

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Worth the Wait ?

A report released this week by the Surface Transportation Policy Project, "Road Work Ahead: Is Construction Worth the Wait?" finds that motorists can **lose more time in road construction delays** than they will save in years of driving on the newly "improved" road.

In a case study, the report spotlights Trenton's Route 29 project, an \$85 million, four-lane highway along the Delaware River waterfront. The report shows that traffic delays stemming from the project are so long that it will take **ten years for drivers to make up the time** and actually benefit from the project.

The report says traditional transportation planning leaves the perspective of individual drivers out of the road-building equation. As a result, projects may meet the goal of accommodating more cars while doing little to improve the commute of those driving now.

Participants in a Thursday press conference in Trenton said NJDOT is planning many new highway projects which could spell years of construction delays to motorists. The projects include the widening of Route 1, Route 1&9, Route 206, Route 46, Route 15, and Route 55. "NJDOT needs to start looking at the costs of construction delays before it submits drivers once again to the orange cone zone," said Marie Curtis, Executive Director of the NJ Environmental Lobby.

In addition to the delays caused by road widening projects, the additional highway space also can attract more drivers, possibly reducing time saving benefits even further. On Route 29, STPP found the project will attract 25 percent more traffic than there would have been without the project. Such added traffic could mean unanticipated congestion.

"This report spotlights an often overlooked flaw in DOT's road-building policy," said Greg Meyer of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "Motorists need assurance that years of construction delays will be worth the trouble." The report suggests increasing train and bus service, clearing accidents quickly, and building communities so people need to drive less.

The entire report is available on via the internet at [www.transact.org](http://www.transact.org).

### Inside

- ➔ Tappan Zee toll study is complete, shows variable tolls will ease congestion
- ➔ Charting the future of the Tappan Zee Bridge
- ➔ New York trash on New Jersey s roads

### MTA Set to Unveil \$16 Billion Transit Plan

Next week, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority will release its proposal for its next multi-year construction program.

According to MTA documents, the plan will amount to \$17 billion — \$16 billion for transit system expansion and subway, bus and commuter rail improvements, with an additional billion for MTA bridge and tunnel maintenance.

The transit program breaks down as follows:

- NYC Transit buses and subways: **\$10.1 billion**
- Commuter railroads: **\$3.4 billion**
- System expansion projects: **\$2.5 billion**

The plan's overall figure for maintenance of the existing transit and MTA bridge and tunnel system is \$14.5 billion.

NYC Transit programs would include purchase of over 1,000 each of new buses and subway cars, a \$1.66 billion station rehabilitation program, better communications and customer information systems and overhauls for four subway train maintenance shops.

The **transit expansion** budget would be divided between the LIRR-Grand Central link, which would receive \$1.6 billion to complete design work and begin construction, the Second Avenue subway north of 63rd Street, which would get \$700 million to complete environmental reviews and designs and begin tunnel work, and a final \$170 million for planning future projects like a LaGuardia Rail link and Metro-North Penn Station access.

The MTA projects that under this scenario, over five years, its combined capital and operating budget gaps will amount to \$4.4 billion. The agency suggests the gap can be made up partly by a program of expense reductions (unrelated to transit services), and initiatives like bond refinancing. Even with these measures, however, **the plan has a hole of \$2.36 billion** that would have to be filled with "new governmental assistance and

### Spotlight on the MTA Capital Plan

The MTA Board meets this **Wednesday** morning, **September 29, at 9 a.m.**

The meeting will focus on elements of the proposed MTA construction plan discussed above.

Advocates for Second Avenue subway construction, clean buses and other transit improvements are expected to come out in force.

**347 Madison Avenue, 5th floor, Manhattan**

other resources.”

At this point, information is not detailed enough to judge whether the NYC Transit subway and bus purchases represent expansion of the city transit fleet. Some observers believe the subway cars will only replace old cars slated for retirement.

The MTA plan indicates it will buy 300 “clean fuel” buses and spend \$50 million to renovate and add compressed natural gas fueling capability to the Manhattanville bus depot in Harlem. The likely scenario here is that the MTA will expand the city bus fleet, but that the CNG buses will more or less represent the margin of expansion. Thus, very little, if any, of the MTA’s polluting diesel bus fleet will give way to cleaner replacements. The Natural Resources Defense Council and others will expose and press this issue hard during the capital plan debate.

The MTA plan is smaller than the one released earlier this month by the Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA), a coalition of business, planning, civic, environmental and labor groups (see *MTR* #236) by \$2 billion (the ESTA plan did not look at funds for MTA Bridges and Tunnels). The biggest gap is in the allocation for the Second Avenue subway project. ESTA called for a \$2 billion investment in a Second Avenue line running the length of Manhattan. ESTA argued that funding at this level would enable the project to be completed around the same time that LIRR trains begin to run into Grand Central (2010). This issue will likely be the biggest fight during the capital plan debate. State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who represents Manhattan’s Lower East Side, has said he would not approve any MTA spending plan that did not begin work on a full-length Second Avenue line.

ESTA also called for expansion of the subway fleet by 100 cars (to enable increases in peak service), for much bigger investment in clean fuel buses and faster subway signal upgrades.

Still, the MTA proposal would represent the biggest-ever building program. The MTA could likely win widespread support if it devoted somewhat more funding to the Second Avenue project and agreed with Speaker Silver to develop a full-length plan for the Second Ave. line. Then the legislature and Gov. Pataki could turn full attention to the \$2.36 billion question.



Transport Workers Union Local 100 has hired labor campaigner Ray Rogers and his Corporate Campaign outfit to organize public support for a drive for wage increases and increased transit funding. Contract negotiations between transit labor and the MTA are set to begin in October — the 35,000-member local’s current contract expires December 15. *Chief-Leader*

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

### Thruway Completes Tappan Zee Toll Study

The NY State Thruway Authority has finished the Tappan Zee Bridge toll policy study it began in 1996 at the request of the Rockland and Westchester County Executives and Governor Pataki. Results show that even **modest price differentials** between peak and off-peak toll rates **stand to significantly reduce rush hour congestion** on the chronically clogged bridge.

The Thruway and its consultants conducted the study with funding from the Federal Highway Administration’s Value Pricing Program.

The base Tappan Zee Bridge toll is \$3.00, collected only in the east-bound direction. But drivers using the bridge at least 17 times per month pay only \$1 — the Thruway Authority estimates that over 75% of rush hour drivers pay the \$1 rate.

While the study finds that the direct effect of higher peak prices is the shift of a significant number of drivers to other travel times, it also found that some travelers — who **now shun peak hours** due to congestion — **return to them** once the peak/off-peak price break has eased traffic flow. The finding reflects the willingness on the parts of many commuters to pay a higher toll **if it means less time spent in traffic**.

Surveys of Tappan Zee Bridge travelers conducted as part of the study found that over 50% of all respondents either strongly favored or somewhat favored congestion pricing on the Tappan Zee Bridge, once they had received some information about congestion pricing’s

#### Tappan Zee Bridge Toll Scenarios and Estimated Peak Hour Traffic Volume Effects

	Toll scenarios		
	7-9 a.m. <b>\$1.50</b>	7-9 a.m. <b>\$2.50</b>	7-7:30: <b>\$2</b>
Shoulder <b>\$1</b>	Shoulder: <b>\$2</b>	7:30-8:30:	
Off peak <b>\$.50</b>	Off peak: <b>\$1.50</b>	<b>\$2.50</b>	
		8:30 -9: <b>\$2</b>	
		Shoulder: <b>\$1.50</b>	
		Off-peak: <b>\$1</b>	
<b>Effects</b>			
Shift out of 7-9 a.m. peak	16%	17%	15%
Shift into 7-9 a.m. peak	9%	6%	5%
<b>Net peak volume change</b>	-7%	-11%	-10%

“Shoulder” periods are 6-7 a.m. and 9-10 a.m.

Present-day toll is \$1 for daily commuters. “Shift into peak” under pricing scenarios represents drivers who now avoid the peak because of congestion, but would shift back and pay the higher toll to take advantage of the freer flow of traffic created by the peak/off-peak price break.

likely effects and benefits, while about 30% were opposed or strongly opposed. There was virtually no difference in opinion between men and women, or between low, middle or high income levels.

The survey also found that many travelers have some flexibility and will actively consider time-of-day shifts when peak period prices are increased.

Interviews with I-287 corridor employers indicated



### Tappan Zee Future Debated

Transportation and elected officials, planners and activists gathered for a two-day meeting on Tappan Zee Bridge issues this week in Tarrytown. The meeting, organized by the Federated Conservationists of Westchester and NYMTC, appears to have forged a **strong sense among Rockland and Westchester civic leaders** that replacing the Tappan Zee with a new span is a strategy worth pursuing.

The issue of replacing the Tappan Zee was mentioned by Governor Pataki in a radio address this summer, and has received a significant amount of attention in the Hudson Valley ever since.

Proponents of a new bridge say it would be able to accommodate **features the Tappan Zee now lacks** — a public transit right-of-way, a bike/walkway and breakdown lanes. Many at this week's meeting argued that a new bridge should have no new roadway capacity, though that issue would surely be revisited should momentum toward a new bridge ever really take shape. Both transit and scenic advocates were likewise against any notion of "twinning" the existing bridge.

Indeed, one of the strongest arguments for a new bridge may be economic. Thruway engineers say they can keep the 44-year-old Tappan Zee functioning, and even held out the possibilities of hanging new transit- and bike-ways from the existing structure, but said repair and maintenance costs are high and escalating. Still, no one has estimated a new bridge's price-tag, so long-term cost comparisons are not yet possible.

The shape of a new bridge might be dictated in part by the region's choice of **future Rockland-Westchester transit links**. Federated Conservationists of Westchester, some legislators and others are keenly interested in Rockland-Westchester light rail development, although some transit experts have argued that residential and workplace densities are too low to effectively support such a line. Metro-North had expressed interest in crossing the Hudson earlier in the 1990's, but shelved its study of the idea (see *MTR #32*). Eventual development of the West Shore Line, linking Rockland County to Penn Station via Secaucus, may further temper Metro-North's interest.

The need for shorter-term measures — including variable tolls, a vanpool program and improved bus service — to improve the situation on the Tappan Zee, was repeatedly raised at this week's meeting. Ideas from the event will be presented to Governor Pataki's I-287 Task Force, which next meets in October.

that "congestion is a problem, contributing to employee tardiness and stress." Some indicated that "it is difficult to attract and retain employees from west of the Hudson River." Many employers felt that an incentive pricing program would not necessarily affect customers or clients, many of which are already located in Westchester County.

The report's conclusion states: "The analyses conducted for this study indicate that pricing can be used to change the behavior of a reasonably large number of travelers...the overall **peak period traffic reduction** is clearly significant enough to **warrant serious consideration** in the congested Tappan Zee corridor."

Results will provide Governor Pataki's I-287 Task Force — charged with finding solutions to corridor gridlock — with solid data showing that pricing strategies can improve traffic flow.

A toll strategy is in fact one of the few highly effective early action strategies available to the Task Force (see story at left). The Task Force may be interested in offering additional bus and van services across the Tappan Zee Bridge, but to make them attractive, it will have to **get traffic on the bridge moving**, and it will have to make the choice to take transit at least somewhat **competitive with driving**. Compared to the very low \$1 toll for car commuters, the bulk discount for Tappan Zee Express bus riders is \$1.80 roundtrip. Today's bridge prices encourage solo-driving during the most congested hours, and provide no financial or time-saving incentive to use transit.

### New York Trash, New Jersey Streets

The next step in NYC's "interim" garbage disposal plan calls for sending 3,200 to 3,700 tons per day of garbage from Manhattan and Staten Island to incinerators and transfer stations in Newark and Elizabeth, according to the *Big Apple Garbage Sentinel (BAGS)*, a Brooklyn-based newsletter on New York City's evolving waste disposal plan.

When Mayor Giuliani announced plans in December to adjust to the closing of Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island by shipping NYC's waste to New Jersey on barges, the Whitman administration was quick to express its outrage. The latest plan — not yet announced officially — has provoked no such response, despite its reliance on trucks to carry waste to New Jersey. *BAGS* estimates that transport of the Manhattan and Staten Island garbage now at issue will bring **400,000 to 600,000 new truck trips to Newark and Elizabeth annually**. While Trenton may be choosing to ignore the plan due to its temporary or "interim" status, NYC advocates have been warning for months that the interim plan could well become permanent.

NJ Department of Environmental Protection staff noted that, so long as the waste incineration and transfer facilities involved in the plans remain within the terms of their permits, the proposal may not fall within the agency's purview. DEP also noted, however, that local traffic impacts are taken into consideration in the

permitting of such facilities, and that therefore a significant change in the origins of a facility's garbage input would call for a modification to the permit.

BAGS projects 80,000 new one-way truck trips over Goethals Bridge per year under the interim plan, an instant 4% increase over current levels. Unlike the many trucks crossing the Goethals en route to the NJ Turnpike, the garbage trucks would ply Elizabeth streets to get to transfer stations on Front Street and Julia Street, located at distances of 3 and 5 miles, respectively, from the Goethals Bridge. Moreover, 18-wheelers would carry the garbage from the transfer stations to landfills in Pennsylvania and Virginia, generating an additional 40,000 truck trips.

The Manhattan portion of the plan would produce 216,000 garbage truck trips between Newark and New York. According to the Brooklyn Borough President's office, this waste would displace garbage from other sources currently trucked to the incinerator in Newark, and this garbage would then be directed to transfer stations in or near Newark. This would add 82,000 trips by 18-wheelers annually to Essex County roads.

#### **Correction NJ Rail Freight Needs**

In *MTR* #237, in an article about transportation capital spending in New Jersey, we reported that the NJ State Rail Plan identifies \$22 million in rail freight infrastructure needs. That figure was a misprint — the Rail Plan in fact identifies \$221 million in needed NJ rail freight capital projects.

### **Calendar**

**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.

**Sept. 28, 5:30pm** Metro-North Penn Station Access Study scoping meeting, 347 Madison Ave., 5th floor, Manhattan. 877-667-7366.

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

**September 29 9am** Metropolitan Transportation Authority board meeting, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th floor, Manhattan.

**Sept. 29, Noon-2pm** Cross-Harbor Freight Movement Study Open House. NYC Economic Development Corp. 9 Metrotech Center, auditorium, Brooklyn. 212-619-5000.

**Sept. 30, Noon** Permanent Citizens Advisory

Committee to the MTA, quarterly meeting. 347 Madison Ave, 5th floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**Sept. 30, 6:30pm** Metro-North Penn Station Access Study scoping meeting, 135 Einstein Loop, Co-op City, Bronx. 877-667-7366

**October 5, 6-8pm** NYMTC public meeting to accept public comments on applications for TEA-21 Transportation Enhancements project funding. 1 World Trade Center, 82e, 212-938-3310.

**Oct. 5, 6:30pm** Metro-North Penn Station Access Study scoping meeting, 121 North Broadway, Tarrytown. 877-667-7366

**October 6-7** Environmental Advocates' annual conference, "Environment '99: Upstate, Downstate." Lighthouse International Conference Center, 111 E. 59th St, Manhattan. Call 1-800-SAVE-NYS for more info.

**Oct. 7, 6:30pm** Metro-North Penn Station Access Study scoping meeting, 888 Washington Blvd. 2nd Floor, Stamford. 877-667-7366.

**Oct. 7, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum luncheon: "A New Era in Regional Rail Freight Commerce," W. Robert Bentley, Pres., Cross-Harbor Railroad. \$ 212-435-4086 pgressner@panynj.gov

**October 14, 8am-4:30pm** Association of Bicycle and Pedestrian Professionals training course on changes to AASHTO guide, other regulatory and legal documents. In conjunction w/ "Walk NJ" conference (see below). Bloustein planning school, 33 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick. 609-734-7066. www.njapa.org

**October 15, 8:30am-3:30pm** Rutgers University Transportation Policy Institute, "Walk NJ" pedestrian conference. Learn to design and implement pedestrian-friendly facilities and communities. Bloustein school, 33 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick 732-932-6812 x699.

**Oct. 18, 1pm** NJ Transportation Planning Authority meeting. 1 Newark Cntr, 17th floor. 973-639-8406.

**Nov. 4, 8pm** Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist ("the urban superhighway should be relegated to the scrap heap of history") on "Downtowns in America in the 21st Century." Cooper Union Great Hall, 7 East 7th Street, Manhattan. Info: 212-353-4195.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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