

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NJ Transportation Bond Act Vote Yes

Yesterday, New Jersey DOT finally **released its project list** for the \$500 million bond authorization that will appear before voters on the Nov. 2 ballot.

\$250 million is dedicated to local bridge repair. The other \$250 million will devote \$80 million to transit projects (see last week's edition) and \$22 million to bike, pedestrian and rail freight projects. \$45 million will go to bridge work on state highways. \$75 million will be used for road work (mostly repaving). The remaining \$28 million will fund project development studies and operational improvements on roads.

Overall, the NJDOT lists contain no highway expansion projects and represents a strong step toward a capital program that emphasizes **highway maintenance and investment in alternatives to cars and trucks**. A "yes" vote will send a strong signal to Trenton that the public approves of this approach.

Still, the bond issue is not the last word on NJDOT spending. There are still no clear guidelines about how DOT can use other funds. The bond act is a tool for temporarily avoiding the issue of how to finance NJ's **Transportation Trust Fund**. Directing investments to fight sprawl and car dependence will still be on reformers' agenda when Trenton decides to address the latter. Find a link to DOT's project list at www.tstc.org

E-ZPass Back-Office Gridlock Continues

In early September, the Tri-State Campaign received a flurry of e-mail from **exasperated motorists**. "If you have anything to do with E-ZPass, can you tell me why it is taking forever to get a tag sent to me?" began one.

The messages told tales of being placed on **permanent hold and long waits** at E-ZPass walk-in centers.

News stories that followed cited MTA staffers who attributed the mounting bureaucratic jam to the recent merger of MTA, Port Authority, Thruway and NY Bridge Authority E-ZPass customer service operations. The MTA said new automated account-checking systems had caused phone line overload, and that over 40 workers were being added to the operation.

While the agencies say the problems are just growing pains, the *Daily News* reported again Wednesday that it was "flooded with complaints" from motorists responding to its coverage of E-Z administrative nightmares.

Electronic toll collection can yield big transportation benefits, but only if it is as easy as possible for motorists to join and use. The toll agencies should put the system under emergency management and add staff and computer resources until the jams are gone.

Port Authority Infrastructure Blitz?

The Bi-State Agency's Big Capital Plans

The *Star-Ledger* reported on Monday on the contents of a 15-year Port Authority "investment agenda" it had obtained. The plan calls for \$40 billion in infrastructure projects, half of which would be financed by the agency, while federal funds, airlines, ocean carriers and other tenants of the agency's airports and marine terminals pick up the rest. The overall look at potential projects and revenues was reportedly ordered by PA board chair Lewis Eisenberg two years ago.

The projects include a new \$1 billion NJ-Manhattan commuter rail tunnel to ease the train capacity jam at Penn Station, \$1 billion for a new PATH train fleet, \$944 million for new marine terminals \$350 million for the **I-278 Goethals twin bridge**. The list also includes \$350 million for the Governors of NY and NJ to fund unidentified priority projects.

To pay its share of the costs, anticipated Port Authority revenues would fall \$6 billion short of the \$20 billion needed. According to the document obtained by the *Star-Ledger*, the gap could be made up if **bridge and tunnel tolls and PATH train fares** are increased. The planning document does not schedule or even recommend the hikes, but according to the *Star-Ledger*, Port Authority officials said that if all proposed capital improvements are to be undertaken, it would be best to have the higher rates in effect by mid-2001.

Some of the projects mentioned in the article, like the new commuter rail tunnel, are critical to the transportation future of the region, and the Port Authority's close look at how to pay for it is a welcome development. The Governors of New York and New Jersey should get on board a plan to build this project.

Others, like the Goethals "twin," are hugely unpopular in both NY and NJ and could weigh down an otherwise worthy Port Authority capital program.

Apart from the mix of projects, increasing Port Authority toll and fare revenues has some pitfalls and some opportunities. A PATH fare increase will not yield much additional revenue (when viewed in the scale of overall PA finances), and so should be weighed against potential impacts on transit ridership.

The blow of a bridge and tunnel toll hike could be softened by confining any significant hike to peak periods and minimizing the off-peak increase. A **peak/off-peak price break** could reduce some peak congestion, a benefit rush hour motorists that would see from repetition of past across-the-board toll hikes.

Goethals Project Still Evil Twin for S.I.

On the heels of the news stories on the Port Authority's extended wish-list, the Staten Island Advance launched the editorial equivalent of an atomic bomb at the PA's proposed Goethals twin bridge on Wednesday.

The piece, entitled **Traffic Fantasies**, was a strong statement on the potential of new highway capacity to generate new traffic: "The phenomenon is simple: If a new highway works to speed up traffic flow in a previously congested area, more and more drivers will choose to use it until it is itself congested...That pattern has been replicated in countless other traffic plagued areas of the country, which have **increased highway capacity** with costly and much-ballyhooed new projects only to find that within years or even months, traffic itself has increased, turning a jammed-up six-lane highway into a jammed-up 12 lane highway, and doubling pollution and congestion on local access roads."

The writers also unloaded on Assemblymember Robert Stranieri and S.I. Community Board 2 transportation chair Joel Traube, who voiced support for the proposed bridge in a Tuesday news article. "The fantasy that just one more new bridge, just one more new highway will solve the traffic problem, which is **fundamentally a matter of too many vehicles**, is one that dies hard. But it should be pronounced dead by responsible planners. This idea has gone nowhere for years. There's a reason for that."

NY Assembly Plans Hearing on MTA Program

The NY State Assembly has scheduled a **Wednesday, November 3rd** public hearing on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's proposed capital program.

One stated purpose of the hearing is to determine whether the MTA plan contains transit system expansion projects adequate to the region's transportation needs. It will consider the issue of a "full-build" Second Avenue Subway. Funding plans for the MTA program will also be considered.

The hearing will take place for most of the day and the early evening:

* **10 a.m.-4 p.m.** NY County Lawyers Association auditorium, 14 Vesey St., Manhattan

* **5:30-7:00 p.m.** NY State Office Building, Assembly Hearing Room, 270 Broadway, Manhattan, 11th floor.

Contact 518-455-4881 for more information.

NJ Planners Honor Tri-State Campaign



At its annual meeting last week, the New Jersey chapter of the American Planning Association recognized the Tri-State Transportation Campaign's contribution to transportation policy reform in New Jersey.

"If the Tri-State Campaign didn't exist, we'd have to invent it," said chapter president Jack Molenaar, an executive with the RBA Group. Molenaar also lauded *Mobilizing the Region* in presenting the Campaign with the APA award for advocacy.

The Port Authority's environmental impact statement for the Goethals bridge project shows in fact that peak bridge traffic will increase significantly once the twin is in place.

The *Advance* called instead on the PA and other transportation officials "to consider more sensible, less dramatic means to reduce traffic congestion such as **varying toll prices** to reduce peak traffic on bridges and tunnels."

The continuing unpopularity of the Goethals twin project poses some problems for the **NY State DOT's major investment study** for the Staten Island Expressway. The scenarios the study is considering **assume that the Goethals twin project will proceed**. But DOT's analyses may turn out to be mostly hypothetical unless this assumption is changed.

PA Moving Ahead with Road Pricing Analysis

At a NYMTC meeting yesterday, officials from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey presented preliminary research findings of a limited study they had commissioned to look at the possible impacts of applying different peak and off-peak toll rates to trucks.

Trucks account for 6-13% of traffic volume on Port Authority crossings — more if the trucks are viewed in terms of "passenger car equivalents" for purposes of analyzing volume and capacity — and are a sizeable contributor to peak period congestion.

However, based on 55 interviews with trucking firms, the study finds that **trucks that can avoid peak periods** are largely **doing so already**. 60% of trucks using the Port Authority crossings during rush hour are destined for NYC deliveries. Many of them are constrained in their times of travel by customer needs, the requirements of multiple-delivery trips, work rules or community restrictions. Moreover, tolls may not make up a significant portion of the cost of many truck trips.

The NY State Thruway Authority implemented variable toll rates for trucks at the Tappan Zee Bridge in 1997. An October, 1998 evaluation of the program indicated some shift of trucks out of peak traffic periods, but was unable to separate the impact of variable tolls from a number of other factors. A 1998 Regional Plan Association paper suggests that truck traffic is indeed sensitive to toll prices.

The Port Authority intended its look at trucks as a complement to its 1996 study of the effects of variable tolls on passenger cars, which found that a \$1 peak toll surcharge at the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels could reduce morning vehicle-hours of delay at its six crossings by 17% (see *MTR* #92).

PA officials said yesterday that they intended both the 1996 study and the new truck analysis to become building blocks for a far **more detailed, regional look at roadway pricing** options. The Port Authority and the MTA have discussed a joint approach to such a regional analysis, but the MTA is unwilling to get the effort underway. Other agency representatives at yes-

terday's NYMTC meeting voiced support for the start of the regional analysis. The MTA representative was characteristically silent throughout the entire pricing discussion.

The NYC Dept. of City Planning said it was developing a proposal for a hands-on look at variable pricing — it will urge the Port Authority and MTA to reduce tolls for service and commercial vehicles during the 5-7 a.m. "shoulder" hours for an experimental period.

The Port Authority representatives said the pricing study for trucks will be released later this year.

Dredging Study Light on Implications for Port

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has released a draft environmental impact statement on its channel deepening plan, which surprised no one by recommending that all major Harbor channels be deepened to 50 feet. Whatever the recommendation's merits, the Corps is begging the question by claiming that deeper channels will have **no impact on highway and railroad networks** or on proposals to fill hundreds of acres of wetlands to expand the Port.

The Corps' leap of faith is based on the assertion that market forces will bring millions of additional containers into the Port regardless of the depth of the channels, and that the deepening will simply make it cheaper to do so, saving U.S. consumers a bundle. It is interesting to note that while the necessarily imprecise benefit-cost analysis shows deepening channels to the Jersey City/Bayonne peninsula to be well worth the money, blasting out the Kill van Kull barely squeaks by, even if piggybacked on other dredging projects.

The study completely fails to acknowledge that 50-foot channels will make it more attractive for the Port Authority and other port developers to make investments to bring the next increment of growth to the Port of NY/NJ, which without question will bring with it significant highway and wetland impacts.

The EPA is spearheading an effort to ensure that all such factors are taken into account in a unified fashion before new port facilities are permitted by means of a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding among the various agencies involved. To date, there has been **no opportunity for public input** on the MOU, and it remains unclear why the Corps' study should have been allowed to proceed independently of it. Public comment on the channel deepening study is due by Nov. 14.



The NY Metropolitan Transportation Council, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority and metropolitan planning organizations in Connecticut are seeking federal funding (from a program designed to facilitate international trade) to launch yet another regional port and freight study.

A project summary distributed by NYMTC yesterday said the new work would build from existing studies to look at port expansion implications and rail freight and other possibilities on Long Island, in CT and elsewhere within the distribution reach of the NY/NJ port.

Weighty Turnout vs. Heavy Vehicles

Over a hundred demonstrators, including Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields and many elected officials representing lower Manhattan gathered on the corner of Lafayette and Broome Streets to protest policies and agency sloth that contribute to heavy duty vehicle impacts. Participants shouted for the police minding the event to ticket trucks that rolled continuously down Broome Street, which is not a truck route.

The protest focused on three policies: The NYC Dept. of Sanitation plan to **export most NYC trash by truck**, the City DOT plan to revamp the **truck route system** without prioritizing community impact mitigation or promising better enforcement, and the MTA's proposal to perpetuate **NYC Transit's dependence on polluting diesel buses**.

Speakers at the rally echoed City Councilmember Katheryn Freed: "Until we get an MTA that thinks as highly of us as it does of Long Island (where MTA Long Island Bus has stopped buying new diesels), we aren't going to get clean air." They also strongly backed Assemblymember Deborah Glick's call for "enforcement day in and day out," of existing truck routes and rules. State Senator Tom Duane called for truck tolls on the East River bridges.

MTA Assessing Hudson Extension Fight

On October 19th, the *Poughkeepsie Journal* reported that Metro North's Hudson Line Extension study is on hold. "**In light of the opposition** expressed by residents in the study area, Metro North is reassessing the study," said Marjorie Anders, a railroad spokeswoman.

But James Sedore, the Dutchess County MTA board representative said that the study **has not been scrubbed**. He expects officials from Dutchess County and the MTA will meet in the next two months to decide "how to proceed in the best interests of the County."

Scores of residents in Northern Dutchess communities have voiced opposition at public meetings held by Metro North. They have cited concerns that expanded commuter service would induce sprawl. In addition, there is concern that a terminus in the small riverfront communities of Tivoli and Rhinecliff would overwhelm the riverfront. Six municipalities have passed formal resolutions opposing the \$3 million environmental impact statement/major investment study.

Dutchess County Executive William Steinhaus and Columbia County officials suggested that the study examine a longer extension to Hudson, the seat of Columbia County. However, since Columbia County is outside of Metro North's charter, an extension to Hudson will not be considered.

Amtrak Is it Ever on Time ?

Amtrak officials said last week they had still not resolved the problem they were experiencing with wheels on new high-speed train sets slated for **high speed service** between Washington, D.C. and Boston. Amtrak officials announced in September that the problem would delay the start of the new fast service from

this fall until January, 2000.

However, as of this week, Northeast Corridor train travelers are **still being delayed by track work** east of New Haven, raising questions about whether other areas of the Amtrak project were indeed on schedule for a fall start of service.

Amtrak says its high-speed rail service will shave the Boston-New York trip to about three hours and New York-Washington run to two hours, 45 minutes, and expects those services to put a dent in air shuttle markets. Express travelers will pay a premium price for the fast service, however. But an Amtrak spokesperson told the Campaign that the track improvements between New York and Boston and the electrification of the New Haven-Boston track would reduce the currently five-hour NY-Boston run by about an hour for all of its trains.

When the high-speed service begins, Amtrak will change the way it markets train travel, launching "Acela" express, regional and commuter services. Regional service will cover most of today's existing Amtrak service. Express service will cover the fastest trains, and absorb the existing NY-Washington Metro-liner operation.

Hopefully, the overhaul will allow Amtrak to make some progress in instilling a **culture of punctuality** and communication about problems that now seems to be badly lacking in its non-Metroliner operations.

Calendar

Oct. 25, 9:30am MTA Capital Program Oversight Committee, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 5th floor. 212-878-7178.

Oct. 25, 6pm "Communication Based Train Control — recent developments." Jorg Schutte, Matra Transport International. University Transp. Research Center, 135th St & Convent Ave., Bldg Y #207C. 212-650-8050.

Oct. 26, 6pm Town hall meeting to craft a West Bronx traffic safety plan. NYC City Councilmember Adolfo Carrion, Jr. 2860 Webb Ave., Bronx 718-584-6955.

Oct. 26, 6-8pm MTA/Long Island Railroad East Side Access Project citizens advisory committee. 347 Madison Ave. 5th floor. 718-558-7520.

Oct. 27, 9am MTA Board meeting, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 5th floor. 212-878-7178.

Oct. 27, 10:30am Bronx River Revival — citizen volunteers pull dead cars from Bronx River. Starlight Park, Bronx. 212-239-8882

Oct. 27, 8pm Benefit event for L.A. Bus Riders Union, featuring new film on 3-year transit rider/pro-bus organizing campaign. 54 Varick St, Manhattan. \$ 212-512-7660, 213-387-2800.

Oct. 28, 8am-3pm "Leveraging Train Stations to Build Better Communities." NJ Transit/Downtown NJ workshop. Hackensack University Medical Center, 30 Prospect Ave. Reserve by Oct. 25. \$ 908-218-7778 DNJInc@aol.com

Oct. 28, 10am NYC City Council oversight hearing on NYC Dept. of Sanitation's Interim Waste Export Contracts (resched. from 10/20). City Hall, Council Chambers. 212-788-7210

Oct. 28, Noon NYC Transit Rider's Council regular meeting. 420 Lexington Ave., Manhattan, 11th floor. 212-878-7087.

Oct. 28, 5:30pm Brooklyn Boro President's Unity Speaker Series: "Environmental Justice?" w/ NYC Environmental Justice Alliance exec. director Leslie Lowe, others. Brooklyn Borough Hall, 718-802-4042.

Nov. 3, 10am-4pm, 5:30-7pm NY State Assembly public hearing on the MTA capital program (see box, page 2).

Nov. 3 Noon NYC Transit Riders Council President's forum, with Lawrence Reuter, NYCT President. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 5th floor. 212-878-7087.

Nov. 3, 6pm LIRR public information meeting on East Side (Grand Central) access project. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 5th floor. 718-558-7520

Nov. 4 11:45am Transportation Research Forum luncheon: Bernie Wagenblast, TransCore: "Traveler Information in the NY Market." 100 Washington St., Manhattan. \$ 212-435-4086, pgressner@paynynj.gov.

Nov. 4, 5:30-7:30pm Long Island Railroad Commuter Council President's Forum, w/ LIRR President Thomas Prendergast. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 5th floor. 212-878-7087.

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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Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

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