

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 117

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NEWS

Rowland: Commuter Rail Likely to Survive

The *New Haven Register* reported Thursday that Governor Rowland had “**conceded defeat**” on his **plan to end commuter rail service** on Shore Line East and Metro-North’s Waterbury and Danbury lines. In an interview with the paper, Rowland had said he was certain the Legislature would ensure that the state budget included support for the rail service.

Ironically, Rowland said that **traffic congestion was south-central Connecticut’s biggest problem**, but insisted his plan to wipe out the rail lines and raise fares on surviving transit did not conflict with other efforts to ease congestion. “Public transportation is good public policy,” said State Rep. Robert Landino, whose district includes Shore Line East stops. He told the *Register* the Governor’s complaining about high transit subsidies while identifying traffic as a top issue made no sense.

Rowland backtracked somewhat in press reports Friday, saying **he had not given up the fight** to eliminate Shore Line East, even though he acknowledges strong opposition to the proposal. “Shore Line East is too expensive to continue operating and the ridership is too low,” Rowland spokesperson Dean Pagani told the *New London Day* Friday. Advocates for continued commuter rail service say **CT DOT mis-figures the subsidy** because it does not account for several million dollars the state receives from the Federal Transit Administration as an incentive for offering the train service. CT could also reduce its Shore Line East costs if a deal being negotiated with Amtrak, which operates the service on contract to the state, is approved by both parties.

In the *Register* interview, Gov. Rowland said he wished “more people would use” Shore Line East. The CT Metro North-Shore Line East Commuter Council responded with a press release calling for **service improvements to attract new riders**. “For once we agree with the Governor,” said Commuter Council Vice Chair Jim Cameron. “We know how to improve ridership — it’s by increasing service. Give [commuters] better service... and they’ll be on the rails instead of the roads. Waterbury riders have only two trains a day in rush hour! Why not extend Shore Line East through to Greenwich? Give drivers on dangerous, congested I-95 an alternative and they’ll take it,” said Cameron.

**Next CT Commuter Rail Council meeting:
Thurs., March 20
Naugatuck Town Hall, 7:00 p.m.**

Campaign to NJ DOT: Fix it First

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign and its New Jersey constituent groups and allies took the “Fix it First” message to the public, releasing its analysis of NJ DOT’s capital budget at a Tuesday press conference. The event received wide print and electronic coverage, including a front page *Trenton Times* piece and stories on the NJ Network and Philadelphia’s Channel 6.

The Campaign’s analysis of the projects in DOT’s draft capital plan shows that **up to 42% of funds** allocated to road projects in 1998 will **support highway capacity expansion**. Campaign members called on the state to dedicate most of these funds to road maintenance, transit projects and local transportation enhancements like improving bicycling and pedestrian environments. Benita Jain of NJPIRG Citizen Lobby, principal organizer of the event, noted that highway capacity expansion is a false solution to traffic congestion: “The past decades of highway expansion have brought us more congestion, sprawl and loss of open spaces.” A growing consensus is emerging in the transportation planning community that **new road capacity will induce additional car trips** and vehicle miles of travel. The discussion today over induced traffic is primarily one of extent. Indeed, the New Jersey Long Range Transportation Plan, adopted by the NJ DOT in *Continued next page*

Free the Buses

The NYC Transit Authority released new summer bus schedules at this week’s Transit Committee meeting. **Anticipating a strong surge in bus ridership** once its free bus-subway transfer policy comes into being this July, the schedule consisted not of the usual litany of service frequency reductions, but instead contained a strong element of **bus service increases** termed “Intermodal Fare Implementation Adjustments” changes **deemed necessary by the pending free transfer policy**. Some types of routes, like cross-town Manhattan buses above, below and through Central Park, will see greater bus frequency almost across the board. Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island schedule changes are also heavily weighted toward service increases. An example is the increase slated for the B41 line (Flatbush Avenue). The change would reduce summer headways on local service from five minutes to 3.5 minutes, for an overall frequency hike of 3.8% (“limited” service would not increase). A series of Bronx bus service reductions will result from introduction of large articulated buses.

Fix it First (from prev. page) 1995, states: "...added capacity may not provide permanent congestion relief if land use policies encourage sprawl development; added highway capacity may generate even more traffic."

Responding to the press, NJ DOT disputed the Campaign's figures. DOT spokesperson Jim Berzok told several major newspapers that only **one-third of DOT capital spending over the next five years would be devoted to highway expansion**. While the Tri-State Campaign believes the numbers are different because of hidden highway expansion costs in the budget, the percentage Berzok offered proved our point, and illustrated that **DOT was missing that point** rather badly. To spend one-third of capital resources on a strategy that the Department admits is self-defeating is obviously bad policy and a misuse of taxpayer resources.



In a letter to the Campaign last week, new NJ Transportation Commissioner John Haley stated that the **highway expansion projects** in the capital plan were necessary to promote economic growth and to get traffic off of local roads, thereby "enhancing communities." The Campaign intends to request the DOT's economic and community analyses of its highway expansion projects.

Joining the Tri-State Campaign groups at the press conference were representatives of the NJ State League of Municipalities and the NJ Chapter of Republicans for Environmental Protection. "NJ DOT has historically shortchanged New Jersey municipalities," said Jon Moran, Senior Legislative Analyst for the League. "Towns and Counties are being stuck with hefty bills to maintain transportation infrastructure and numerous associated services." In 1995, the Campaign released an analysis of NJ roadway transportation spending and revenue (*Crossroads: Highway-Finance Subsidies in New Jersey*) that found that all levels of government in NJ spend over \$700 million more per year than is collected in motorist user fees like gas taxes and vehicle registration charges. The difference is **borne entirely at the local level**, by NJ counties and municipalities. Localities spend \$1.2 billion a year providing roads, but collect only \$200 million directly from drivers; the difference of \$1 billion is paid largely through property taxes.

The Campaign and NJ Environmental Lobby also testified on the high level of highway expansion at legislative hearings last week in Trenton and Hoboken. NJEL argued that reliance on property taxes for local transportation spending causes towns to scrutinize traffic-generating effects of development less than they should, adding to sprawl pressure already increased by road-building schemes. The capital plan debate will move to the Legislature in April. **The Campaign's analysis of NJ DOT's capital budget, including lists of roadway expansion projects and foregone maintenance work, will be available on the Campaign's World Wide Web site as of Tues, March 18.** <http://www.tstc.org/tstc/>

West Shore Watch

On Thursday evening, NJ TRANSIT and Bergen County hosted a meeting of local officials and community leaders in Tenafly to kick-off the latest in a long line of studies of the restoration of West Shore rail service. The current study, an MIS/EIS, is examining rail alternatives, including the West Shore and Northern Branch lines in Bergen and Rockland Counties, and the NY Susquehanna and Western line running east-west through Bergen County. **The corridor in question is the most auto-oriented** one in the entire region, a result of the absence of fast bus service or any rail service.

While the effort to involve the communities early is admirable, the **absence at the meeting of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority** and its railroad operating agency for the northern suburbs, **Metro-North** (although invited) is foreboding, and raises serious doubts as to whether anything will ever happen, at least for any alternatives into Rockland County. **Historically, Metro-North been hostile to the West Shore restoration.** Rockland County will have to find a way to assert itself politically, if Metro North's position is ever to change. Yet, County **officials are currently talking about dropping out of the MTA altogether**, complaining of not receiving its "fair share" of improvements and MTA investment. But it is hard to fathom how leaving the table can help the cause of better transit in Rockland.

Bergen County, on the other hand, is looking for an early action rail segment. At the meeting, Planning Director Chet Mattson hoped that the study can lead to a relatively quick decision to move forward.

Complicating the current work is the uncertainty surrounding the Conrail "de-merger." Conrail now controls the West Shore line and has constrained the options for passenger service on the line.

Road-Fight Briefs

❖Passaic County Freeholders agreed to meet a long-standing public appeal by scheduling a March 31 public meeting open to all residents of Wanaque to discuss the County's proposal to construct the "Ringwood Avenue Bypass." The disputed road project would double the capacity of County Rte 511 by paving a railroad right of way through the NJ Highlands town and significantly change the town's character. "It's about time," Sandy Lawson, coordinator for the Coalition Against Alternate 3, said of the meeting.

❖Concerned Citizens for 25A of Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island recently wrote to the NY State Transportation Commissioner, outlining the fundamental differences between the community group and NYS DOT regarding proposals to widen Route 25A. "A traffic calming approach, with its integral safety component, its inherent respect for natural and historic beauty, community values and taxpayer funds, is clearly what the public wants," wrote the group. Concerned Citizens says it is "unalterably opposed" to creation of new traffic lanes or faster curves on 25A.

Brooklyn Traffic Calming Advocates Dig In

In recent editions (#'s 113 and 114) we've reported on the conflict between Brooklyn officials and civic leaders, on the one hand, and the NYC Dept. of Transportation, on the other, over a **district-wide traffic calming plan** for the western half of the borough. The plan is backed by Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden, City Council Member Ken Fisher, other elected leaders and many community organizations. The plan has been submitted several times for federal funding under ISTEA's CMAQ program. The **NYC DOT** could easily prioritize and champion this project for such funding, but has refused to do so. The agency has offered up a seemingly **endless litany of bureaucratic excuses** for not doing so.

Golden and Fisher have refused to let the matter die. Reportedly, the Brooklyn officials were able to win a meeting with higher ups at City Hall to discuss the matter. We expect that the Giuliani Administration will fail to see why it should fight the communities in west Brooklyn over the issue, and take the decision out of DOT's hands. That would be wise, and hopefully only a prelude to City Hall intervening more generally to improve the attitude and abilities of the city transportation agency.

More on NJ's ISTEA Priorities

NJ Transit informs us that the reference in their ISTEA-2 project list to the "**Newark City Subway Extension**" (see last week's *MTR*) was not to the plan to extend the Newark subway north to Belleville, but does in fact indicate priority **support for the Newark-Elizabeth light rail project**.

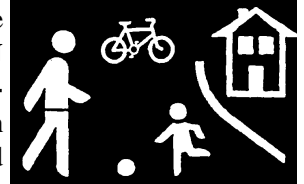
NJ DOT says that highway widening projects detailed in the five "ISTEA-2 Earmark Corridors" it has submitted to the NJ Congressional delegation are just placeholders for to-be-determined **intermodal investments in key parts of the state**. The road projects included in the submission looked awfully specific to us, though.

NJDOT Bike/Ped Policy Still Theoretical

Mayors, county and town planners, citizens and others comprising the **Route 1** (Trenton to Woodbridge) **Bike/Pedestrian Project** Steering Committee got an impressive presentation Feb.7th of design options from Greenways, Inc. of North Carolina, which, if adopted, would make most Rte. 1 intersections and other important nearby destinations pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly.

But the group learned that the decision whether to incorporate such designs is left to individual NJ DOT road project managers, whose reactions range from enthusiastic to opposed, and whose budgets are constrained. Despite **NJ DOT's policy** that "**bicycle and pedestrian traffic should be incorporated** in the planning, design, construction and management **of all transportation projects** and programs funded or processed by the NJ DOT," adopted in May, 1996, many managers reportedly believe that projects that are already "scoped" do not have to comply, or they are trying to avoid compliance by narrowly interpreting the policy. FHWA has sent objections to DOT's front office about its failure to include sidewalks, appropriate signals and bike lanes in capital construction projects. Apparently, since the federal complaints, the Route 1 project managers have responded favorably to Greenways' recommendations.

But if DOT project managers around the state do start to fulfill the policy, **the Department has no bicycle/pedestrian staff** person to review projects. And the one vacant bike/ped position that exists (out of more than 4,000 employees), if filled, could be hit with 150 or more projects to review at once. The Campaign and many others have called upon DOT over the past year to create a bicycle/pedestrian programs office, staffed with a dozen or more professionals able to review projects and provide technical assistance to counties and municipalities.



Around the Region: NYC



The *NY Times* reported continuing impasse between Governor Pataki and Mayor Giuliani over rail access to **NYC's airports**. Other newspapers had reported a pending State-City deal earlier this month that would permit the Port Authority's JFK light rail plan to proceed in exchange for a State commitment to a LaGuardia rail access project. The **Port Authority** announced Wednesday that it would be ready to begin construction the light rail that would circulate among the JFK terminals and connect them to the Howard Beach subway stop and Jamaica Station. City Hall said the announcement was an attempt to pre-empt conclusion of the talks. The *Times* said the Mayor wants a \$100 million commitment from the Port Authority toward the cost of a LaGuardia link.

The Chair of the **NY Shipping Association**, James Capo, said in a Thursday *NY Times* opinion piece that talk of a **cross-harbor rail tunnel** and revival of **Brooklyn's port** is apocryphal. Capo wrote that the Port of NY/NJ's existing facilities should be improved, and that channel-bottom blasting to provide access for new generations of giant container ships to **Ports Newark and Elizabeth** is the key to winning "hub port" status for the region. Capo said that blasting, although costly, would be cheaper than the new tunnel/port proposal.

The **NYC Transit Authority** announced it would hire 100 full-time subway cleaners, abandoning hopes of using workfare participants, according to the *NY Times*. Although the Transit Workers Union had agreed to a deal to bring workfare workers to transit operations, other city unions and the Giuliani Administration opposed the move. Without **City Hall** to supply the workfare personnel, the Transit Authority was faced with returning to traditional, paid employees. "It's an admission that the problem is beginning to show," said the Straphangers Campaign's Gene Russianoff, referring to subway trains that have become dirtier since deep service cuts in November, 1995.

Agencies Won't Release Rte. 29 Re-evaluation

FHWA and NJDOT have officially refused to disclose the re-evaluation of the 17-year old environmental impact statement for a 1.7 mile segment of Rte. 29 in Trenton, to be built at taxpayer expense. The road is slated to cost about \$94 million, at least \$78 million of which comes directly from the state Transportation Trust Fund. The road has been redesigned to meld three alternatives, **all of which were rejected in the study 17 years ago**, as too costly, disruptive, hazardous to pedestrians and resulting in too much additional local traffic.

FHWA says that release of the re-evaluation, which it is working on with NJ DOT, will "compromise the process." A written re-evaluation of a final EIS is required if a project has not advanced within three years of the EIS' approval. The Tri-State Campaign filed formal comments this week objecting to the project's inclusion in the 1997 State Transportation Improvement Program and requesting that the EIS be formally supplemented, which would require public disclosure. Federal law requires public access to technical and policy information used in transportation program development, and time for public review at key decision points. The agencies have clearly compromised public access to information at such a point.

In a letter responding to NJPIRG Citizen Lobby's objection to Rte. 29's inclusion in the transportation program, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), the metropolitan planning organization for southern NJ, confirmed **the project is inconsistent with the Capital City Redevelopment Plan** and the south Trenton waterfront development plan, a joint project of the city and Mercer County. DVRPC also called the project "arguably expensive" but inexplicably maintained it would not affect funding for NJDOT's highway maintenance program. DVRPC further admitted that "there may be some additional [traffic] generated by the new facility" and said the project would disrupt spawning areas for an endangered species of sturgeon.

Save the Date

A Tri-State Transportation Campaign Forum

"Efficient Freight Transportation for the 21st Century"

April 10 12-4PM, Pavilion on the Terrace, Staten Island.
\$25/person (\$15 non-profit). Co-sponsor: Union County Alliance

Transaction 1997

New Jersey's 21st Annual Transportation Conference

April 15-17 Tropicana Resort Hotel, Atlantic City

April 15, 12:30-5pm: Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Seminar

tel. 908-903-1077 mcdot@gramercy.ios.com
<http://gramercy.ios.com/~mcdot>

CALENDAR

MAR 20, 7:00 PM CT Metro-North/Shore Line East Commuter Council Meeting, Naugatuck Town Hall.

MAR 26, 10 AM Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council meeting — vote on 1997-98 TIP update. Dutchess Cty Leg. Chambers, 22 Market Street, Poughkeepsie. 914-486-3600.

APRIL

APR 2 8:30 AM-1:00 PM "Pedestrian Safety in Municipalities." Seminar organized by NJ State League of Municipalities. Quality Inn, 815 Rte 37 West, Toms River, NJ. Reg. fee \$45. Call 609-695-3481.

APR 2 Noon-2 PM Permanent Citizens Advisory Council, MTA: "Bus Forum." Featuring Millard Seay, Transit Authority Vice President, Dept. of Buses. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 5th floor board room. Call 212-878-7087.

APR 3, 11:45 AM Transportation Research Forum lunch. Speaker: Gerard Bernacchia, Liberty Lines. "The Role of Private Bus Companies in Contemporary Transit Operations." Call 212-435-4086.

APR 4, 12:30-2:00 PM NYC Dept. of City Planning Brown Bag Lunch. Hilary Ring, MTA Planning and Capital Investment Director is featured guest. 22 Reade Street, Manhattan. Call 212-442-4724.

APR 5, 2 PM "Asphalt Nation." Lecture on car dependent 20th Century life. Jane Holtz Kay, author of new book of same title. NY Historical Society, 2 W. 77th Street, Manhattan. 212-873-3400.

APR 8 7:45 AM-2:30 PM RPA's 7th Annual Regional Assembly: "The Road to Recovery." Lunch Speaker, NYC Comptroller Alan Hevesi. NY Sheraton, 7th Ave. & 52nd St. 212-785-8000.

APR 11, 8:30 AM-1:00 PM "Pedestrian Safety in Municipalities." Seminar organized by NJ State League of Municipalities. Landmark Inn, Rtes 1 & 9, Woodbridge, NJ. Reg. fee \$45. Call 609-695-3481.

APR 15 12:30-2PM NYC Dept. of City Planning Brown Bag Lunch. "Gowanus Tunnel Option" Al Appleton, Jeff Zupan, RPA, featured speakers. 22 Reade Street, Manhattan. Call 212-442-4724.

APR 28 6-8 PM "Rebuilding NYC's Express Highway Infrastructure." Richard Maitino, NY State DOT Regional Director. Auto Free NY meeting, at Transportation Alternatives, 115 W. 30th St. #1207, Manhattan. Call 212-475-3394.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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MTR#117. Contributing this issue: Janine Bauer, Jeff Zupan Editor: Jon Orcutt. Executive Director, Janine Bauer

281 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10010 212-777-8181 fax 212-777-8157 tstc@igc.apc.org <http://www.tstc.org/tstc/>