

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 161

February 13, 1998

NEWS

Sanctions Scramble in NJ

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (TPA) — northern NJ's "metropolitan planning organization" — sounded a **belated alarm** this week over the potential impact federal Clean Air Act sanctions could have on New Jersey transportation construction projects.

The state is facing the sanctions due to its failure to reduce automobile emissions. The clean air plan NJ has filed with the US EPA depends heavily on the introduction of more thorough vehicle inspection and maintenance procedures. But so far, the state has been unable to get the new system in place.

The TPA issued several resolutions and a press release this week expressing alarm that federal sanctions could **delay projects** that the planning organization says will help reduce emissions. TPA called for a concerted effort by the NJ Legislature and Congressional delegation to ease the sanctions through negotiations with EPA.

A story in the Bergen *Record* yesterday carried the erroneous information that the sanctions could hold up work on the **Hudson-Bergen light rail** project. Tri-State Campaign experts reviewed the claim and found it

groundless. In the light rail line's case, the project passed the federal clean air "conformity" test for transportation plans some time ago.

However, it is true that new transit and rail freight projects could be held up by the sanctions. Under federal rules, new road and rail projects that could significantly affect travel patterns need to be factored into a computer model that is supposed to show the transportation system's overall air pollution impact. Under sanctions, **the state is not allowed to update** the model and thus cannot add big projects.

Transportation officials throughout the state have been busy amending required transportation programs (project lists) before the sanctions take effect April 11. Because agencies have been able to do this prior to sanctions' onset, the **impact of the federal penalties** may not be felt for some time. Still, groups like TPA should have seen the present situation developing months ago, and issued the warnings then.

This week, the Tri-State Campaign was able to win inclusion of several important rail freight projects in the state's "TIP amendment." However, NJDOT has also managed to include a number of pollution-causing highway expansion projects in the amendment as well.

While there may be a case to make that the feds should ease restrictions on new rail projects, New Jersey negotiators might carry more water — and **enjoy stronger backing** throughout the state — if their amended transportation plan shows good faith regarding clean air. That means jettisoning the Millstone Bypass and Route 1 widening projects before April 11, and abandoning bogus arguments that road capacity expansion reduces air pollution by speeding traffic.

What's In a Study, Queens Wants to Know

When is an HOV lane study not an HOV study? When it's a major investment study (MIS), according to the New York State Dept. of Transportation.

This confused alphabet soup spilled over the pages of the *Queens Tribune* this week, as **local reporters began to ask questions** about DOT's "**Long Island Expressway Development Study.**" The latter is a "major investment study" of the Long Island Expressway from the Cross-Island Parkway to the East River. In response to questioning at a transportation planning forum held at Queens Borough Hall on November 12, a State DOT representative stood before several dozen officials and

NJ Gets its Conrail Deal, Ignores Region

On Saturday, the Whitman Administration gave its approval to the division of Conrail by Norfolk Southern and CSX Corporations. New Jersey cited a deal it struck with the railroads to avoid future **conflict between passenger and freight railroad** operations. NJ Transit and freight haulers share many tracks. Plans to expand rail passenger service in parts of the state are also eyeing tracks now used only for freight. The administration hailed the Conrail deal for its introduction of competing rail freight services to the state. Officials said 80% of NJ companies that use rail shipments would be in areas where direct competition would exist.

Still, NJ could have thrown its weight behind a better deal if it had made **common cause with New York** and Connecticut to ensure that a substantial operating agreement for areas east of the Hudson is part of the Conrail deal. Presently, very little rail freight activity takes place in NYC or Long Island, and freight train passage between New England and the rest of the U.S. is constrained. If an agreement to boost east-of-Hudson rail freight is won, NJ will gain from **lower truck congestion** and reduced highway wear-and-tear. If this happens, Jersey can thank its neighbors, not itself.



citizens and said clearly that “special use lanes” (read: HOV — carpool — lanes) would be among the strategies the new LIE study would examine (see *MTR* #151).

But a NYSDOT spokesperson told the *Tribune* this week, “**This is not an HOV study.** This is a major investment study.” However, the DOT gave the reporter no information on the study’s content, leaving Queens readers with a worthless distinction.

In addition to the DOT statement in November, experience strongly suggests any DOT analysis of the highway will look at adding HOV lanes. The agency is building HOV lanes on the LIE in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, and has active plans to extend them into Queens to the Cross-Island Parkway. NYSDOT is studying **HOV lane construction** on the Gowanus Expressway and in “**major investment studies**” for the Staten Island Expressway, the Cross-Bronx and Major Deegan Expressways and an extensive network of Long Island routes. The agency had sought to pave a Cross-Westchester Expressway HOV lane over massive public opposition until it became clear to Governor Pataki last fall that the project was a political liability.

Surprise: Council Hearing Hammers Cars

In an illustration of the changing politics of traffic safety in New York City, Tuesday’s City Council hearing on pedestrian safety, which featured a bill regulating bicycle couriers, turned into a public bashing of Mayor Giuliani’s anti-pedestrian policies. Still, whether the hearing was a one-off **grandstanding session**, or whether the Council will develop a package of **pro-pedestrian legislation** that challenges the Mayor remains a big question.

Urged on by a vocal pro-pedestrian audience, council members lambasted the Giuliani Administration for its **midtown crosswalk barriers and crackdown on jaywalkers**, and for last year’s rise in pedestrian fatalities.

With transportation committee chair Noach Dear meandering through the 3-hour hearing, it was left to Sheepshead Bay council member Anthony Weiner to supply drama. Addressing the administration’s lead witness, DOT Assistant Commissioner Joan McDonald, Weiner read from a 1997 city DOT pedestrian safety study that promoted **wider sidewalks, more ticketing of drivers and slower car speeds** — everything except the new pedestrian-control barriers and jaywalking jihad. When McDonald retorted that pedestrians obstruct turning cars, Weiner sternly reminded her that “the pedestrian has the right-of-way” and upbraided police for **failing to ticket aggressive drivers**.

City inaction on vehicular endangerment was also denounced by council members Kathryn Freed of lower Manhattan, who tied safer streets to reduced traffic levels, and Walter McCaffrey of Woodside, who branded city traffic-safety efforts a total failure. Upper East Side councilman Andrew Eristoff said “My constituents are telling me the barriers are causing an **increase in mid-block jaywalking.**”



DOT’s PR people in Queens have likely caught an HOV allergy because of **the stiff fight they’ve gotten** from elected officials and civic groups **in the eastern part of the borough**. This constituency, led by State Senator Frank Padavan, doesn’t like the HOV plan for the LIE east of the Cross-Island Parkway, and have filed a lawsuit (now in an appeal stage) against it.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is seeking documentation of the Long Island Expressway Development Study’s scope of work, to put to rest the question of whether or not it will examine HOV lane construction. The primary consulting contract for the work has already been awarded to Parsons-Brinckerhoff, the huge NYC-based engineering company.

Open House

Staten Island Expressway Major Investment Study

Thursday, February 19, 1998 4:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

New Dorp High School, Staten Island

Call 718-482-4559

Albany Will Consider U.S.’ 1st Road Rage Law

On Monday, NY’s Governor Pataki announced legislation to deter aggressive driving. The Governor’s “road rage” bill will **create three new crimes**: criminal aggressive driving in the third, second and first degrees. The definition of aggressive driving will include frequent or unsafe lane changes, failing to signal, tailgating, failing to yield right of way and **disregarding traffic controls**. The degrees specified in the bill vary with the extent of harassment, intent and whether or not injury is caused. The bill classifies second and first degree offenses as felonies. At the Governor’s direction, the NY State Police began to target aggressive driving in 1996.

The legislation has been introduced in the State Senate (S5959) by Senator Michael Nozzolio of Seneca Falls, and in the State Assembly (A8817) by Transportation Committee chair David Gannt of Rochester.

New York City traffic safety advocates are examining the legislation to determine whether it can **help boost pedestrian safety**. The Senate bill is co-sponsored by NYC State Senators Maltese and Padavan, and Long Island State Senators Lavallo, Marcellino and Trunzo.

New York City: Clueless on Traffic Safety

When it comes to transportation, Governor Pataki usually seems to get to the heart of NYC’s problems faster than Mayor Giuliani. Compare the Governor’s road rage bill to the city administration’s continued fumbling of street safety:

- The *NY Times* made official last weekend what everyone has known for years — that NYC **cabbies drive like maniacs**. But Taxi and Limousine Commissioner Diane McGrath-McKechnie’s response, instead of sending a signal to cab drivers that treating avenues as autobahns will no longer be tolerated, was to **dispute the numbers** showing

increasing cab crashes and related injuries.

- The lackluster NYPD/City DOT presentation at the City Council pedestrian safety hearings (see story, previous page) this week had a similarly unreal quality. The city's reps seemed neither willing nor capable of making basic distinctions, as between jaywalkers endangering themselves and drivers inflicting danger on others. The scale of the solutions and progress they cited are also dwarfed by the scope of danger to walkers, and by the city itself. Hundreds of pedestrians die on city streets each year, but NYC DOT has been stuck since the Dinkins Administration doing **minor traffic calming tests**. The DOT's spokesperson, Assistant Commissioner Joan McDonald, cited installation of 120 speed humps, a handful of other traffic calming and street marking installations and establishment of four intersections with pedestrian-only crossing times as prominent examples of the city's commitment to safety. But NYC has **over 6,000 miles of city streets**, and over 10,000 signal-controlled intersections. It was no surprise last month when the *NY Times* dubbed the city's traffic calming efforts "dilettantish."

DOT said it had eliminated a traffic signal request backlog, but failed to establish that this is meaningful for traffic safety. The city has yet to install the miniscule maximum number of red-light cameras — 50 — that state legislation permits. And in a shocking misuse of statistics, McDonald dredged up figures placing many pedestrian fatalities outside crosswalks, only to admit under questioning her numbers were national, not NYC data (DMV data indicate that most walkers killed in NYC had the right-of-way). Studies by Transportation Alternatives (see "Speeder City," <http://www.tstc.org/reports/>) show that NYPD's **speeding enforcement priority** remains limited access highways, not city streets.

The city also made much of its work in traffic safety education, but this effort is entirely focused on delivering "get out of the way" messages to kids — **no motorist education exists** whatsoever. Compare to London's "kill your speed, not a child" campaign.

- Mayor Giuliani's Preliminary FY1998 Management Report, released this week, described the Midtown pedestrian barricades as a traffic flow strategy (not in the pedestrian safety terms now used by the NYPD). The traffic calming and student safety education programs noted above are also described, but **traffic crashes, deaths and injuries are not quantified**.

But outside of government, most people seem to think traffic safety should be regarded as a **basic measure of city government performance** and seem truly ready for serious city action to improve life on NYC streets. In the early days of the jaywalking flap, some writers cracked that perhaps the crime rate had fallen a bit too low. The hard fact is — the Mayor's war on pedestrians notwithstanding — that traffic chaos is the biggest NYC law enforcement and quality of life frontier yet to be crossed by the Giuliani Administration.

New on the Web!

Best of Times, Worst of Times: A Straphangers Campaign State of the Buses Report

<http://home.earthlink.net/~straphangers/bus/busreport.html>

or find a link at: <http://www.tstc.org>

FYI

South Bronx Transportation*

- Percent of households with access to a car: 14% (1990 census).
- Street corner furthest from a subway stop: Ryawa Ave. and Halleck St., Hunts Point (1.5 mile walk to the #6 Longwood Ave. station).
- Bus routes serving Hunts Point: 1 (Bx 6)
- Bx 6 service reduction, 1986-1997: 28%
- NYC Transit Authority South Bronx bus route service reduction, 1986-1997: 24%
- NYC Transit Authority Bronx borough-wide bus service reduction: 15%

* The Bronx south of the Cross-Bronx Expwy
Bus info from Straphangers Campaign "State of the

Middlesex County's Sprawl Plan

Middlesex County is petitioning the New Jersey Planning Commission for the official approval under NJ's State Plan of **growth plans for undeveloped areas** well outside the urban centers and inner suburbs of New Brunswick, South Amboy and Perth Amboy. The aim is to win preferential local aid treatment and permit processing for adequate road and sewer capacity to fuel continued ex-urban growth. The focal features for the county's seven "strategic planning areas" are six **highway corridors** such as the Turnpike and I-287, and the Metropark station area.

If the petitions for "endorsed plans" in the highway corridors are approved, they will be the sharpest evidence to date of the **failure of New Jersey's State Development and Redevelopment Plan**. The 1992 Plan is ostensibly designed to focus development in areas with mature infrastructure while protecting open space and natural resources. But the Plan's lack of enforcement teeth, and the tendency of municipalities and counties to **declare any potential growth zone a "center" or "strategic corridor,"** has spurred calls in recent years for more tangible land use policies like growth boundaries, restrictive rural zoning and transfer of development rights programs.

The Plan is currently under revision. At present, it appears the changes under official consideration are **mostly rhetorical**. Worthwhile substantive changes should be implemented in the areas noted above, and in reducing NJDOT highway capacity expenditures.

Governor Whitman declared war on sprawl in her

inaugural speech last month, but the relationship of her initiative still appears to have no clear relation to the function or revision of the State Plan.

Citizens and organizations concerned that Middlesex County is seeking a stamp of approval for unimpeded sprawl should attend the meetings being scheduled in each "strategic area." Contact the Tri-State Transportation Campaign at 212-777-8181 or the Middlesex County Planning Board, 732-745-3016.



Change of Address

Regional Plan Association
4 Irving Place 7th floor
New York, NY 10003

tel. 212-253-2727 fax 212-253-5666
<http://www.rpa.org> rpa@maestro.com

CALENDAR

FEB 18 3:00 PM "Rail Freight and Passenger Service: Coexistence or Conflict?" NYC Bar Association Transportation Committee. W/ officials from Norfolk Southern, CSX, Metro-North, others. 42 West 44th Street, Manhattan. 212-382-6600.

FEB 19 Noon Metro-North Commuter Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 10th fl. Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

FEB 19 6:30 PM Hudson Valley Regional Conference meeting on I-287 rail development, Warner Library, 121 North Broadway, Tarrytown.

FEB 19 8:00 PM "The Future of Route 25A." Meeting on proposal to widen NY Route 25A (Long Island) to four lanes. L.I. Progressive Coalition. Emma Clark Library, Setauket. 516-541-1006.

FEB 23-24 NY Public Transit Association Winter Conference & Lobby Day: "Partners in Transit." Holiday Inn, Albany. 518-434-9060.

FEB 24 7:00 PM Forum on Bronx portion of the Hudson River Greenway. Bronx Advisory Committee to the Greenway seeks ideas. Visitation School Auditorium, 171 W. 239th St.

FEB 24 7:00 PM "Which Way for the Hudson Valley Greenway?" Open forum on Dutchess County segment of the Greenway. Rhinebeck Town Hall, 80 East Market St. Call 914-486-3600.

FEB 25 9:00AM NJ Planning Commission, public meeting, State Plan revision. State House Annex, 125 W. State St. #4, Trenton. 609-292-7156.

FEB 25 6:30 PM Advisory Committee to Bronx Arterial Needs Major Investment Study, kick-off meeting. Bronx Borough President's Office, 198 E. 161st Street, 2nd floor. 212-645-9031.

No Relief in Gowanus Stalemate

Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden and southwest Brooklyn businesses are concerned for the survival of enterprises depending on trucks if the reconstruction of the Gowanus Expressway severely disrupts freight movement. As a result, Brooklyn newspapers report that **over 100 businesses** are urging Governor Pataki and the NY State Dept. of Transportation to seriously consider placing expressway in a tunnel, rather than rebuild the elevated highway in place.

Golden wrote to the NY State Dept. of Transportation in January, stating that businesses wanted a full economic impact assessment of the project as part of a major investment study for the borough. A lawsuit brought by Brooklyn groups and Transportation Alternatives will likely resolve the issue of whether a major investment study — which is broader in scope than the current EIS — will be undertaken.

Meanwhile, Brooklyn State Assemblywoman Joan Millman has also demanded a full state analysis of placing the Gowanus Expressway in a tunnel. Millman said in January that the **tunnel analysis** in the Gowanus EIS is **too piecemeal** to provide any basis for a decision about the ultimate fate of the expressway. Others argue the state is not factoring the many **benefits of removing the elevated** from west Brooklyn neighborhoods into its cost-benefit analysis. Tucker Murray of Liberty Gas/Welding told the *Brooklyn Paper*, "[The State DOT is] saying, let's put the people in the tunnel and the cars on top. Why not do it the other way around?...The sunlight will hit 3rd Avenue for the first time in 70 years."

FEB 25 7:00 PM Forum on Dutchess County segment of Hudson Valley Greenway. Dover Town Hall, E. Duncan Hill Rd. 914-486-3600.

FEB 26 1:15 PM NYMTC monthly Program, Finance & Administration Committee meeting. 1 World Trade Center, #82e, 212-938-4371.

FEB 26 6-8pm Auto-Free NY's "Livable City Plan" 115 W. 30th St. #1207 Manhattan. 212-475-3394.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



M o b i l i z i n g t h e R e g i o n

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

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