

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### PA Halloween Gift: Goethals EIS

— But Staten Island Wants Coffin Nailed Shut —

With release of the final environmental impact statement for the Port Authority's proposed **Goethals Bridge "twin"** perhaps a week away, elected officials and citizens groups gathered Wednesday at Staten Island Borough Hall to **reiterate widespread opposition** to the project. The proposal met with near-unanimous rejection when it came before the public in 1995, and was later withdrawn from the Port Authority's capital program. But the PA continues to move the new highway bridge through the environmental review process. State Senators John Marchi and Vincent Gentile, City Council Member John Fusco, Protectors of Pine Oak Woods and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign sent representatives to call for an end to the project. The event was covered by Staten Island papers, NY 1 television and regional radio. Officials and groups who contributed statements against the bridge project but did not attend were Assemblymember Eric Vitaliano, City Council members Vito Fossella and Jerome O'Donovan, Staten Island Citizens for Clean Air and the NYC Audubon Society.

### Queens HOV Foes Fight On

Sources say foes of the Long Island Expressway HOV project in Queens are **ready to return to court** and continue the fight against the project. Plaintiffs in a lawsuit seeking to stop the NYS DOT project include State Senator Frank Padavan, Queens Borough President Claire Shulman and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

While **the Mayor** has joined the lawsuit, it is very likely he **could kill the project** much more easily and permanently. The Mayor **wiped out the Miller Highway** relocation with a simple press release in the summer of 1995. Queens HOV opponents would be best served with a strategy designed to create sufficient public backing for a Mayoral veto of the road widening project.



### What Did They Say?

The Straphangers Campaign needs subway riding volunteers to conduct a survey of subway-car announcements. Volunteers will record observations of subway announcements during daily commutes (no questioning of fellow passengers involved). The project starts Nov. 10 and runs through December. To help, contact Stephanie Powers at 212-349-6460 or [smpowers@rocketmail.com](mailto:smpowers@rocketmail.com)

### Route 92 Turmoil

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told the NJ DEP that it required additional information regarding the NJ Turnpike Authority's proposal to **construct a new east-west toll highway** in Middlesex County (Rte 92) in order to make a final finding on the project's impact. EPA rejected the road as having too few benefits relative to its environmental impact in January.

In response, the Turnpike redesigned the road, incorporating costly new overpasses to protect wetlands. EPA's comments and questions suggest it is still uncomfortable with the highway proposal.

To make matters worse for the highway's proponents, in an October 23 letter, EPA took the unusual step of **proposing a highway alignment** that the Turnpike Authority had not analyzed. The EPA requested that the Turnpike investigate the route, which it said might avoid the wetlands damage of other proposed alignments.

Because the EPA-suggested route lies to the south of the Turnpike's desired path, it poses a dilemma for Route 92 advocates. Peter Cantu, Mayor of Plainsboro, supports construction of the highway along a route largely in neighboring South Brunswick. But the EPA alignment would run through his town, and Cantu told the *Trenton Times* the route would be "devastating" and likely to increase local traffic congestion.

EPA's postponement of the Rte. 92 decision came as the Turnpike Authority's comptroller publicly challenged Authority revenue projections as "grossly inflated."

Meanwhile, local and regional opponents of the highway construction project launched television ads designed to focus sentiment against the road onto the Whitman Administration. Road foes say it will draw truck traffic and further snarl the area.



From anti-Route 92 TV spot

### ISTEA Legislation Looks Dead in '97

The U.S. Senate stopped consideration of its ISTEA-2 bill this week after several attempts to end debate of a campaign finance reform rider that Democrats had attached to it. The Senate's inability to move forward with the bill led to calls for the Senate to meet the House of Representatives' **six-month ISTEA extension** and take up multi-year reauthorization again next spring.

But a deal by Republicans and Democrats on campaign finance issues struck yesterday theoretically opens the door for the Senate to reconsider the ISTEA-2 bill. Some observers say, however, that **the bill has lost momentum** and is unlikely to be voted on this fall. Even six-month ISTEA extension bills are likely to be subject to considerable wrangling — early discussions have been full of talk of controversial amendments and re-written funding apportionment formulas.

### Congress, Campaign Weigh in on Conrail Deal

With a view to reducing truck traffic across NY Harbor, through NYC and up into Connecticut, twenty-four NY and CT members of Congress have petitioned to intervene in the Conrail acquisition proceeding. The petitioners, led by NYC Rep. Jerrold Nadler, wrote to the Surface Transportation Board to request that a **cross-Harbor rail car float and rail lines through Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx be added** to the facilities to be maintained for joint use of Conrail purchasers CSX and Norfolk Southern. Current plans confine this "Shared Assets Area," to northern NJ. Freight movement across the Harbor and east of the Hudson now occurs overwhelmingly by truck due to the limited rail network.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign's comments on the Conrail case had a similar flavor. Both filings emphasized the need for renewed activity on the cross-Harbor float operation, the Bay Ridge Line, and lines serving Oak Point Yard, Harlem River Yard and Hunt's Point market, and proposed means of achieving this through the Conrail transaction.

Despite the benefits of reduced truck traffic resurrection of rail service to the east would bring to New Jersey, **none of the NJ Congressional delegation** signed onto the petition. New Jersey DOT's filing focused almost exclusively on issues of potential passenger/freight service conflicts arising from the rail traffic increase the Conrail deal is projected to produce. As a major player in the negotiations with CSX and NS, New Jersey could boost NY's and CT's demands for east-of-Hudson improvements, but has thus far declined to do so.

While awaiting the STB's decision, parties will have another opportunity to comment on CSX' and NS' plans for the region. On Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>, the STB granted a Port Authority motion requesting that the railroads provide detailed operating plans for the Shared Assets Area. The PA argued that the shared assets concept is untested and that the arrangement would potentially create minimal incentives for CSX and NS to invest in metropolitan

### Fed Funds Flow to Roads, Big Ticket Transit

President Clinton signed the federal fiscal year 1998 transportation appropriations bill on Tuesday. The funding measure contains significant amounts for big transit projects in the region, including \$60 million for construction of the **Hudson-Bergen light rail**, \$27 million for completion of the **Secaucus Transfer** station, \$20 million for linking the **Long Island Railroad to Grand Central Terminal**, \$500,000 to study a **Nassau Hub** rail link and \$250 million for Amtrak's Northeast Corridor upgrade. A provision also prevents any funds from being used for "improvements to the Miller Highway" in NYC. The appropriation provides \$6 million (down from \$12 million Senator Lautenberg was able to include in the Senate bill) for NJ Transit for purchase of non-diesel buses, \$5 million for natural gas buses in Nassau County and \$7.5 million for NYC CNG buses.

Overall, the \$42.2 billion appropriation provides an 11% spending increase over FY 1997, including an 10% boost in transit spending (to \$4.84 billion). Still, according to Friends of the Earth, "the overwhelming majority of resources go toward the highway program." Highways get \$23.27 billion, an 11% hike.

Transit operating assistance, consistent with Republican plans to do away with this area of federal aid altogether, is cut \$250 million (to \$150 million). The blow is softened somewhat by a provision (authored by Lautenberg) that widens the definition of transit capital spending to include preventative maintenance, including bus and rail car overhauls and other activities, and allows small cities to use capital funds for operating expenses (transit advocates also want to include this provision in ISTEA-2).

The bill breaks new ground by omitting highway "demonstration" projects. It cuts Amtrak operating assistance 7% and capital budget (non-NE Corridor) 11%. Other areas in the bill are US DOT and Coast Guard operations and aviation capital and operating funds.

### Cost of Transit Success

While the Transit Authority has added service on some bus lines in response to recent ridership gains, the bus lines controlled by NYC DOT have not. The **city bus lines** are concentrated heavily in Queens and the Bronx, and offer the same free Metrocard bus-subway transfer as Transit Authority buses.

Assembly member Catherine Nolan reports **increased crowding** on half a dozen Queens lines. She says DOT should boost service on them, and has requested that NYC Transportation Christopher Lynn inform her of plans to that effect.

New York facilities, so that the **railroads should be required to state their intentions** fully in advance of the transaction. CSX and NS are to file operating plan for the region on October 29<sup>th</sup>, and comments on these submissions will be accepted until November 24<sup>th</sup>.

### Humps in the 'hood

Traffic calming has arrived at a street near you, if you live in New York City. Speed humps designed to slow traffic to safer speeds (between 15 and 20 mph) are popping up around the boroughs, and most New Yorkers are giving them a **warm welcome**. Bronx and Brooklyn residents interviewed by the *Daily News* called for more, and said the traffic calming devices were a good answer to too much through traffic on neighborhood streets. Some motorists inevitably complained, but even a Federal Express driver told the *News*: "They should be on all residential streets." Motorists can save themselves the trouble of a trip to the mechanic by just slowing down.

While concerns for emergency vehicle response times have often been a big hurdle in for traffic slowing street designs in American cities, the **NY Fire Dept.** said it's **with the program 100%**. NYFD spokesperson Michael Regan told the *Daily News* "The department believes speed humps save lives and slow down drivers. The Dept. of Transportation has gone out of its way to work with the Fire Department in letting us know before each and every one of these control devices is installed."

Starting in the fall of 1996, NYC DOT installed 20 test humps. The program was deemed successful, and this fall, the agency installed a 134 humps on 69 streets.

Queens has the most of the NYC boroughs, with 39 humps on 19 streets, though Staten Island and Brooklyn have nearly as many. Some additional humps in Brooklyn and Queens are under review. Most humps are asphalt, though a few are concrete.

Streets that have become detours for cars traveling between highways, such as 166 St. in Queens, which connects the Clearview Expressway and Cross Island Parkway, are good candidates for the humps.

The hump installations, at around \$3,000 per hump, were paid for with \$405,000 in federal funds.

### Traffic Calming: AAA's Take

An article in a recent *NY Motorist* invites drivers to imagine the streetscape as both motorist and pedestrian, and backs the proposition that **traffic should be slowed** where it interacts with people walking. The article describes traffic calming techniques, but also argues that maintaining good traffic flow on major routes is a preferable way to keep traffic out of neighborhoods and other heavily walked areas ("a point sometimes overlooked by pedestrian advocates"). The piece's author, NY Motorist Club staff member Mark Kulewicz, participated in a presentation on traffic calming techniques to Long Island officials organized by the RBA Group engineering firm earlier this year. The Motorist Club, the state AAA group, has a slide presentation on traffic calming available to community groups on request: 516-873-2364.

### Can NYC Sustain Traffic Calming?

New York City's speed hump program puts the Big Apple in the forefront of urban traffic calming in the northeast, but observers worry that the recent installations may languish without much follow through.

Other traffic calming devices have yet to be widely installed in NYC. The current issue of *Transportation Alternatives* magazine says that a NYC DOT initiative to try out **mini traffic circles** — a popular traffic calming feature in several western cities — has not gotten off the ground. And it is unclear that the speed hump program will be an ongoing one.

Still, T.A. also reports that the city is readying new intersection improvements dubbed "**urban oases**." These are sidewalk extensions at crosswalks crafted with textured paint and steel bollards. They avoid the high cost of traditional sidewalk extensions, which require relocation of curbs and storm drains. But they effectively extend pedestrian space into the parking lane, reducing crosswalk distances and forcing turning vehicles to go slower. T.A. is calling on the city to put the "oases" in midtown Manhattan.

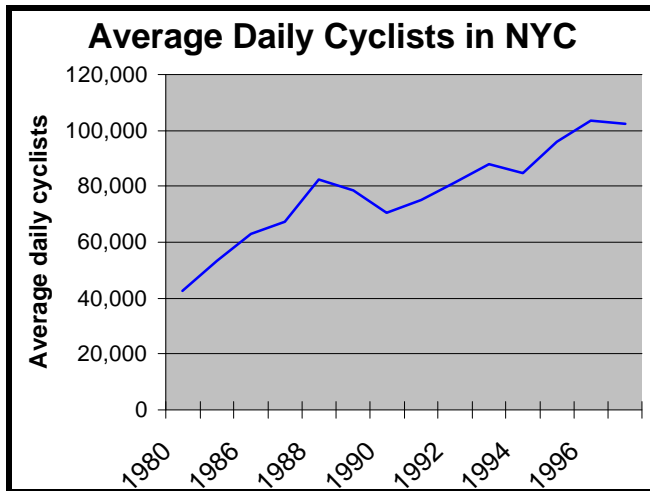
One of the difficulties the NYC traffic calming program faces is that at present, it **relies on federal grants** that must be re-approved every year or two via a convoluted process involving NY State as well as the NYC budget office and the Federal Highway Administration. Moreover, the federal air quality funds now being used are threatened in Washington and are in high demand among regional agencies. A strong potential funding source is federal traffic safety funds, which the city has not tapped for traffic calming. Still, the best option would be the **city's regular capital program**. Hopefully, traffic calming's popularity will not be lost on DOT and the city's elected leaders.



### NYC Cycling on a Roll

Bicycling in New York City is up sharply from a decade ago, with more than 100,000 people cycling on city streets on average weekdays. Transportation Alternatives calculates that in 1997, an **average of 102,000** people bicycled, compared to 67,000 in 1987. The calculations are based on NYC Department of Transportation "screen line" counts of bicyclists and a formula designed by T.A. that estimates levels of cycling that DOT's data collection methods cannot account for.

This 52% increase occurred in the context of a slight decline in city population and a downsized cycle courier industry (though food delivery cycling may be growing). The boom took place despite complete or partial **closure of important bicycle crossings** on the Queensboro and Manhattan Bridges because of reconstruction or city policy decisions. Reopening these vital paths in coming years, and a new pathway on the Williamsburg Bridge



(next spring), should result in further increases.

These NYC results stand out from the latest National Personal Transportation Survey (NPTS), which shows that nationally, bicycle trips increased by only 5% from 1983 to 1990 and bicycle commute trips fell 26%.

Transportation Alternatives attributes the increase to policies and social factors. During the late 80s and the 1990s, the mountain bike has come to the fore as a comfortable, "cool" way of getting around. Bicycles have been appropriated by the media, and commonly featured in ads to represent youth, health and the outdoors.

The transportation system has also pushed some onto bikes. Chronic gridlock and transit fare hikes, subway cuts and a big decline in bus service have all contributed.

And **cycling advocacy** has made a difference. In recent years, Transportation Alternatives has persuaded the transit authority to allow bikes on subways (an important intermodal connection), convinced private parking garage owners to provide secure parking at a score of locations and has won expanded or better access to many bridges. T.A. has also pushed NYC DOT to install well-marked new lanes and a few hundred on-street parking racks. T.A. organized Bike Week during the past six years with corporate and elected official sponsorship to generate positive attention to cycling. ISTEA, on the other hand, has had little impact on NYC bicycling levels, since only in the last year and a half have ISTEA funded projects begun to be installed.

NYC cycling faces an uncertain future. A network of "greenway" multi-use paths will be constructed along the Hudson River in Manhattan and around the perimeters of Brooklyn, Queens and much of The Bronx during the next five years. But greenways or not, the city will realize only a fraction of its cycling potential until it stops **epidemic dangerous driving** and speeding which can turn a fun cycling trip into a nerve racking hell ride.

For derivation of overall cycling levels from NYC DOT counts, see *Bicycle Blueprint*, pp 157-158, and M.F. Dunham, "Assessing the Percentage of Bicyclists in the Traffic of Manhattan's Central Business District." Transportation Alternatives, 1993 and 1991.

## CALENDAR

**NOV 5 1PM** North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority "Planning and Technology Day". Applications of technology and planning to transportation; opportunity to provide comments on NJTPA draft plan update. NJTPA, Newark. (973) 639-8420.

**NOV 6 11:45AM** Transportation Research Forum Meeting: "Access to the Region's Core: A proposal for a coordinated Long-Term Solution to Midtown Rail Access" with Martin Robins. Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St. (corner Rector St.) \$23 for members, \$28 for non-members. Paul Gessner, 212-435-4086.

**NOV 12 5:30PM** Public meeting: NYMTC Regional Transportation Plan; Queens Borough Hall, Room 213, 120-55 Queens Blvd, Queens. RSVP to Rayness Smith or Emmanuel Erondou at 718-482-4559.

**NOV 19-21** NY Public Transit Association and NYS-DOT Public Transit Fall Conference: People, Jobs and Transit. At the Saratoga Sheraton, Saratoga Springs, NY. Info: 518-434-9060.

**NOV 20 8:30AM-4:30PM** Working Group on NYC Area Data, seminar on Intelligent Transportation Systems data collection. At CUNY Grad Center, 33 W. 42 St., Manhattan. 212-650-8061

**NOV 20 5:30PM** Public meeting: NYMTC Regional Transportation Plan; Polytechnic Univ. CATT/Library Auditorium, MetroTech Center. More info at <http://www.poly.edu> RSVP to Rayness Smith or Emmanuel Erondou at 718-482-4559.

**NOV 21 1-4PM** Amtrak/Freight Rail Seminar featuring Amy Linden, VP Planning, Policy, Devel., Amtrak. NYMTC, 1 WTC, 82 Fl., Manhattan. 212-650-8061

**NOV 24 5:30PM** Manhattan East Side Transit Alternatives (MESA) Public Meeting. MTA HQ, 347 Madison Ave., 5th Fl. Manhattan 718-694-5164.

**DEC 3 5:30PM** Public meeting: NYMTC Regional Transportation Plan; CUNY Grad Center, 33 W. 42 St., Manhattan. RSVP to Rayness Smith or Emmanuel Erondou at 718-482-4559

### TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

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