

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 167

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## NEWS

### ISTEA-2 Moves Toward Finish

The U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure and Ways and Means Committees approved the **House's ISTEA-2 bill**, known as BESTEA, this week. The measure is expected win approval from the full House of Representatives next week. Congress is then likely to move the 6-year authorizing legislation quickly into a House-Senate conference. The current federal transportation authorization **expires at the end of April**.

The \$217 billion measure provides record levels of funding for most transportation modes, including highways, transit and bicycling and walking, while preserving much of the structure of the ISTEA of 1991. The bill represents successful advocacy by transportation reform interests and their Congressional, state-level and local allies in **fending off major challenges** to provisions and programs like metropolitan planning, the CMAQ transportation/air quality program, the "transportation enhancements" program and transit funding.

A major feature of the House bill is its list of 1,449 "**demonstration projects**" worth over \$9 billion. The Surface Transportation Policy Project says that among these earmarked projects, smaller bicycle, pedestrian and transit projects have begun to emerge much more strongly in a field that has historically been the province of highway construction jobs.

A few noteworthy projects for this region include \$32 million for a study of the **Gowanus Expressway tunnel option**, \$19 million for the Port Authority and NYC EDC to increase **cross-harbor container barge and rail car float service**, highway interchange projects in Passaic and Bergen Counties, a new ferry terminal in Weehawken, and bicycle and pedestrian access improvements in Hartford and New London.

The House Ways and Means Committee, which deals with the fiscal aspects of the legislation, **failed to approve** a companion provision to the Senate bill's relaxation on strictures surrounding an employer tax credit for transit commuter benefits. Some said the absence of the committee's ranking Democrat, NYC's Charles Rangel, traveling with the President in Africa, hurt the measure's chances, but others expected the House was withholding its OK of the measure as a conference bargaining chip.

Spending levels and the ultimate size of the demo project list will be big issues for the **conference committee** to tackle next month, since the bills exceed caps established by last year's balanced budget agreement.

For more info, see [www.istea.org](http://www.istea.org)

### Griffin Line Goes Down

This week, both the Capitol Region Council of Governments and the Hartford City Council voted against the Griffin Line **light rail project** as the preferred alternative for the Hartford-Bradley Airport corridor, **sealing the fate** of the transit project after years of debate. Although some towns within the Council maintained strong support for the line, the no votes from Hartford and Council of Government were expected after ConnDOT said it would **threaten other Hartford area projects** if local governments kept the transit project in the regional Transportation Improvement Program.

In its epitaph for the line, the *Hartford Courant* squarely and correctly blamed "highway obsessed" CT DOT for sinking the project. The paper said "Greater Hartford's transportation picture couldn't look more bleak." It noted that the capitol region now has no major transit project on the drawing board, and that millions in FTA "new start" funds slated for the line would now go elsewhere. "The future holds the **baleful promise of worse traffic congestion**, longer commutes and the wasteful use of more land for parking lots."

Paul Ehrhardt, the Griffin Line's principal advocate, resigned as chair of the Greater Hartford Transit District after Wednesday's COG vote.

### Court Won't Block Waterfront Highway

On Monday, a federal judge declined to enjoin NJDOT plans to construct a limited access segment of **NJ Route 29** that would wipe out the remaining publicly accessible portions of Trenton's Delaware River waterfront.

The suit, brought by Trenton residents, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, NJPIRG Citizen Lobby and others, faced the daunting task of halting a highway construction project with significant political momentum. Nonetheless, the plaintiffs plan to appeal the decision. NJDOT is already cutting down hundreds of trees in the right-of-way.

### Well-mannered or Not, Time to Slow Down

This week, NYC Mayor Giuliani declared the first-ever (modern era) **NYPD deployment against speeding motorists** in decades a success, hopefully leaving the door open for many more such actions. The speeding enforcement push is part of the traffic safety program the Mayor announced in February. Another piece of the program apparently proceeding according to plan is installation of over 1,000 **speed limit signs** on city streets.

NYC DOT said half of the signs were already in place.

To change driving culture in and around the city, enforcement blitzes will have to be mounted on a regular basis, and accompanied by an effective public message.

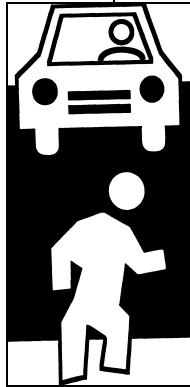
This week's enforcement effort appears to have represented redeployment of police officers from highways to city streets. The impact of the program will stem as much from **public perceptions of a crackdown** as from the actual number of summonses issued.

In that regard, it is time to shift the anti-speeding campaign's context. Under the rubric of "civility," as the mayor first presented it, traffic safety has become easy to dismiss as school-marmish or unworthy small potatoes. The mayor attested to this fact in comments to reporters this week.

The problem can be swiftly overcome by switching the message to the more weighty issues of **life and death on city streets**. The slogan accompanying London's traffic calming campaign was "Kill Your Speed, Not a Child." NYC still boasts the traffic fatality numbers to justify a similar imperative.

Some of the best observers of the city have begun to shift the message themselves. *Daily News* columnist Mike Daly marked the crackdown by writing about the case of Michael Regina, a small businessman run over in 1996 by a chronic speeder on Manhattan's Lafayette St.

And the *News'* editorial writers called for a consistent speeding crackdown, continuing Mayoral engagement and appointment of a city transportation commissioner, who could complement the law enforcement campaign with a traffic management plan.



## Mayor Giuliani and Borough Presidents Endorse Slow Speed Legislation for NYC

City government sources say Mayor Giuliani will shortly join Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan Borough Presidents and more than 40 community groups, including Transportation Alternatives, in calling for state legislation that would **allow New York City to establish traffic calmed, slow speed zones**.

The mayor's step is an encouraging boost for the future of traffic calming in the Big Apple, and is consistent with the city administration's recent emphasis on traffic safety. Currently NY state law mandates a minimum speed of 30 mph on all local streets. This means that city streets must have an engineered "design speed" of at least 30, and that traffic calming measures like speed humps, sidewalk extensions and mini-traffic circles often cannot be used or are largely ineffectual. The mayor, NYC DOT and other slow speed supporters have recognized that **30 mph is simply too fast** for many neighborhood streets and that traffic planners need more discretion in how to meet community demands for reductions in speeding and traffic and better conditions for pedestrians.

The fate of the bill hinges on approval in the NYC City Council's home rule committee, which is controlled by Council Speaker, and gubernatorial candidate, **Peter Vallone**. The bill is sponsored in the Assembly by **Deborah Glick**, and Long Island State Senator **Owen Johnson** has picked up Senate sponsorship from the late Norman Levy. But there may also be concern in the Senate Transportation Committee that a NYC slow speed law will encourage other localities to demand the same authority.

### Transit Equity Denied

A new report from the NYC Partnership and Chamber of Commerce, the city's most influential business group, says **New York State funding for public transit** increasingly favors upstate and suburban commuters at the expense of NYC subway and bus riders. The report noted unequal per ride subsidization of city and suburban transit service, and spotlighted the transfer of funds from the city to the suburbs by the formula for dividing **MTA bridge and tunnel revenue**. The report, "Equity Denied," looks at a variety of funding programs and found that while New York City is driving the state's economy, it is shortchanged in numerous areas of state spending.

### Mega-Project Moves Ahead

Last week, the MTA ran ads seeking management, engineering and environmental consultants for its proposed \$3.5 billion connection of the **Long Island Railroad to Grand Central Terminal**. The firms would develop the project's environmental impact statements and begin design once the review stages are complete. The MTA could award the contracts this summer.

The MTA's advisory committee for the LIRR East Side Access study meets next on April 8 at 6:30pm, at MTA headquarters, 347 Madison Ave. in Manhattan.

### Slow Speed Possibility for NJ

Central NJ State Senator Robert Singer has introduced legislation to amend a state statute that severely constrains municipalities' efforts to **control local speed limits**. Current law says cities and towns may only designate speed limits that vary from state standards if a street under municipal jurisdiction is not connected at town borders with other streets or roads, and only then if the state Transportation Commissioner approves of the change. Singer's bill would relieve the "self-contained" provision and permit municipalities to act independently of the NJDOT commissioner. Counties would also be newly permitted to set speed limits on county roads that do not connect to roads in other counties.

Like the NY legislation described above, the Singer bill would represent a major advance for traffic calming and locally-responsive transportation policy.

### Body Count Rises with Highway Speed Limits

Recent studies from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety show **surging highway deaths** in states that have raised speed limits. Road deaths in 32 states



with higher limits were up 10.4% from 1995 to 1996, according to NHTSA. The NHTSA study says total traffic deaths fell 0.3% from 1995 to 1996, but that **Interstate highway deaths were up 8.2%**. The Insurance Institute study showed fatality increases in the first states to raise speed limits. Missouri, with a 70mph speed limit, saw a dramatic jump from 138 Interstate deaths in 1995 to 208 in 1996. Advocates for faster driving said the studies did not take variables like weather into account.

**Connecticut legislators** are pressing now to join the **65mph ranks**. On Monday, a speed limit increase bill passed a joint legislative committee and is now being considered in the Senate. Speeders were encouraged by Governor Rowland's statement last week that he would not stand in the way of a higher maximum speed. Meanwhile, a "road rage" bill that would have mandated additional driver education for reckless motorists died in the Legislature's judiciary committee, and can only be revived this session as an amendment to another bill.

In New Jersey, some legislators are already champing at the bit to expand the state's 65mph zones. Several Republican lawmakers want to add 300 more miles in central NJ to the 400 miles approved for 65mph earlier this year by Governor Whitman and the Legislature.

So far, **the Governor has stuck to her position** that the increase to 65mph on certain highways is an experiment that will be evaluated for its safety impact after 18 months, and that the affected highway segments will not be expanded before the test period is over.

#### **Public Safety vs. Road Lobby Security**

During every debate on every federal transportation bill, road lobbyists argue that **making roads larger** makes them **safer**. However, according to US DOT, the eight types of projects that make roads safer in order of cost effectiveness are: increasing lighting, upgrading median barriers, relocating or redesigning poles along highways, removing roadside obstacles, adding traffic signals, installing new median barriers, upgrading guardrails and upgrading traffic signals.

US DOT also found that money spent on **crosswalk upgrades** was more safety-effective than spending on other parts of streets and highways. Not only does the research call into question the **ubiquitous safety rationale** the road lobby offers for its **highway expansion projects**, it also points out several misguided safety priorities. For instance, dollar for dollar, the elimination of at grade rail/highway crossings — which always rates long sections and dedicated funding in federal transportation bills — saves fewer lives and reduces accidents less than increasing street lighting. The Center for Auto Safety's Clarence Ditlow put the safety debate in its broadest context. The road builders "want to pour more concrete for more lanes and more roads [which] results in more vehicle miles traveled, and that results in more accidents," Ditlow told the *NY Times*.

#### **Strange Bedfellows Blast JFK Rail Project**

A coalition of civic and other interest groups rallied in front of Port Authority offices Friday to oppose the PA plan for a rail link between Jamaica Station and Kennedy Airport. The groups said they supported a **Committee for Better Transit** proposal to use the abandoned LIRR Rockaway line. Those supporting the proposal are Assembly Member **Dan Feldman**, the NY chapter of the **AAA**, **Committee for Better Transit**, the **Queens Civic Congress** and other Queens civic groups.

Feldman, a member of the Assembly Committee on Public Authorities, said he intends to continue to build a grassroots effort to fight the PA plan. A spokesperson for Feldman said the Rockaway branch alternative would provide a "one seat" ride into Manhattan.

The groups were also joined by the the **Air Transport Association (ATA)**, an airline industry group, which filed suit today against the Federal Aviation Administration's approval of the PA's use of "passenger facility charges" (PFCs — federal air ticket surcharges) for construction of the light rail system. ATA does not believe that PFC charges should be used for development of anything outside airport boundaries. "This **raid on airport funds** cannot be allowed to stand...it could lead to local transit systems being built around the country with PFCs paid by airline passengers," said Roger Cohen ATA's Managing Director. Without the PFC funds, the PA would be hard pressed to build the JFK link to either Jamaica Station or Howard Beach as presently planned, and it is **unclear how any airport rail line**, such as the Rockaway Branch, **could be funded** amid strong regional demand for other sources of infrastructure dollars.

#### **NY Truckers for Tax Relief**

The trucking industry in New York State says it pays more taxes than its siblings in other states. The difference, it says, is the **state ton-mile tax** on trucking.

The NY Motor Truck Association is seeking repeal of the ton-mile tax this legislative session, and has launched a "save jobs" publicity campaign to bolster the effort.

The Motor Truck Association says the tax costs the trucking industry an average of 6.6 cents per mile traveled on New York State roads.

It's unclear whether the Association has any proposal to make up for the **revenue** it proposes to eliminate from state coffers. The Tri-State Campaign's *Subsidies for Traffic* report shows that in 1990-91, NY State brought in \$87.5 million from the tax. Generally, trucks **contribute disproportionately to pollution, noise and infrastructure damage**. Moreover, an American Automobile Manufacturers Assn. report released several years ago lists NY State as 50th ranked among states in percentage of **highway revenues** received from the trucking industry.

*Subsidies for Traffic* found that, overall, expenditures to support motor vehicle use in NY State exceed motor vehicle user-derived revenue by \$2.4 billion annually.

## Around the Region

➤ The **Long Island Railroad** reported this month that ridership in 1997 was the highest since 1985, and gave the railroad its third best year since 1955. Total rides taken on the commuter system last year were 75.8 million. Commuter use grew slightly, but surging off-peak ridership, which grew by over 600,000 rides over 1996, accounted for the healthy statistics. *Passenger Transport*

➤ NYC newspapers reported this week that the **MTA** is considering MetroCard and EZ Pass sales over the **Internet**. Both the Long Island Railroad and the NYC Transit Authority are actively looking into World Wide Web fare pass sales – perhaps even permitting straphangers to add value to MetroCards via WWW credit card transactions. Once established, it would not be difficult to extend the system to encompass MTA Bridge and Tunnel EZ Pass sales. In a related vein, this month the Transit Authority has also discussed the final demise of the fare token, as MetroCard use climbs above two-thirds of bus and subway riders. In a token-free scenario, fares would be sold in stations via vending machines (or by mail or internet), with clerks taking on a “station assistant” role. The MTA’s web site is <http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us>

➤ MTA Bridges and Tunnels is considering dedication of an entire lane of the **Queens-Midtown Tunnel** to EZ-Pass users. The plan would help reduce jockeying at the toll plaza between cash payers and EZ-Pass equipped cars. More than 60% of cars using the MTA crossings now use the electronic toll tag. The Verrazano Bridge will have dedicated EZ-Pass lanes on both levels later this spring.

➤ A *Newsday* exposé this week found that motorists failed to respond to ¾ of parking tickets assigned to **Suffolk County** District Court. The ignored summonses could mean over \$700,000 in forgone state and local revenue, according to the report. Court officials said their workload was so high that they did not look up car owners in the NY DMV registry to follow up on the unanswered summonses.

➤ NJ Transit schedulers are beginning to grapple with the opening next year of a new station in **Hamilton**, along the **Northeast Corridor**. Issues include additional riders on the line and how to prevent “express trains from making too many stops. The station will open before the end of the year. *Trenton Times*

## CALENDAR

**MARCH 30 1pm** NJTPA Board Meeting: DOT TIP amendments vote prior to conformity freeze. Also discussion of pedestrian/bicycle promotion and safety efforts, ISTE briefing from Senator Lautenberg. NJTPA, 1 Newark Ctr., Newark 973-639-8400.

**MARCH 31 5-7pm** “Revitalizing the Port of NY” NYC Bar Assn. 42 West 44th St., Manhattan 212-382-6600.

**APRIL 2 12-2pm** TRF Luncheon: “Short Line Realities.” Roy Blanchard, VP, Morristown & Erie Railway. Giovanni’s Atrium, 100 Washington St., Manhattan 212-435-4086.

**APRIL 2 12-2pm** NYC Transit Riders Council Bus Forum. Millard Seay, VP, NYC Transit. MTA, 347 Madison Ave. Manhattan 212-878-7087.

**APRIL 9 6:30pm** Jane Holtz Kay, author *Asphalt Nation* NY Transit Museum, Boerum Place and Schermerhorn Streets, Brooklyn 718-243-3060

**APRIL 15-16** Transaction 1998: NJ State Transportation Conference. Atlantic City. For registration or vendor information, call 908-903-1077.

**APRIL 20** Albany Earth Day Lobby Day. Contact Environmental Advocates, 518-462-5526.

**APRIL 20 10am** NJ Clean Air Council (DEP advisory body) public hearing on Clean Air Act compliance, Trenton. Reserve speaking slot by 4/13. 609-633-6198 / [eindelic@dep.state.nj.us](mailto:eindelic@dep.state.nj.us)

**APRIL 21 6:30pm** Working group organizational meeting for Bronx arterials (Cross-Bronx, Major Deegan) major investment study. Bronx Borough President’s office, 198 E. 161st St. 718-482-4549

**APRIL 24 9:30am** University Transp. Research Center Visiting Scholars Seminar: “Sustainable Transportation,” David Banister, University of London. 1 World Trade Ctr., 43rd Fl., 212-650-8050

**MAY 4-7** ITS ‘98 conf. Detroit. 202-484-4847.

**MAY 5** Regional Plan Association’s 8th Regional Assembly: “Creating the Capacity for Growth.” 212-785-8000.

**MAY 8-14** Tour de Sol electric vehicle championship, NYC-Washington D.C. Expos in NYC, Morristown, Princeton and Westhampton, NJ. Conference on hybrid electrics May 7-8. Call 413-774-6051.

**JUNE 16-18** NY Public Transit Association spring conference and trade show. Westchester Marriot, Tarrytown. 518-434-9060.

### TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

MTR#167. Contributing: John Kaehny, Lisa Schreiberman Editor: Jon Orcutt Executive Director, Janine Bauer

281 Park Ave. South, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10010 tel. (212) 777-8181 fax (212) 777-8157 email [tstc@tstc.org](mailto:tstc@tstc.org)