

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NY Business, Labor, Civic and Environmental Groups Outline 5-Year, \$18 billion MTA Investment Program, Call for Major Transit Upgrades and Expansion

The Empire State Transportation Alliance, a new, encompassing coalition of New York business, environmental, labor and civic organizations, called on Wednesday for an \$18.2 billion MTA capital program to boost mobility for metropolitan region employees, consumers and tourists and accommodate future job growth.

The call for a significant increase in transit capital spending is a bold one, but is backed by a **powerful, diverse range of constituencies**. The very existence of the Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA) is strong commentary on the consensus in NY favoring a robust set of transit upgrades alongside the first major system expansion projects in several generations.

ESTA's transit blueprint, prepared by the Regional Plan Association, looks both at needs for continued investment in the existing transit system, and outlines funding that will be required over the next five years to advance tandem construction of a Long Island Railroad-Grand Central Terminal link and a Second Avenue Subway running the length of Manhattan. ESTA's sober examination of the current state of transit and of popular and much-discussed expansion projects will give it a strong role in shaping public debate over MTA capital planning this fall and winter.

The Alliance's initiative comes in advance of the MTA's release of its new capital program, required on October 1 by state law. Observers expect MTA staff to **present their plan** at the MTA board meeting on **September 29**. A series of five and six year capital investment programs beginning in the early 1980s has allowed the MTA to bring the subway system back from the ruin of the 1970s. The current MTA capital program amounts to about \$12 billion, spent over six years.

The program offered Wednesday features the first major NY transit expansion projects in 50 years. The

MTA is widely expected to include significant funding for the LIRR-Grand Central connection in its new plan, but to put off any real funding for the Second Avenue Subway. "We've essentially used up the transportation system built by our grandparents. New York avoids investment in expansion and improvements at its peril," said RPA director Bob Yaro.

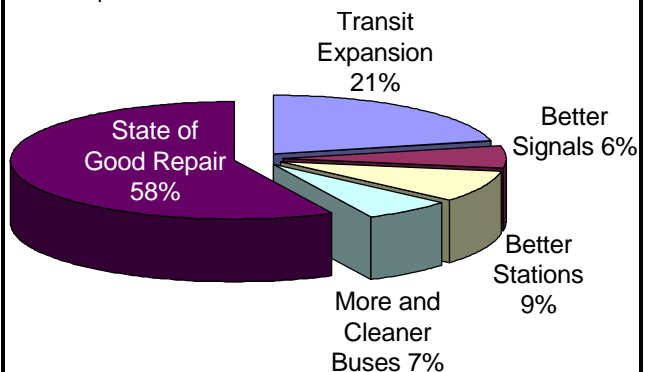
Growing consensus around this point, fueled in part by surging transit ridership around the metropolitan region, has led many business groups to back the Empire State Transportation Alliance. ESTA's members include the NYC Partnership, the Long Island Association, the General Contractors Association, the Real Estate Board of NY, the Westchester County Association and the Association for a better New York.

The coalition, which also features transit advocacy campaigners like the Straphangers Campaign, the Transport Workers Union, Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund and Tri-State Transportation Campaign, is planning a **major public outreach and mobilization effort**, likely to include an advertising campaign and other measures to engage a

The ESTA Plan

Allocation of Funds, 2000-2004

Total: \$18.2 billion



MTA Capital Plan Debate — Coming Attractions

- **September 15, 6pm** Public Hearing on MTA Manhattan East Side Alternatives Study (2nd Avenue Subway) draft environmental impact statement. MTA headquarters — 347 Madison Avenue 5th Floor.
- **September 29, 9am** MTA Board Meeting (likely release of MTA proposed 5-year capital program), 347 Madison Avenue, 5th floor.

broad segment of the citizenry in the debate over the future of the public transit in New York. After the MTA releases its proposed building program later this month, the parties to the debate will weigh in over the program's contents, scope and funding sources in the effort to win approval by the State Legislature and Governor Pataki. Spokespersons for Governor Pataki and State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver told the *Daily News* they would review ESTA's plan.

MTA Capital Program: Internet Links

- ESTA and its assessment of MTA capital needs:
<http://www.rpa.org/esta.html>
- Regional Plan Association's Metrolink subway construction plan:
<http://www.rpa.org/metrolink.html>
- Sept. 15 public hearing notice and executive summary of MTA Manhattan East Side Alternatives (2nd Ave. Subway) study:

Repair, Improvement and Expansion

While debate and media attention is already swirling around proposals for a Second Avenue subway (see next page), the assessment of MTA capital needs released by ESTA puts **strong emphasis** on continuing **work to repair subway and commuter rail infrastructure** and on important upgrades to key parts of the overall transit system.

System Repair and Normal Replacement ESTA would direct the bulk of MTA capital spending during the next five years — \$10.5 billion of the \$18.2 billion total — to the MTA's goal of bringing the entire system to a state of good repair by 2019, and to instituting a normal cycle of replacement for those elements of the system already in good repair.

\$6.5 billion of ESTA's state of good repair estimate is for NYC Transit. ESTA expands on likely NYCT funding requests by calling for more emphasis on overhauling and expanding capacity at NYC Transit subway car shops and yards, and for expanded effort to upgrade and repair subway line equipment and structures.

The ESTA plan also provides for a more concerted effort to repair LIRR line structures, but largely concurs with MTA estimates for bringing the commuter rail systems to a state of good repair.

More Subway Cars ESTA calls for expansion of the subway fleet by 100 new 'B' division cars (lettered subway lines) over the next five years, to provide for four-minute rush-hour headways. The cost of these additional cars is included in ESTA's NYC Transit repair estimate

More and Cleaner Buses To meet surging peak-period bus ridership, ESTA recommends expanding NYC Transit's bus fleet by 400 and adding two new bus depots capable of handling 200-250 buses each. The new buses and depots, and two depots to be overhauled would feature compressed natural gas (CNG) engines and fueling facilities. Three additional depots would also be outfitted with CNG fueling systems. Buses purchased as part of the normal replacement cycle would also be CNG-powered. ESTA allocates \$1.2 billion for this bus program.

Modern Subway Signals and Passenger Information ESTA recommends that NYC Transit accelerate its efforts to replace its turn-of-the-last-century signal sys-

tem with modern communication-based-train-control technology, and invest \$100 million to develop and begin deploying electronic passenger information systems in its subways and buses. ESTA total: \$1.1 billion.

Better Stations ESTA argues for an accelerated and reformed subway station rehabilitation program that will include incentive contracting, stronger emphasis on improving station accessibility and more community involvement in station design. ESTA cost: \$1.6 billion.

Expanding the Transit System With the transit system on its way to a state of good repair, ridership up and the economy growing, ESTA argues that transit system expansion must become a priority for the MTA. Subways and buses are jammed and tunnel capacity for commuter trains is exhausted. ESTA recommends:

- The LIRR-Grand Central project proceed in tandem RPA's MetroLink plan, which implements a variety of new rapid transit services around the linchpin of a new subway tunnel running under Second Avenue and Water Street. Both projects could break ground in 2003 and be completed in 2012. During the next five years, this timetable would require \$1.5 billion for LIRR-GCT and \$2 billion for MetroLink.

- The Metro-North Harlem Line Third Track project advance through construction, at a \$43 million cost.

- The LIRR Main Line Third Track project complete design and permitting at a \$10 million cost. Construction would occur in the following five years.

- A \$370 million planning and design fund should be set aside for work on projects such as LaGuardia rail access, the West Shore Line, cross-Hudson rail capacity, and Metro-North access to Penn Station.

In the NYMTC TIP, the MTA has requested \$2.4 billion for LIRR-Grand Central, plus \$160 million for design and engineering of unspecified projects.

The ESTA blueprint does not raise possibilities for raising the new revenues needed to meet the \$18 billion tag. The coalition's focus for now is to stress the region's critical transit needs. Discussion about revenues will naturally ensue as the MTA, the legislature and Governor Pataki take up the debate and react to the ESTA plan. "We are calling on the Governor and legislative leaders to continue the positive record of investment [represented in earlier MTA rebuilding programs]," said Elliot Sander, founder of the Council on Transportation and an ESTA convenor.

NY Times Backs Full Second Avenue Line

An editorial in the *NY Times* today states that the MTA should pursue funding for both the LIRR-Grand Central Link and a full-length Second Avenue Subway line, calling the projects a "down payment on the city's growth." *Newsday* has supported the same position for a number of weeks.

Debate over the 2nd Avenue line continued alongside ESTA's release of its MTA capital program proposal this week. Manhattan elected officials continued their

pressure for a full-length subway based on RPA's MetroLink proposal at a Wednesday press conference. They were joined by elected officials from Queens and

Schumer, Moynihan Win D.C. Transit Fight

Yesterday, Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama withdrew a budget measure that could have cost New York State up to \$160 million in federal transit aid. Shelby's measure was approved by a Senate committee in May (see *MTR #222*). It would have distributed federal transit aid more evenly among the states, without regard for the fact that mass **transit systems and riders are concentrated heavily in New York and California**. Lobbying and a filibuster threat by Schumer and others was apparently convincing to enough Senators that Shelby lost a vote yesterday to end debate on the transportation spending bill. Sen. Shelby withdrew the mea-

Metro-North West Side Study Launched

Metro-North Railroad has released a draft scoping document for a plan to bring some of its trains **into Penn Station** via Manhattan's west side or, for the New Haven line, through Queens. The project will proceed as an environmental impact and major investment study.

Among the issues the study will examine are time savings for existing Metro-North commuters, attracting new passengers and **opening new stations on the West Side** between 57th and 86th Streets and in The Bronx' Co-Op City. Peak hour, off-peak and reverse commute services will be studied. Routes that will be studied include the Spuyten Duyvil crossing for the Harlem and Hudson lines and the Hellgate Bridge for New Haven line trains.

Four public meetings are scheduled for Sept. 28-October 6th. For more information call 1-877-677-7366.

NYC Gridlock: Less Parking = Less Traffic

A recent *Daily News* expose' suggests a permanent means Mayor Giuliani could exercise to curb gridlock — severely **limit the availability of free parking permits** for city workers. The *News* found that New York City agencies dole out over 15,000 all-purpose free parking permits to city employees and politically-connected out-of-towners every year. Distributions include 9,776 placards to the Transportation Department, 5,348 to the Police Department, and 296 to Fire officials. In addition to these legal permits, some agencies reproduce permits so that more workers can car commute through the nation's worst traffic.

Last spring, a survey by a Lower Manhattan paper, the *Tribeca Trib*, found that 9 of 10 daytime vehicles on streets with high parking demand had city parking permits or special plates. Lower Manhattan boasts one of the greatest densities of subway stations in the world, but city policy has fostered **generations of municipal car potatoes** and extra traffic. Changing this bad habit could have a more lasting impact, at least downtown, than the city's ephemeral don't-block-the-box blitzes.

the Bronx, who expressed strong support for the services and connections MetroLink would offer to transit riders throughout the city.

At a City Council hearing on the issue, the MTA defended its proposal to build a 2nd Avenue tunnel from 63rd St to 125th Street, and route 2nd Ave. trains on the unused N and R tracks south of 63rd. Neither City Council members nor other advocates of transit expansion were convinced, however. NYC Transit's own Manhattan East Side Alternatives study shows the 63rd St.-125th St. project would do little to relieve overcrowding on the Lexington Line, reduce walking distances for many East Side residents or attract many new subway riders.

Still No Details on the New Jersey's \$250M Transportation Bond Question

The history of voter disapproval of transportation bond issues does not seem to be worrying the Whitman Administration despite. So far, the State House and NJ DOT are still mum about the projects that will be funded if voters approve a \$500 million transportation bond issue on November 2nd.

At an Alliance for Action breakfast last week billed as a forum for contractors to get information about the bond issue, Commissioner Jim Weinstein **provided no details**, except to repeat the bill's amended language that it would be used for "statewide transportation improvements." The original bill would have devoted all of the proceeds to repairing bridges, but was amended at the last minute to cut the bridge portion in half.) NJ Transit officials also acknowledge that they don't know how much, if any, of the bond proceeds will go to transit projects. In July, **the Campaign requested a list of projects or programs** on which the \$250 million would be spent; a DOT capital program manager coyly wrote back that a list of projects would be released *after* the voters approves the ballot issue in November.

This week, Assembly Transportation Committee chairman Alex DeCroce, who was told he would be provided with a list of projects when he agreed to the amendment last June, wrote to Weinstein again requesting a list of projects or programs. DeCroce noted that, "Success at the ballot will **require at strong case that the proceeds from the bond will be spent on the highest priority projects** and/or programs.... The amended bill continues to give me pause. Voters are increasingly concerned about the **state's high level of bonded debt**, and without greater specificity as to the projects or programs to be funded from this bond act, strong editorial support and the support of various stakeholders could be jeopardized." DeCroce requested that all proceeds be devoted to "system preservation," which DOT claims is its highest priority.

Among environmentalists, fear is growing that the money will be used for yet more destructive big-ticket highway projects that the Administration doesn't want to

reveal, and which would force the groups to oppose the ballot question. Silent running seems to be the strategy — this bond vote is not accompanied by the slick-materials media hype about job creation and infrastructure that surrounded past transportation revenue efforts, but it seems a risky strategy to win approval for what amounts to a \$250 million blank check.

Tappan Zee Toll Study Nears Completion

The NYS Thruway Authority recently completed its Congestion Relief Pricing Study for the Tappan Zee Bridge corridor. The final report has not yet been released to the public, but preliminary findings presented by the Thruway earlier this summer showed that even very small toll fluctuations can improve traffic flow.

The standard toll on the bridge is \$3.00. Commuters using the crossing at least 17 times per month pay only \$1.00 per roundtrip crossing — a steep discount that encourages travel during the most congested hours.

According to the Thruway's "revenue-neutral" option, a 50-cent surcharge for commuters during the morning peak, along with a 50-cent discount for commuters during "shoulder" hours (periods immediately before and after rush hour) would yield an **8% reduction in peak traffic volumes**.

This is **good news for the I-287 Task Force**, a group of elected officials, transportation agencies, and business and environmental groups appointed by Governor Pataki to find solutions to cross-Westchester gridlock.

15 prominent environmental groups in Westchester and Rockland County — including both counties' environmental umbrella groups, the Rockland County Conservation Association and the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County, as well as the NY League of Conservation Voters, Scenic Hudson, the Sierra Club of Lower Hudson and the Saw Mill River Audubon Society — have endorsed a statement calling for implementation of variable tolls on the Tappan Zee Bridge.

Road-Ripping Mayor Will Visit Big Apple

Milwaukee's Mayor, John Norquist, who succeeded this year in securing City Council approval and more than \$20 million in federal money to tear down a 3/4 mile highway running through the city's center will give a lecture at Cooper Union in November entitled "Downtowns in America in the 21st Century."

Mayor Norquist's highway-removal initiative has received some national attention. Norquist was cited in the *NY Times* this summer, stating "the urban superhighway should be relegated to the scrap heap of history."

The free lecture will be in Cooper Union's Great Hall, 7 East 7th Street (at 3rd Ave.) Thursday, November 4 at 8:00pm. Information: (212) 353-4195.

Additional calendar items at www.tstc.org

Calendar

September 11, 6am CT Chapter of the Women's Transportation Seminar bus trip, "Tour the Boston Central Artery Project ." Call Lori at 203-335-7425.

September 15, 6pm Public Hearing on Manhattan East Side Alternatives Study (MESA) draft environmental impact statement. MTA headquarters - 347 Madison Avenue 5th Floor. Call Douglas Sussman 212-878-7483.

Sept. 15, 7pm Public planning workshop re: Weehawken Community Plan. 98 Columbia Terrace, Weehawken. Friends of Weehawken Waterfront. robkotch@weehawkenwaterfront.com

September 16, 1-4pm Route 1 Collaborative quarterly meeting. Middlesex County Planning Board, Livingston Ave., New Brunswick. 732-745-4490.

September 19, 11am-4pm Morris County NJ Millennium Transportation Expo. Highlights new rail technology, bike and pedestrian programs, alt-powered cars. Morristown Train Station. 973-267-7600, www.mcrides.org.

September 21, 10:30-1 Freight Transportation Working Group meeting. One World Trade Center 82nd Fl. East. Call Howard Mann 938-3448.

September 21-22 Federated Conservationists of Westchester County's Transportation Conf., "Crossing the Hudson: How will we do it in the next Millennium?" A consensus-building "meeting of the minds." Tarrytown Hilton. 914-289-0537

Sept. 23 9am-7pm The Waterfront Conference, Liberty State Park, NJ and Governor's Island, NY. Baykeeper, Rockefeller Bros. Fund, others. \$ 800-364-9943, conference@waterwire.net, www.waterwire.net

Sept. 23, Noon NYC Transit Riders Council monthly meeting. 420 Lexington Avenue, 11th floor. 212-878-7087. www.pcac.org

September 24, 12-2pm Lower Manhattan Access Public Advisory Committee Meeting. 22 Reade Street, Spector Hall. Call 212-799-4500

September 27, 10am-2pm North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority committee meetings. 1 Newark Center, 17th floor. 973-639-8420

September 28, 10am Project Advisory Committee meeting on the Sheridan Expressway/Bronx River Parkway ramp across East 177th Street. Bronx Borough President's-- Office 198 E. 161st Street. Call Nayan Basu at 718-482.4549.

September 28, 6-8pm Auto-Free NY, "Cross Harbor Freight." 115 W 30th St, Rm 1207, Manhattan. 212-475-3394, geohaikalis@juno.com