530*, we reported on Secaucus' efforts to become the first state-designated transit village with an affordable housing component. The following week, both Governor Corzine and NJDOT Commissioner Kolluri stated that Secaucus won't be alone because all **new transit villages** will be required to have an **affordable housing** plan.

"I think it is time to consider affordable housing as a primary consideration, not a secondary concern of the approval process" Kolluri said at a transit village symposium sponsored by the Voorhees Transportation Center. "The governor is committed to that, and I am committed to that."

Applicants for the current fiscal year will not be affected by the policy change.

Kolluri also announced that future applications will be evaluated on a rolling basis, meaning each application will be evaluated as municipalities submit them. Currently, all applications are evaluated at the same time and new villages announced once a year. This creates a climate where towns feel they are competing with each other and politics may play a role in determining which applicants earn the official state designation. ❖

"Garden Swap" Promises Penn Station Renewal

In a city filled with the prospect of uncounted large building projects and attendant debates, the most interesting is suddenly the concept of swapping the site of Madison Square Garden for a rebuilt Penn Station and intensified development around an expanded transit hub.

Constructing a new Penn Station on the Garden site would correct one of the most egregious New York City development mistakes of the 20th Century, and help reinforce the 21st Century expansion of the region's commuter rail network around projects such as the Trans-Hudson Express tunnel, which will significantly increase New Jersey Transit capacity into western Midtown, and LIRR East Side Access, which could free up enough capacity in Penn Station to allow "west side access" by some Metro-North trains via Amtrak's west side line and Hell Gate Bridge/Sunnyside routes (see next story).

The area around West 34th Street also curiously continues to feature some **relatively low-value land**

uses given the district's infrastructure. Of all the places to plan big NYC projects, it is probably the best suited of all of those currently in play.

Two real estate giants – Related Companies and Vornado Realty – are pushing the plan. Vornado owns a lot of properties in the immediate district. The Garden would be moved to 9th Avenue, while office buildings would rise on its 8th Avenue site above a grand new Penn Station. The idea is already encountering a variety of cross-currents, as described in recent *NY Observer* and *NY Sun* articles:

- The Pataki administration is impatient to begin the transformation of the Farley post office building west of 8th Avenue into the planned extension of Penn Station, without revising the plan to accommodate the new concept. The Related/Vornado plan would make train station areas west and east of 8th Avenue complementary, but might demolish part of Farley to locate the Garden on the western end of that block. Governor Pataki will leave office in January, and has been unable over 12 years to sufficiently knock bureaucratic and political heads to achieve more progress on the Farley plan.
- Preservationists seem set to oppose any destruction of Farley in favor of a new Madison Square Garden. It is possible the Garden could be located on the other side of 9th Avenue, but that would open up the issue of development rights above Penn Station rail tracks and the cost of constructing a new platform to bear the building.
- Garden executives say they will not move unless they are able to bring their lucrative property tax exemption with them, according to the *Observer*.
- **Who will pay** for the new Penn Station east of 8th Avenue is a big, unresolved question.
- Amtrak owns the land and underground rights beneath Penn Station and the Garden, introducing yet more complexity to any negotiation over the train station and development above rail tracks.

We would add, from a transportation perspective, that any big development and train station plan will need to address the area's pedestrian capacity problem. Today, walking on 8th Avenue between 34th and 42nd Streets is a chore at almost any day-time hour, while train commuters completely swamp 7th Avenue's sidewalks during rush periods, forcing many pedestrians into the avenue itself. It is past time to re-tip the balance of street space back to the pedestrian traffic generated by midtown's big transit stations. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Tappan Zee Transit Costs

In the most recent *MTR*, we reported ridership estimates from the official Tappan Zee corridor alternatives analysis study. Here we show some of the preliminary capital and operating costs.

Unsurprisingly, full east-west bus rapid transit is the least expensive option, with even a lower operat-

	Capital cost (millions)	O & M cost (millions)	Annual cost ** (millions)	Net cost/ rider
Full corridor commuter rail (CR)	7,434	52	398	18
East-west light rail (LR)*	3,040	41	183	18
East-west bus rapid transit (BRT)	2,100	30	128	5
Rockland-Manhattan-CR; east-west BRT*	5,942	64	341	13
Manhattan bound CR; east-west light rail *	7,628	83	438	21
Manhattan bound CR; LR in Westchester	5,537	63	321	14
Manhattan bound CR; BRT in Westchester	5,015	52	285	10

* Option eliminated from EIS consideration

** Operating and maintenance (O&M) figures are annual.

** Annual cost = annual payment to amortize 50-year loan at 5% interest for capital cost + yearly operating and maintenance.

*** Net cost per rider divides estimated ridership by annual cost less fare revenue. The latter ranges from \$63 to \$70 million annually for options with Manhattan-destined commuter rail but falls to \$32 million for east-west BRT and \$20 million for east-west light rail.

ing cost than comparable light rail service. Commuter rail between Rockland and Manhattan along with east-west light rail had the highest overall construction cost. Though not shown directly in our table, commuter rail options reap relatively high fare revenue, but that is largely offset by high capital costs. It is possible that future detailed BRT

plans in the future will show higher construction costs — it is unclear at this stage, for instance, what types of technological and infrastructural elements would be needed for corridor rapid bus service. Specially designed stations, real time data technology or tunneled routes in White Plains would likely

NYC Rapid Bus Planning on an M-34 Pace

Bus rapid transit (BRT) won't be coming to NYC streets **until 2008 at best**, NYC Transit and New York City officials announced at recent public meetings, and may not be very rapid after all, according to press statements by NYC Transit.

If service actually begins in 2008, it will be four years after the project began, and seven years after Mayor Bloomberg promised "surface subways" along 1st and 2nd Avenues as part of his first campaign platform.

Like the NYC DOT's decade-long effort to revise truck routes in the city, the BRT effort could end up as another major signal that **transportation planning** in New York is in need of **major institutional overhaul**, on a par with Mayor Bloomberg's first-term abolition of the Board of Education.

The big BRT question is: what are they doing? An advantage of BRT is that it is relatively easy to implement, compared to other types of rapid transit. While the recent round of meetings presented more detail about what rapid bus service would look like on selected routes, the agencies have taken the route selection process to an extreme level of bureaucratic delay. Does anyone disagree that the East Side of Manhattan is a clear candidate? Don't NYC Transit and DOT have the expertise to have recommended one key route in each of the other boroughs two or more years ago?

At this point, it may be that the agencies are extending the implementation date beyond the span of Mayor Bloomberg's term of office, so that current leadership won't have to deal with implementation. That's a sad contrast to **Los Angeles**, for example, where the **mayor had BRT up and running in 18 months**. Comments to the *NY Times* about the effort certainly betrayed no sense of urgency or even interest by project principals: Ted Orosz of NYC Transit told the paper that BRT routes would have limited impact, and said his agency "didn't want to oversell" BRT because it was unlikely to speed service more than 10 percent over today's "limited" routes.

Recently distributed materials on potential routes, which are clear and informative, note that pre-boarding fare collection is being considered for certain routes. That seems like an advance from word last winter when Transit seemed to have ruled that measure out. ❖

hike capital costs.

Of those analyzed, three options were eliminated from further consideration — the options with light rail and Manhattan-bound commuter rail with full corridor bus rapid transit.

It is noteworthy interesting that the option with the highest ridership, full east-west BRT with a commuter rail link to Manhattan, was eliminated from further study, even though it shows **significantly lower net costs per rider** than an option that made the cut — full corridor commuter rail.

Numbers from the alternatives analysis are likely to change as project designs, impacts, ridership, and other data become more detailed in the EIS. ❖

City Big on LIRR-Downtown Project

NYC Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff provided at least one glimpse into the contents of the strategic plan his office is reportedly developing for the city's future. At a recent forum on airport capacity and access, Doctoroff decried the "two hour" trip from lower Manhattan to JFK Airport, and strongly endorsed the downtown LIRR connection that business groups have promoted as part of lower Manhattan reconstruction.

But so far, **no study has shown that that project will attract appreciable ridership** — there appear to be numerous better investments for public transportation resources around the city.

Unfortunately, a *NY Times* reporter did not challenge Doctoroff's "two hours" assertion. Travel time from lower Manhattan to JFK by subway, LIRR and JFK AirTrain is significantly faster for someone who knows his or her way around, or is simply assertive in asking directions.

NYU's Mitchell Moss said the city should have "double-decked the Van Wyck Expressway 30 years ago," according to the *NY Times*. ❖

Newark Light Rail Nears Service

A mayor is not the only thing new that Newark will see this summer. NJ Transit will begin service on a **new light rail line connecting Penn and Broad Street Stations**, possibly in July. The route is mainly in-street, but uses tunnels to reach Penn Station. It will create a good transit link for commuters from the Montclair-Boonton and Morris & Essex commuter rail lines, which do not travel through Penn Station, to downtown Newark, as well as better connect downtown to parts of the North Ward. The line has stops at the city's minor league baseball stadium and the Performing Arts Center, and the city hopes it will help anchor downtown residential development.

An NJ Transit spokesperson told the Star-Ledger the line would attract about 2,000 daily riders initially. Future ridership may depend on additional

transit investment in the city. The line is designed so that it could provide through service on the Newark City Subway line, which runs from Penn Station generally northwesterly past Branch Brook Park and into Bloomfield. The new line was also initially conceived as segment of a light rail line that would connect Midtown Elizabeth to Newark Penn Station via Newark Airport. That project will have to compete in Trenton with a host of demands for commuter rail extensions. We suspect that the best bang for New Jersey's mass transit bucks will be in additional projects that serve urban centers. ❖

Infrastructure Inflation

Metro Magazine recently reported that mass transit agencies are experiencing significant capital project cost increases due to inflation in prices of construction materials. The article cites U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indices that show a construction material hike of 12.5% in 2005, versus an average of 1.8% increase in prior years. It attributes the spike to China's steadily rising pressure on supplies of steel and other materials, and post-Hurricane reconstruction in the U.S. southeast. It said NJ Transit was reporting project cost increases in the range of 20-35% while other U.S. agencies are delaying projects to seek additional capital funding. ❖

NJ Senate Panel Delays on Xanadu Roads

The Senate Transportation Committee tabled legislation that would have used 60% of sales tax revenue generated by the Meadowland Xanadu megamall to **widen Routes 17 and 3**.

The legislation is sponsored by Bergen County Democratic Senators Paul Sarlo and Joseph Coniglio. Opposition to it threatened from all corners — environmentalists, transportation reformers, residents of south Bergen municipalities and representatives of Hartz Mountain, a rival developer, were all lining up to speak against the legislation.

Coniglio's and Sarlo's basic idea—to use development-generated revenues for needed infrastructure is perfectly reasonable, but many are looking for a more balanced and comprehensive approach to sports complex transportation planning (*MTR* #498). The Senators would do well to call for an area-wide study emphasizing mass transit as much as possible.

In other action, the panel also advanced to the Senate floor a proposed amendment to the state constitution which would dedicate the 1.5 cents of the state gas tax that now flows to the general fund to the NJ Transportation Trust Fund. ❖

CALENDAR

June 20, 3:00pm & 6:30pm. NYMTC Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) listening session. Staten Island Borough Hall, 10 Richmond Terrace, 1st Floor Conference Room, Staten Island. 718-482-4562.

June 20, 4:00-5:30pm and 6:00-8:00pm. NYMTC TIP solicitation workshop for New York City. NYC Dept. of City Planning, 22 Reade Street, Spector Hall, Manhattan. 845-431-5768.

June 20, 7:30pm. Connecticut DOT Public Transportation Commission hearing on public transportation services. Derby Town Hall, Aldermanic Chambers, 1 Elizabeth Street, Derby CT. 860-594-2800.

June 21, 12:00pm. NYMTC Brown Bag Presentation: "Bus Use of Highway Shoulders" with presentation by Aaron Isaacs, former planner for the Twin Cities Metro Transit. NYMTC, Lesperance Conference Room, 199 Water Street, 22nd Floor, Manhattan. RSVP to Gretchen Riederer, 212-383-7258 or griederer@dot.state.ny.us.

June 22, 12:00-2:00pm. New York City Transit Riders Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

June 22, 3:00pm & 6:30pm. NYMTC Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) listening session. Nassau County Legislative Chamber, 1 West Street, 5th Floor, Mineola NY. 631-952-6112.

June 27, 8:00-10:00am. Citizens Budget Commission breakfast forum: "How to Balance the MTA's Budget." Metrazur Restaurant, Grand Central Terminal, East Balcony, Manhattan. RSVP to Fondia Thompson, fthompson@cbcny.org or 212-279-2605 x310.

June 27, 10:00am & 6:30pm. NYMTC Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) listening session. NYMTC, 199 Water Street, 22nd Floor, Manhattan. 718-482-4562.

[More calendar items at www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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Contributing: Michelle Ernst, Damien Newton Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kate Slevin

350 West 31st Street #802, New York, NY 10001 tel. 212-268-7474 fax 212-268-7333 tstc@tstc.org www.tstc.org