

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

People's Petition: Implement the NJ State Plan

From the "Save our Farms and Forests" petition (see last week's MTR) now being circulated by NJ Audubon Society and the NJ State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs:

We, the undersigned citizens of New Jersey, struggling daily with commuting nightmares like Rt. 287 (and Rts. 42, 73, 1, 206, 3, 17, 80...), plagued by sprawling development in our scenic rural areas and mindful of our neglected urban areas, which desperately need, but don't get the growth, do hereby petition Governor Whitman, our Legislators, and State Planning Commissioners to promptly alter the character of our State Plan to give it some teeth.

For at least ten years now, local governments have had the chance to implement the State Plan on a voluntary basis, but the vast majority have conspicuously failed to do so. We, the citizens who repeatedly appear before them in frustration, find ourselves out-spent and out-lawyered by developers, and don't expect our local leaders to change their land-use habits in time. We need the following changes in the State Plan:

1. Design stronger state ground rules and clear growth boundaries.
2. Give Farms and Forests protective zoning densities of one unit per 40 acres — make local gov't respect these with a penalty system (loss of state aid).
3. Revise the "centers" policy to limit their size and number in rural areas.
4. Create a responsive procedure to protect environmentally sensitive areas ignored by local governments.
5. Set up a statewide transfer of developments rights system to protect landowners' interests while making the "centers" policy workable.

Here in front of the local planning boards, the clocks all read 5 minutes to midnight for the fate of our natural resources. It's time our leaders start implementing the State Plan by drafting the legislative changes we have outlined here. Historically, major changes in land-use policy in New Jersey have always required the hands-on leadership of the Governor.

To get copies of the petition, call NJ Audubon Society, 908-766-5787.

If "ISTEA Works," Don't Trade Environment Programs Away

It's difficult to tell at present whether the **ISTEA Works Coalition**, which includes Governors Pataki, Whitman and Rowland, the Giuliani administration and this region's Congressional delegation, is taking seriously the **problem posed** by a provision for "**uniform transferability**" between ISTEA's funding categories proposed by House Transportation Chair Bud Shuster.

"Uniform transferability" is aimed primarily at ISTEA's Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) and Transportation Enhancements programs. It would enable states to move 50% of funds for these programs into highway construction and other activities. CMAQ and Enhancements have been responsible for most of **the innovative, pro-environment** transportation projects begun in the region since the passage of ISTEA in 1991. Maintenance of this record of rail freight improvements, better access to transit stations, new bikeways and clean fuel fleet conversions is at risk if "uniform transferability" survives. Supporters and opponents of these programs agree that, if their funding is not secure (non-transferable), they will be raided by road-oriented DOT's or states under budget pressure.

ISTEA Works states are focused on the bottom line of federal transportation aid. But they also say they support ISTEA's program structure. "Uniform transferability" will make a big dent in that structure by taking away much of what makes ISTEA different from earlier highway authorizations. As a result, public interest and support for ISTEA will be much diminished.

Gov. Whitman on NJ DOT and the State Plan

At a "Sustainable State" conference Thursday that focused on government performance benchmarks, Governor Whitman told the gathering that "Benchmarks hold us accountable...we are inviting our citizens to hold our feet to the fire..." In reviewing State Plan implementation by each state agency, she said NJ DOT was coming up with benchmarks that would come from the Transportation Choices 2020 plan. Yet DOT's effort to develop its own "report card" died out in 1995. And the Local Aid to Centers program, funded at a paltry \$1 million in past years as DOT's only direct contribution to Plan implementation, is being cut back to \$750,000 in 1998. The Governor concluded: "State government should practice what it preaches...We will change the course of policies that aren't working."

Newark-Newark Rail Line ?

At a special meeting May 7, the NJ Transit Board adopted a resolution directing NJ Transit staff to accept a “preferred alignment” for the planned Newark-Elizabeth Light Rail Link. The link is a \$636 million project that will carry riders 8.8 miles between Newark’s Penn Station and the Midtown Elizabeth Station. There will be 16 stops along the route, including one on the Northeast Corridor which will allow riders to transfer between NJ Transit, Amtrak and an extension of the Newark Airport Monorail. The new line will share maintenance facilities and link up with the Newark City Subway, increasing its use by 76% and getting 6,000 people out of their cars, according to NJ Transit.

Last week the *Star-Ledger* reported that Transit staff had suggested **scaling the project back**, studying only the 0.8 mile segment in Newark between Newark Penn Station and Broad Street stations. Board members argued that the reduced study would likely kill the rest of the project by limiting Federal funds earmarked for the entire line. The May 7 compromise allows environmental studies to begin immediately on the first segment of the light rail line, from Newark Penn station to Broad Street, while keeping the entire project alive. Ground-breaking on any part of the line is probably 4-6 years away, provided funding is secured.

Despite the May 7 board action, which may have been motivated primarily by financial considerations, NJ Transit staff is soft-pedaling the southern section of the line because **it feels the line will not draw many passengers**. The current plan’s alignment through Elizabeth is not advantageous for the area, since it goes through neither the center of the city, nor by the developing port district. The decision to place the alignment between the two optimal areas was the product of **traffic engineers, who argued that the line would impede motor vehicle traffic flow** along Broad St. Light rail transit beginning to make a comeback in New Jersey, an unsuccessful project would not bode well for future projects. The low ridership numbers indicated in the recently released Newark-Elizabeth rail DEIS, due primarily to the chosen alignment, may make failure of the line a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Still, to build just the Newark part of the line could be a waste. The 0.8 mile segment covers a walking distance of 20 minutes. The bus that runs along Broad St. in Newark is currently run on a 20-minute headway, and is often snarled in traffic. Reducing the bus headway is a much less expensive option that should be explored if the southern section of the rail line becomes a non-starter.

Interestingly, Rep. Bob Franks, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, wants to extend the Newark-Elizabeth line beyond Elizabeth, and is seeking funding to extend the project in this year’s ISTEA reauthorization. He proposes that the line be extended to Plainfield through Cranford, Garwood, Westfield and Fanwood.

Airport Access Still Stalelated

— Rockaway Branch in Play? —

Queens Borough President Claire Shulman says she will walk the LIRR’s abandoned Rockaway Branch with transportation engineers sometime soon. Though the Borough President has long opposed any re-opening of the line for rail service, citing the opposition of constituents, Queens community groups and elected officials have begun to reconsider their stance.

Three factors are galvanizing their interest. One is opposition — either because of perceived impacts from the line itself or from desire for better airport rail access — to the Port Authority’s plan to run an elevated **light rail** line down the median of the Van Wyck Expressway from **Jamaica Station to JFK**. A second is demand for better transit options from the Rockaways. And third is the prospect of development in the Rockaway Branch right-of-way — communities along the line are now wondering whether train service in their backyards might not be a lesser evil.

In its heyday, an LIRR trip from the Rockaways to Penn Station took 30 minutes, and from Ozone Park, 18 minutes. Trains from South Ozone Park to Penn Station ran until 1962. The distance from JFK from Penn Station over the line is 13 miles.

The line is abandoned but is still mostly intact. A proposal to remove a large portion of the right-of-way for a Home Depot project helped re-ignite interest in the line among the communities that host it.

Queens elected officials, including Shulman, Assemblymember Audrey Pheffer of Rockaway and Councilmember Alfonso Stabile of Ozone Park, listened to changing community opinions about the line at an April meeting.

News reports this week say Shulman and Mayor Giuliani are negotiating mutual political endorsements. This could strengthen Shulman’s say in any eventual airport access deal.

The Port Authority has said it intends to break ground on the Jamaica-JFK rail line this summer. Yet calls by the Campaign to City Hall and the Port Authority revealed that no agreement had yet been reached to allow construction to begin. The City wants the Port Authority to ante up \$100 million dollars for a LaGuardia Airport subway extension project in return for the go-ahead on the JFK project. The Port Authority needs the City’s sign-off to issue an environmental impact statement and begin work on the light-rail line.



Around the Region



➤ A traffic calming movement is afoot in **West Hartford**. A plan developed there includes speed humps, undulating sidewalks that force traffic to weave slightly and intersection traffic circles. Some traffic planners say the measures will reduce emergency vehicle response times, damage snow plows and endanger bicyclists. Advocates accurately point out these issues have been resolved elsewhere. Elsewhere in CT, traffic calming under consideration. Greenwich, Stamford and Manchester *Hartford Courant*

➤ Staten Island's Amalgamated Transit Union Local 726 is promising to step up its campaign for a \$2 express bus fare between now and the city-wide end of two-fare zones on July 4. Larry Hanley, Local 726 president, says continuing the \$4 fare when other long-distance riders are getting a break is unfair.

To bring home the popularity of the issue, the union plans to sign up 10,000 new voters by the end of May — an overall **Staten Island** registration increase of 7%. The many S.I. politicians who have endorsed Local 726's effort have apparently been unable to budge the MTA, which is holding firm on express bus fares.

➤ The NYC Transit Authority's recently announced \$1.45 billion subway car purchase will have benefits outside of the city — it will add 250 jobs to the Kawasaki plant in **Yonkers**, and 600 to a Bombardier factory in upstate Plattsburgh. The Yonkers plant was established in 1984 to build Port Authority PATH cars.

➤ The Richmondtown Civic Association of Staten Island has asked the Giuliani Administration to demap the never-constructed **Willowbrook Parkway** and classify the land as parkland. The group said Staten Island Borough President Molinari's recent proposal to build the road had been "discredited" by civics and local elected officials.

Who's "We" ?

A broadside contained in the NYC executive budget released yesterday by Mayor Giuliani presented "examples of inequity" in state and state-controlled public authority budgets. The budget document says New York City pays more than its fair share of expenses in a variety of programs.

Of the Port Authority, the Mayor's budget says: "LaGuardia and Kennedy Airports generate a \$200 million cash surplus which goes to subsidize the operating deficit of New Jersey PATH trains."

The report also criticizes the MTA's diversion of bridge and tunnel revenue to the support of LIRR and Metro-North commuter rail operations. Earlier in the week, the Mayor had blasted the MTA following release of evidence showing subway cars and stations getting dirtier since the reduction of cleaning staff in 1995. The Mayor told the *Daily News* that his budget shows that estimated future **billion-dollar city budget deficits** could be eliminated if the city kept the money shifted to the suburbs by the MTA and the Port Authority.

Hold on a minute. While the Mayor's analysis of who benefits from MTA toll revenue may read like a Straphangers Campaign lawsuit, it's the **NYC Transit Authority, not city government**, that would gain if bridge and tunnel revenue formulas are changed to reflect the number of city vs. suburban transit riders.

The Mayor may be suggesting one of two things, both of which will be unpopular with city transit riders and state legislators:

1) With more toll revenue going to the Transit Authority, the city could reduce its contributions to the transit system. Result: city transit riders are no better off.

2) MTA bridge and tunnel revenue should be directly available to the city, ending the 30-year relationship between TBTA toll revenue and transit finance. Result: transit can no longer count on a major source of stable, predictable revenue.

City Bike Plans Wait

❖ The NYC Depts of Transportation and City Planning recently completed a multi-year survey and plan for a **New York City bicycle transportation system**. Drafts of the plan did a good job integrating ongoing "greenway" path and esplanade projects with a network of new on-street bicycle lanes and comprehensive access to dozens of major bridges.

The final plan has reportedly been printed, but the City has not released it. Apparently, the Mayor's office is reviewing the plan to ensure its contents are consistent with Giuliani administration policy priorities. We look forward to receiving the plan and to early implementation of its recommendations.

❖ The Dept. of City Planning has also recently completed a study of installing a **bicycle/pedestrian way on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge**. The study reportedly says such a path is feasible, and will cost \$23 million. The Dept. should be commended for undertaking the study, since the bridge's operating agency, **MTA Bridges and Tunnels**, has consistently been hostile to suggestions for improving bike and foot access to its spans.

This study has been complete for some time now, and it's unclear what City Planning is going to do with it. It would be smart to get it to **Congresswoman Molinari**, whose **district spans the Narrows**. She also sits prominently on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which is taking up a massive five year federal transportation bill, sure to be replete with a great many "members' projects," right now. The MTA may not like the project, but it's not in any position to gainsay Rep. Molinari if she decides she does.



Try it Here

The Sustainable Transport Action Network for Asia & the Pacific reports that Singapore plans to **fit cameras to its buses** to catch motorists who **violate** the city-state's extensive network of peak-period **bus lanes**. This follows concern that the average bus speed in the morning peak fell from 20 km/hr in 1991 to 18 km/hr last year. The cameras will photograph the license plates of motorists parking or driving in the bus lanes. Such drivers will automatically be issued a fine of \$130 and 4 demerit points. They will work in much the same way as existing "red-light" cameras which detect traffic light violations in many cities, including NYC.

The MTA has installed digital cameras at its EZ-Pass toll booth lanes, though isn't using them yet to catch toll-beaters. In recent years, the question has been raised whether walking is faster than taking a NYC Transit Authority bus. But "smart" transportation technology is primarily being deployed in this region on highways in an attempt to reduce the traffic congestion that motorists subject themselves and each other to.

One Difference Between Blair and Clinton

The lead story in the current *Manchester Guardian Weekly* said the **new British government** would end the Thatcherite promotion of car dependence and tilt policy decisively in **favor of public transport**. The government is apparently consolidating agency briefs in a manner that will integrate transport and environmental policy-making. John Prescott, deputy prime minister in charge of the new infrastructure and environment department, views regional transportation planning as critical in defending and improving Britain's quality of life.

Ideas under consideration include possible **cross-subsidization of public transport with new motorway tolls**, halting large scale road projects and re-nationalizing bankrupt or needlessly competing private railroads and transit lines. Prescott says he is not anti-car, but that "we are reaching in our cities a situation where it is impossible to accommodate [cars]."

Straphanger's Campaign Push for NYC Discount Transit Passes

Volunteer to leaflet Times Sq., Rockefeller Center and Grand Central stations. MAY 15, 8 - 10 a.m. and 4 - 6:30 p.m.

Call Mauricia Baca ASAP to help out, 212-349-6460 or e-mail NYPIRG@aol.com.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org/tstc/>

CALENDAR

MAY 12 1PM North Jersey Transportation Planning Auth. Monthly meeting. At NJTPA, 1 Newark Ctr., 17th Fl.

MAY 12 7-8PM City Council Forum, "Transportation Alternatives: Commuter Vans and Gypsy Cabs" New York City Hall, Council Chambers. Info: 212-788-7113 or 212-788-7123.

MAY 13 1:30PM-4PM Organizing Against Environmental Racism: Fighting for Community Control and Social Justice. Hunter School of Social Work, 129 E 79 St., 10th Floor. Co-sponsored by the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance and the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development. Call 212-866-4120 to RSVP.

MAY 12-16 National "Try Transit Week" '97. Fair: May 14 11AM-2PM, press conference at Noon. On Court St. between Main St. and Martine Ave in White Plains.

MAY 13-14 "Heels and Wheels '97" -- conference on Bicyclists, Pedestrians and in-line skaters. At SUNY Albany, 1400 Washington Ave., Albany. For info, e-mail Mary Reilly at mreilly@gw.dot.state.ny.us

MAY 15 NOON Metro North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 7th Fl. Conference Room. Info, call 212-878-7087

MAY 19 6-8PM Auto-Free NY meeting: "The London Underground," with Architect Arthur Rosenblatt. At Transportation Alternatives Conference Room, 115 W. 30 St., Room 1207, New York, NY. Call 212-475-3394 for more info.

MAY 23 8AM- 4PM "Legislating Land Use" Current Issues in Local and Regional Planning and Development, sponsored by the Cross County Connection TMA. With special session on implementing bikeways. \$20 Reg. By 5/16 to CCCTMA, The Atriums at Greentree, 11007 Lincoln Drive West, Marlton, NJ 08053 or fax 609-983-0388. Info, call John Medina, 609-596-8228.

MAY 27 City Council Forum, "What's Happening With Our Subways and Buses" At New York City Hall, Council Chambers. Info: Mike Clenedin 212-788-7113 or Rica Rinzler 212-788-7123

MAY 29 - JUNE 1 Congress for the New Urbanism — Fifth Congress, "Access & Community." Toronto. Call 415-291-9804.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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