

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Port Authority Hopes to Revive Goethals Twin

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Port Authority's proposed **new highway bridge** alongside the NJ/NY I-278 **Goethals Bridge** was released today, despite continued community opposition to the project on Staten Island and in New Jersey. The document is a rehash of the much-criticized draft statement from 1995. The only changes to the project are slight changes in pier locations and toll plaza widths, and the relocation of a bike/pedestrian lane from the old to the new bridge.

Although Staten Island and Elizabeth area citizens and officials have stated unequivocally that the project will mean more traffic and congestion, the FEIS still **dismisses alternatives** to constructing the second highway span. Comments on freight movement show why it has been left to the NYC Economic Development Corporation, not the Port Authority, to analyze and invest in options for better connecting New York City with the country's railroad network. The EIS deems rail freight ineffective because of the "inefficiency and unreliability" of cross-harbor car-float service and because commodities being brought over the Goethals Bridge by truck "are incompatible with modern freight railroad service." These observations are not elaborated, and the wisdom of choosing trucks over rail is not discussed in terms of **NYC's over-reliance on trucks**.

Although the Port Authority has undertaken a major study of trans-Hudson congestion pricing that indicated clear congestion-reducing benefits, the FEIS says the effects of pricing strategies are only "speculative" and therefore unworthy of consideration.

Last year, the bridge was removed from the Port Authority's five-year capital plan, but PA officials seemed to take heart that the project is close to a procedural milestone. Ernesto Butcher, PA director of tunnels and bridges, told the *Star Ledger* he would ask the Port Authority board to reinstate the project in the capital plan. Completion of the FEIS phase allows the Port Authority to begin requesting environmental permits from federal and state agencies, in anticipation of construction.

Still, PA leaders continue to say that the project will not proceed if it faces significant community opposition. If that is so, recent statements against the new highway capacity by Staten Island elected officials and civic leaders indicate that this would be a good time to call the project off for good.

Sprawl a Loser in Local NJ Votes

While pundits wallow in the supposed messages sent by the electorate about expensive car insurance and high property taxes, voters across New Jersey registered another major public concern. NJ voters approved 85% of county and municipal ballot questions **hiking local taxes** to pay for open space preservation. 27 separate open space tax questions were on NJ ballots — they were approved in Somerset and Ocean Counties, and in 21 towns. The result is similar to votes last year, where the electorate in two other counties and 12 municipalities OK'd tax increases to fund open space preservation. NJ voters have also consistently supported state open space protection bond issues. A national conservation finance expert told the *Star Ledger* that most similar measure around the country were approved.

The results bode well for proponents of **overhauling NJ's State Plan**, which contains anti-sprawl and urban reinvestment rhetoric but little else. A campaign by the NJ Audubon Society, NJPIRG and the NJ Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs to add enforceable provisions to the State Plan won the support of some legislators during the election campaign, and continues to build support as the state moves to update the State Plan during 1998.

13,000 open acres per year have been developed in NJ during the past few decades.

Mega-Project Scorecard

Transit planners continue to convene public meetings and seek press attention for two huge Manhattan projects whose prospects today occupy the part of the spectrum between "exceedingly dim" and "theoretical."

The *Daily News* last weekend related details of Transit Authority planning documents for a Second Avenue subway line between 125th Street and 63rd Street. Transit Authority staff have held countless public outreach meetings on the concept, winnowing dozens of "alternatives" to the proposed subway line (whose trains would travel downtown from 63rd on unused tracks beneath Broadway, and which would be complemented on the Lower East Side by surface light rail).

Last week, the "Access to the Region's Core" project team presented an update of its work to a gathering of planners and engineers. The project, housed at the Port Authority, is attempting to resolve the planning problems of building new rail capacity between New Jersey and Midtown Manhattan, with big added features like track links between Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal.

Both projects would meet real needs. A recent study showed the Lexington Ave. subway line, which the 2nd Ave. subway would relieve, carries 600,000 people each day and is between 40%-80% over capacity at rush hour.

Likewise, **Penn Station** and its **trans-Hudson tracks** are **jammed to capacity**. The station and tunnel face an even more crowded future as NJ Transit anticipates completion of projects that will increase demand for train travel into Manhattan, like the Secaucus Transfer and the Montclair Connection, and as Amtrak completes work on its New York-Boston high speed project.

But neither project is part of any capital budget. Nor is it clear that either has the type of political or even agency backing that will help it rise to the top of anyone's list. "Access to the Region's Core" is not on NJ Transit's radar screen, and did not surface among NJ's Congressional delegation during work on ISTEA-2 bills.

Likewise for the 2nd Ave. line. While the LIRR link to Grand Central is starting to pull down real money, it's unclear the 2nd Ave. project has anywhere to go once

planning studies are complete.

So what's the rationale for all this work, especially the heavy emphasis on engaging the public? The charitable answer is that the agencies want to have **plans in place** once funding becomes available. The cynical one is that agencies **receive planning funds** that they will spend — leading the public on — whether or not they actually intend to build anything.

The problem with even the optimistic reply is that **funding never "becomes available."** At the scale of big transit construction, it has to be fought for and won by powerful political coalitions. Are the agencies presenting the plans to those who can see them through? The LIRR-Grand Central project is backed by Senator D'Amato and Gov. Pataki. The 2nd Ave. subway is supported by local officials on the Upper East Side — a start, but nowhere near sufficient. Access to the Region's Core needs to stop talking to engineers and rail buffs and start talking to NJ's commuting public and its representatives in Trenton and in Congress.



The pitched battle over Route 6 east of Hartford continues apace. ConnDOT recently wrote to federal agencies criticizing an engineering study commissioned by Connecticut Fund for the Environment and others. The report recommended upgrading Rte. 6 instead of building a new expressway. ConnDOT advocates the latter.

Tri-State Campaign TV ads launched this week spotlight the cost of ConnDOT's expressway plan vs. the road upgrade favored by CFE and towns along the highway, and urge action by Governor Rowland.

Advocates of upgrading the existing road will meet with federal officials to further discuss the feasibility of their plan this month.

Mayor Could Cut Express Bus Fares

We noted recently that Mayor Giuliani said that reduction of NYC Transit **Staten Island express fares** should be considered in any package of fare incentives and service increases that could possibly stem from the mounting **Transit Authority operating surplus**. S.I. bus riders, elected officials and transit workers have hammered on the fare issue for over a year.

The Mayor could in fact take an exemplary role in the issue, because the NYC Dept. of Transportation (and thus the Mayor) directly controls far **more express buses than the Transit Authority**. The seven private bus companies subsidized and regulated by NYC DOT operate about 600 express buses — twice the number of NYC Transit express buses.

This year's free bus-subway transfer program, which has spiked bus ridership upwards, shows that transit use in NYC is significantly price-sensitive. This, plus healthy city tax receipts, gives Mayor Giuliani a good environment in which to launch his own express bus fare reduction experiment — cut fares to \$2 on one of the city lines and see what happens to ridership. The city's buses already have some history of innovation: express buses

offer fares of \$3.50 (vs. \$4 for the T.A.) if riders buy a ten-trip "TravelCard," and local buses charge \$1 during off-peak periods.

If the city's move works, how could the Transit Authority refuse to follow suit?

Bayonne Votes for Mixed Use of Base

The "preferred alternative" for redeveloping the soon-to-be-closed Military Ocean Terminal of Bayonne (MOTBY) was announced Oct. 30th at a public meeting of the Bayonne Reuse Commission. MOTBY's location within New York Harbor makes it an **ideal location for deep water port** development. Pursuing such a future for MOTBY could allow more goods to come into the region by ship, stimulate development of more rail freight capacity and offer New Jersey a shot at the big projected market for trade borne by the huge deep-draft freighters of the near future. The Bayonne plan indeed calls for 121 — 27% percent — of the site's 437 acres are indeed to be set aside for such use. But the Bayonne plan devotes the **remainder of the base to other purposes**, including a stadium, an amphitheater, light industry and

open space.

While initial public reaction to the plan was mostly favorable, some questioned whether the 125 acres would be sufficient to attract the big infrastructure investment container port development would require. According to John Hummer of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, a deep-water port of this size is unlikely to be able to handle enough cargo to be economically viable. "You need at least four berths and 250 acres in order to get a suitable return on the investment that this site requires," Hummer told the Campaign.

When Bill Yates of the Tri-State Campaign questioned the Commission on the port acreage, Bayonne Mayor

Leonard Kiczek said the consulting team had been assured by port experts that the acreage was adequate. He also held that **combining the new port acreage** with adjacent **Global Terminals** and the **Port Authority Marine Auto Terminal**, along with potential new port development north of Greenville Yards, would yield over 400 acres and as many as five berths. Whether the latter is workable is unclear – the Mayor's presentation of the idea seemed rather off-the-cuff, since these were not issues analyzed by the base closing commission. A more comprehensive port planning process for the Bayonne/Jersey City waterfront seems in order before Bayonne finalizes its MOTBY scheme.

Around the Region



➤ Three new **Westchester Bee-Line** bus routes will be free in November to attract new riders. The routes, from the White Plains Metro-North station to office parks on Westchester and Harrison Avenues, and from North White Plains station to Westchester County Medical Center, began operating in late October. Funding is provided by the Westchester County Medical Center, Metro-North and the Westchester County DOT. *Gannett*

➤ Merchants along **Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue** say city policies that restrict parking in favor of maximum traffic flow are bad for business. The city bans parking along part of the south side of the Avenue from 4-7 p.m. weekdays. Additionally, NYC DOT has timed traffic signals to speed cars, which keeps drivers from stopping at shops and has created a safety problem along the street. The result, says the Atlantic Avenue Betterment Association, is that the Avenue has become a "traffic sewer" that cannot hope to live up to its business potential. The Association wants parking restored and some traffic re-routed. *Brooklyn Bridge*

➤ The "ShuttleCat," a ferry between **Norwalk, CT** and LaGuardia Airport, is making trial runs while Norwalk officials complete traffic and parking studies. The double-hulled ferry can cross L.I. Sound in 45 minutes. The trip will cost \$32 one way and \$60 round trip. Operations are likely to begin in several months.

➤ Ferry companies see big business in **Stamford** too — seven firms have approached the city with proposals for commuter boats to NYC, LaGuardia and Long Island. In October, NY Fast Ferry took officials on a 50-minute test run to Wall St. Prices for CT-New York travel will be comparable to the \$270 Stamford-NYC monthly commuter rail pass. Stamford town officials applied to the state for \$3 million to build ferry docks for high speed boats. *Advocate*

➤ Though buses roll through **Lincoln Tunnel** toll booths thanks to a form of EZ-Pass the bus companies and Port Authority have used since the 1980's, commuter buses that the **NJ Turnpike** exempts from rush hour tolls still have to stop and present a swipe card to a toll booth attendant for some sort of tracking purpose. *Record*

Commuter Rail Extension Approved

The \$18 million extension of the **Harlem Valley Line** six miles beyond **Dover Plains to Wassaic** is going forward now that its environmental impact statement has received a "record of decision" from the Federal Transit Administration. The line segment will have two new stations — one halfway between Dover Plains and Wassaic at the Taconic Developmental Center and one just north of the Hamlet of Wassaic in Amenia. A 250 space parking lot will be constructed at the Wassaic station, with 50 at the Taconic stop. Wassaic officials plan to create bike trails and pedestrian access between the Hamlet and the station. Some Amenia residents remain critical, saying the project should have been extended to downtown Amenia. Track laying began in October — the extension should be operating in 1999.

Metro-North is also seeking to extend its Hudson Line service 15 miles north from Poughkeepsie to Rhinecliff — tracks along that right-of-way exist and are used by Amtrak and freight trains. The railroad will shortly seek a consultant to draft the extension's environmental impact statement.

Bike Menace, Car Threat

Pedestrian safety and courteous bicycling and driving shared the spotlight on Manhattan's Upper East Side last week. On Tuesday, Oct. 28th, Transportation Alternatives members took to the streets to launch a "Give Respect/Get Respect" Campaign targeting sidewalk and **wrong-way cyclists** and **outlaw motorists**.

The activists walked and pedaled up First Avenue, distributing over 300 mock summonses to drivers who violated traffic laws. City Council staff and local police officers also joined the group. Errant cyclists received leaflets in English, Chinese and Spanish encouraging them to "Give Respect" by keeping off sidewalks, yield-

Figures are NYC annual averages, 1989-1994

Pedestrians killed by motor vehicles:	284
Pedestrians struck by motor vehicles:	13,000
Pedestrians on sidewalks hit by cars:	483
Pedestrians killed on sidewalks by cars:	9
Pedestrians killed by bicyclists:	0

ing to walkers and riding in the direction of traffic flow.

T.A.'s insistence that critics of sidewalk cycling seri-

ously champion cyclists' rights to the road may be paying off. Last week, the NY Police Dept. announced that a new Midtown Manhattan police-on-bikes squad would try to keep **bicycle lanes clear of parked cars**, look out for drivers acting aggressively or dangerously toward cyclists, and enforce traffic laws on bicyclists.

"Station Cars" That Work

In response to our *MTR* #146 piece on "station cars" in Westchester County, the NJ AAA pointed us to a highly successful station car program underway in Morris County. The program is indeed slated to expand into two additional counties in coming months.

The Morris County program, the first active NJ station car initiative, allows commuters to get from NJTransit's Morristown station to remote offices using one of six electric cars for the last leg of the trip. The station has a total of 10 charging stations, allowing for future expansion. Carpooling is the norm, with each trip from station to office typically carrying four people, according to Judith Schleicher of McRides, a non-profit transportation management association coordinating the program. Participants also sometimes use the cars for errands and lunch trips during the day.

Bayer Consumer Care and GPU Energy have one car each, and Bell Atlantic Mobile and Lucent Technologies each have two. GPU Energy plans to buy an additional car in January.

The program is meeting its goal by "increasing ridership on NJ Transit" and closing the gap between the train station and the office, said Schleicher.

New station car programs are slated for Burlington County, where six cars will be stationed at the Woodcrest PATCO stop in Cherry Hill, and Mercer County, which will park six cars at the Northeast Corridor-Princeton Junction station.

CALENDAR

NOV 12 10:30AM Mid-Hudson South Mobility Advisory Committee, with Larry Filler, Exec. Dir., Transit Center on Tax Law Changes and TDM programs. 112 East Post Rd., White Plains, NY. Info: George Sarmiento, 914-638-5475.

NOV 12 5:30PM Public meeting on NYMTC's Regional Transportation Plan; Queens Borough Hall, Room 213, 120-55 Queens Blvd. 718-482-4559

NOV 13 NOON Metro-North Commuter Council meeting At MTA Hq., 347 Madison Ave. 10 Fl. Conf. Rm., NYC, 212-878-7087

NOV 15 10-11:30AM "Meet the Planners" of the 72nd Street IRT station reconstruction. At the Greenmarket, 72nd St. and Broadway. 718-694-5165

NOV 19 5:30PM Long Island Railroad Commuter

Council President's Forum with Thomas Prendergast, Pres., LIRR. At Pennsylvania Hotel, 401 7th Ave., 18th Fl., NYC, 212-878-7087

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 New York City Area Data, seminar on Intelligent Transportation Systems data collection. At CUNY Grad Center, 33 W. 42 St., Manhattan. 212-650-8050.

NOV 20 5:30PM "Access to the Region's Core" Technical Advisory Committee meeting. At Port Auth. Bus Terminal, North Wing, 2nd Fl. Conf. Rm. Info: 212-435-7000

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

NOV 21 1-4PM Amtrak/Freight Rail Seminar featuring Amy Linden, VP Planning, Policy, Devel., Amtrak. At NYMTC, 1WTC, 82 Fl., NY. RSVP to Yuko Nakanishi, 212-650-8061

NOV 24 5:30PM Manhattan East Side Transit Alternatives Public Meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 5th Fl. Bd. Rm., New York, 718-694-5164.

NOV 25 12:30PM Brown Bag Lunch with Lawrence Reuter, pres. NYC Transit. NYC City Planning Spector Hall, 22 Reade St., NYC. 212-442-4630

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

Mobilizing the Region is a weekly publication of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, available by fax or electronic mail. 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 NYC, from Trenton to Hartford. We invite organizations that agree with our general orientation to join the Campaign as affiliates.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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