

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Mayor Calls for Rail Freight Tunnel, NYC Port Development

Mayor Giuliani offered a big surprise in his State of the City speech on Tuesday, calling for construction of the cross-harbor rail freight tunnel that has been discussed for most of the 20th Century but never implemented. The proposal marks a departure for the Mayor, who has focused his administration's attention more on crime and other social issues than on the city's physical workings. But the rail tunnel issue is as good a place for the Mayor to launch a big infrastructure initiative. It would affect the way transportation works in our region more than any other project seriously proposed in many years, promises major transportation and environmental benefits, and dovetails with the Mayor's interest in improving the city's business climate (and his long-running contention that the Port Authority serves no useful purpose).

In the address, the Mayor said, "Today I am announcing that the City of New York will complete the job the Port Authority was supposed to do 76 years ago. We are committing the necessary resources to determine where to build a freight rail tunnel between New York and New Jersey. And we are committing the necessary resources to determine where to locate a port to go with it."

Before Tuesday, revival of rail cargo access east of the Hudson had been championed in this decade by Congressman Jerrold Nadler, who argues that the decline of the shipping industry has undermined New York City's economic foundations, and that **NYC's status as the nation's most truck-dependent big city in the country** has increased the cost of doing business, raised infrastructure costs and hurt the quality of life. The cross-harbor rail tunnel could connect deep water parts of the harbor — which could be redeveloped into intermodal port facilities — to major railroad lines west of the Hudson and the harbor (these issues are described at some length in *Mobilizing the Region* #109 — Dec. 20). New York City estimates that the rail tunnel could save up to 870,000 cross-Hudson truck trips annually.

The Mayor's proposal was based on studies of the issues carried out over the past few years by the NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC). Nadler and the

Mayor worked to initiate the analyses. Nadler and Senator Daniel Moynihan attended the speech — both were acknowledged by the Mayor for their help securing federal financing for projects important to the city.

In news reports on Wednesday, Governor Pataki's response to the proposal was indeed one of caution over funding such a large project. In fairness, it appears he was asked about the project on the run and without a chance to examine it at any length. The EDC studies outline several financing options for the project, including government financing and user-fees.



One possible source of government funding would be the **transfer of resources slated for highway widening projects** in New York State's capital budget. Routes that could see considerable relief from truck traffic if the rail tunnel is built include the Staten Island Expressway, the Cross-Bronx Expressway and the NYC portion of the Long Island Expressway, all of which are being considered for expansion by the State DOT. At the very least, studies for expanding these roads need to **include the development of the rail tunnel and the diversion of truck traffic in planning scenarios** to see whether their expansion alongside the rail tunnel would be redundant. This would take place automatically if transportation planning functioned at all in the downstate NY region, but it will probably only happen via concerted pressure on highway planners. Hopefully, the Mayor and Governor, cognizant of finite resources, will take the next step and move the funds available for new transportation capacity where it makes the most sense — rail projects.

NJ freight interests contacted about the Mayor's proposal by the *Star Ledger* were quick to pour cold water on the freight tunnel and port ideas, citing excess port capacity on the NJ side of the harbor, the cost of developing a modern intermodal port and small cargo volumes presently trucked east from the NJ port.

Marlin on the Block?

Though Port Authority officials deny it, the Jan. 20 *NY Observer* cites sources in Albany who say Port Authority Director George Marlin will soon be fired as part of Gov. Pataki's mid-term shake up.

Big Kick Off for NJ Save ISTE A Campaign

A large public meeting room in Newark packed with over 200 state legislators, business leaders, county officials, union delegates, mayors and transportation agency heads listened to Senators Lautenberg and Torricelli, Congressmen Franks, Menendez and Pascrell, NJ Transportation Commissioner John Haley and NJ Alliance for Action leaders issue **an organizing call to defend ISTE A** Monday morning. The meeting had been called by the Alliance for Action, a coalition of 500 business, labor, government and other organizations, and Congressman Bob Franks. In December., NJ Governor Christine Whitman signed a letter to then-U.S. Transportation Secretary Pena with governors of 15 other states, calling for “[reauthorization of] ISTE A without significant change.”

All of the Congressional officials present vowed to fight hard to preserve ISTE A and the flow of federal transportation dollars to NJ. Torricelli’s remarks provided the best overview. He said the U.S. has no urban policy, but under ISTE A, it had crafted a transportation policy to fill the gap, and that the economic potential of older centers like Newark could be unlocked via smart investments in public transit projects. He noted that no one in the southern and western STEP-21 coalition of states, which would repeal much of ISTE A and try to return federal dollars to states in proportion to gas tax payments by each state’s motorists, argued against the merits of ISTE A, but on the dollar returns to their states. That, he said, was a repudiation of federalism and the principles that have governed the country since adoption of the U.S. Constitution. Torricelli called for full funding for the **Hudson-Bergen light rail project**, including its extension to Giants Stadium, and for construction of the much discussed **Newark-Elizabeth light rail line**.

As each speaker noted, NJ does well through ISTE A’s allocation formula. According to NJ Transportation Commissioner John Haley, for every transportation dollar NJ sends to Washington, it gets back \$1.12 for highway and \$4.69 for public transit projects. But taking the overall flow of federal revenues and expenditures, NJ only gets 62 cents for every dollar it pays in federal taxes.

Former Congressman Robert Roe, who was instrumental in getting projects like the Hudson-Bergen light rail and the Kearny Connection off the ground with federal funding, also spoke. He departed from the consensus somewhat by stating that **not only dollars, but also the transportation planning principles embodied in ISTE A**, were critical to New Jersey. He specifically cited ISTE A’s metropolitan planning and urban sub-allocation provisions as important to the state’s future. He predicted that skillful horse-trading could mitigate the sectional fight over dividing up federal transportation dollars and

New on the Tri-State Transportation Campaign’s web page this week:

- The list of principles agreed to by northeast and other states opposing radical change to ISTE A.

Feds Say They May Consider Induced Traffic

Compelling evidence that highway expansion creates new traffic is slowly creating a professional consensus around the fact of “induced travel demand.” Still, considerable disagreement remains over the extent of the phenomenon, and over what should be done about it. Kevin Heanue, the Federal Highway Administration’s director of environment and planning, indicated at a panel on capacity expansion and induced travel at the annual meeting of the Transportation Research Board in Washington, DC. Tuesday that an FHWA study of Milwaukee found that traffic created by new highway capacity between 1960 and 1990 can be held responsible for wiping out 8-22% of the time savings the new capacity had afforded.

But earlier, professor Mark Hansen of the University of California summarized his studies of past **highway expansion and traffic growth in California**, which indicating that each 10% increase in highway lane-miles has induced an immediate 2% increase in traffic at the county level, building to a 6% increase within two years. When induced traffic in neighboring counties was counted, Hansen found that traffic growth was even greater at the metropolitan level — 9% for each 10% increase in capacity. Thus, highway-building in California has brought only modest relief to congested corridors and has **largely worsened rather than eased regional gridlock**.

The prestigious U.K. Standing Committee on Trunk Road Assessment reached a similar conclusion in its 1995 report on traffic generation.

Encouragingly, in response to a question from Michael Replogle of the Environmental Defense Fund about FHWA’s modeling guidelines on peak spreading, time of day for travel, and other key parameters involving induced traffic, Heanue said **“Our guidelines have reflected the consensus**. As that changes, we’ll change them.” Presently, the “build/no-build” test used for highway environmental impact statements admits no induced travel effects. Changing this, and the way Clean Air Act clean air/transportation “conformity” rules treat the question, could begin to tip the legal scales more firmly in favor of projects that offer real alternatives to driving, rather than more traffic down the road. Advocacy groups in Washington are seeking further discussion with FHWA on the issue.

(Hansen’s study is summarized in the Fall 1995 *Access*, U.Calif. Transportation Center, 510-643-5454, access@uclink.berkeley.edu. See also MTR #61.)

leave ISTE A generally intact.

Attendees of the forum were asked to endorse a set of ISTE A reauthorization principles that the northeast and allied states have developed. Overall, they amount to the preservation of ISTE A in its current form, with some modifications. The most unfortunate of these is the assertion that Metropolitan Planning Organizations should be self-certifying, rather than under some form of oversight by the federal government.

ATU Releases Cost-Benefit Study of Express Bus Plan

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 726 underlined its proposal to boost Transit Authority express bus service from Staten Island to Manhattan with bus lanes and lower fares, releasing a cost-benefit study the first week of January that says **the TA would break even on the plan.** Lower operating costs and ridership gains would offset losses from fare reduction, according to the paper, "Express to the 21st Century," prepared by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP).

The report says the ATU favors creating a "contra-flow" bus lane on a west-bound lane of the Staten Island Expressway (S.I.E.) in the morning, and on an east-bound lane in the evening. The express buses would also use the newly-extended Gowanus Expressway bus lane. Some way would also have to be found to prioritize bus passage through the Verrazano toll booths — the bridge itself is not congested. **Bus lanes** along this route would have **five times the passenger carrying capacity** of adjacent general purpose highway lanes, and would save taxpayers the cost of having to add capacity to the S.I.E. Time savings from the bus lanes would increase ridership on the buses by over 9%. Interestingly, this figure is more than twice the ridership increase the study attributes to a halving of the express bus fare (from \$4 to \$2), indicating the very large (up to half an hour) travel time savings the lanes are estimated to yield. The study says the overall ridership effect of the ATU plan would be 1 million new express bus trips in the first year. Less time in traffic would also lower Transit Authority operating costs for the buses. It is unclear whether there would be an increase in congestion costs on the off-peak side of the S.I.E., which would lose a lane to the contra-flow bus route.

The ATU proposal also calls for larger express buses, and for using express bus drivers for daytime Manhattan paratransit service, which would further reduce operating costs. In making the case for fare reduction, the study says MTA capital expenditure per capita in Staten Island is only about 15% of what is invested per person in other boroughs. This calculation does not account for NY State DOT capital investments that benefit Staten Island transit riders, like the Gowanus bus lanes, but even adding these would not reduce the disparity much. The ATU says Staten Islanders will not benefit much from the coming end of two-fare transit zones, and that an express bus fare reduction would be proper compensation. Transit Authority officials have retorted that express bus riders were spared much of recent system-wide fare increases.



Last week, the ATU's plan was endorsed by the Staten Island Board of Realtors, a trade and lobbying association with over 1,000 member companies. A spokesperson said more efficient public transit is in Staten Island's economic interest.

ATU Local 726: 718-698-7700

Congestion Pricing in the News'

A Monday *Daily News* editorial slapped the MTA for its plan to force the EZ Pass electronic toll medium onto car commuters by **eliminating discounted token packs** at the end of this month. The *News* foresees huge back-ups in the cash-only lanes at MTA bridges and tunnels, reasoning that drivers won't make the rapid switch to pre-paid EZ Pass accounts. The paper says "**A better way to go is through 'congestion pricing.'**" Meaning, if you travel during rush hour, weekdays from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m., and between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., you'll have to pay more than during off-peak hours...EZ Pass makes congestion pricing possible."

While the *News'* embrace of differential time-of-day tolls is a welcome one, the piece doesn't add up. First, **discounted commuter tokens** or EZ Passes **run against the logic of congestion pricing**, since they make rush-hour car commuting cheaper than incidental bridge crossing. Second, as the *News* writers at once admit and reject, for congestion pricing to work, tokens will have to be phased out in favor of EZ Passes. It's left vague whether the *News* would back a peak period toll premium or only supports off-peak discounts. Reportedly, the request-for-proposals for the MTA pricing study does not limit analysis only to off-peak toll discount policies.

The Jan. 6 *U.S. News & World Report* takes a somewhat more cogent look. *U.S. News* calls the following transportation strategies "more politically palatable than they are effective" at containing mounting national gridlock: building more roads; improving mass transit; developing "smart" cars and highways. **Congestion pricing, on the other hand, could save roadway expansion funds**, provide a stronger incentive to use transit and unclog the roads. Still, the political hurdles of making Americans pay for something they've long gotten for free are big ones. The article points to recent data from the new toll lanes (alongside regular "Freeway" lanes) on Calif. Freeway 91, for signs that some of the barriers are eroding. A recent study found that **users of the toll lanes come from all income brackets.** "For some working parents, a \$2.50 toll is preferable to steep overtime charges for day care. The fast lanes also are popular with independent contractors and other workers who are paid by the job." If the system were public (the 91 Express Toll lanes were built by a private company), the tolls for lower-income commuters could be partially subsidized.

F Y I: The Cost of Driving

More traffic and more crashes on the NJ Turnpike have led the Turnpike Authority to cancel a planned cut in the State Police budget, and give the force a \$1 million increase instead. Overall traffic on the Turnpike grew 2.7% in the first nine months of 1996. Truck traffic was up 3.6%. Turnpike officials now project similar growth for the highway in 1997. Turnpike crashes from Jan. to Nov. increased 4.2% from 1995 to 1996. *Record*

Transportation Culture and Leadership

A British Dept. of Transport "walking working group" charged with promoting foot transportation recommends that Members of Parliament abandon their cars and walk as much as possible. A report by the group says walking in the U.K. has declined in the past decade not only because of rising car ownership, but also "because people see walking as low status." Walking to work in Britain has declined more than one-third since 1986, according to the *Daily Telegraph*.

The group advocates revival of a "walking culture." In addition to its suggestion for MP's, the group's working paper recommends appointment of full-time pedestrian planners and promoters by local governments, re-timing traffic signals to reduce waiting times for walkers and the designation of walking as the priority mode of transport in at least one area of each town.

Leading by example is an important component of efforts to win public support for new transportation priorities and habits. Why should people adopt means of travel the culture perceives as second-rate? Unfortunately, instances of such leadership are few and far between in our

region. In 1991, the Straphangers Campaign and Transportation Alternatives asked NYC agency heads and politicians to pledge to use transit and reduce agency car fleets, in view of the fact that most of their constituents confront the daily challenge of the transit system. A surprising number of City Council members (about half) checked "yes," and minority leader Fred Cerullo even gave up his City car. Today, though, cars in the City Hall parking lot overflow onto the sidewalks. Many others reacted defensively, some explaining in detail why buses and subways were *inconvenient* for *their* daily routines. More recently, NYC Transportation Commissioner Christopher Lynn has been observed by major media at least twice in recent months exhorting community audiences to abandon cars and use "our great subway system," only to leave the meeting in a chauffeured limousine.

Windshield perspective is rife among policy makers. Do most NYC politicians even acknowledge that most city dwellers get around by subway and bus, not in cars? A State Assemblywoman responded to a Dinkins Administration East River bridge toll trial balloon by saying there should always be a "free" way to get between the boroughs and Manhattan. In 1995, a populist City Council member, in whose district about 30% of households have cars, secured 5,000 new parking spaces in the city by having old fire hydrants removed, and called it a "victory for all New Yorkers." On the other hand, a politician who actually gets on the train (or bus, or his or her feet) may have an epiphany. Senator Al D'Amato traveled from midtown Manhattan to a Yankee playoff game last fall, and the next week told the NY construction industry there was no need to move Yankee Stadium: "This nonsense about you have to have a car to get there [Yankee Stadium] is ridiculous...Let's put the money into mass transportation. You will bring millions of people into the city."

CALENDAR

JAN 21 6-8 PM Manhattan East Side transit study presentation. Manhattan Boro President Ruth Messinger's office, 1 Centre Street, 19th floor. Call 718-694-5164.

JAN 23 NOON NYC Transit Riders Council. East Side Transit Alternatives presentation rescheduled (See Feb. 6) 718-694-5164.

FEBRUARY

FEB 6 NOON MTA Permanent Citizens Advisory Council. Joint presentation on major NYC transit studies: LIRR E. Side Access, E. Side Transit Alternatives, Access to Region's Core. 5th floor board room, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

FEB 26 5:30 PM Exhibit and presentation: "Security Issues Relating to Telecommuting." 331 Madison Ave., 6th floor, Manhattan. Call 212-661-7111.

APRIL

APR 8 RPA's 7th Annual Regional Assembly: "The Road to Recovery." NY Sheraton Hotel & Towers, 7th Ave. & 52nd St. 212-785-8000.

APR 11 "Planning for Sustainable Cities: Taming the Auto." w/ T.A.'s John Kaehny. Planners Network Forum. 295 Lafayette St., Manhattan. Call 718-636-3461.

APR 16 - 17 TransAction 1997. NJ State Transportation Conference. Tropicana Hotel / Casino, Atlantic City, NJ. 201-829-8101.

Mobilizing the Region is a weekly publication of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, available by fax or electronic mail. We invite submissions, calendar items and names of additional recipients from readers. The Campaign was formed in 1993 by 14 leading public interest organizations dedicated to restructuring transportation policy, infrastructure and choices to promote environmental health and sustainability, economic efficiency and social equity in the 32-county region in and surrounding New York City, from Trenton to Hartford. We invite organizations that agree with our general orientation to join the Campaign as affiliates.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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