

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Assembly Veto of MTA Plan Likely

At a hearing Wednesday, NY State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and other Assembly members grilled MTA Chair E. Virgil Conway over the MTA's capital program proposal. The Assembly panel was plainly unhappy with the MTA plan. Members' main criticisms were the extent and funding for a Second Avenue Subway, financing for the overall program and NYC Transit's continued reliance on polluting diesel buses.

Conway's testimony was preceded by State Comptroller Carl McCall, who said that without **more direct state support** for the MTA program, **bus and subway riders could see a fare hike of 30 cents.**

Under questioning, Conway called such an increase "modest," leading to a media frenzy in the hallway as

Conway attempted to exit the building. Speaker Silver told reporters a fare hike would be "unacceptable."

Conway's testimony was punctuated by an exchange regarding the newly-rebuilt **Franklin Avenue Shuttle** subway line in Brooklyn. Conway pointed to the line as an example of an MTA rebuilding program accomplishment. Silver reminded Conway that the MTA board had tried to close down the Shuttle for good, and that it took an **Assembly veto** of the previous capital program to force the Shuttle's reconstruction.

Silver's opposition to a fare increase and his advocacy for including at least planning and engineering funding for the full-length Second Avenue line, the Assembly may have to put some sort of MTA financing plan on the table after it vetoes the MTA proposal.

Transit advocates and unions released a letter Tuesday urging Governor Pataki, Mayor Giuliani and legislative leaders to reject the MTA proposal. In addition to Second Avenue Subway, clean bus and fare issues, the letter spotlighted the **minimal subway and bus service in-**

### Giuliani: Fare Hikes Happen

Responding to press questions Wednesday about Conway's statement on a transit fare hike, Mayor Giuliani likened transit fare increases to rainstorms and changing seasons — "the reality is that fares, like everything else over time, tend to have to be increased in order just to maintain service," said the Mayor.

The reality is that **fare hikes are a product of policy.** The 1995 25-cent, 20% increase in the city bus and subway fare was not a bolt from the blue, it was the result of **deep cuts in city and state support** for the MTA. During the Koch Administration, New York City's contribution to the capital program was twice what it is under Mayor Giuliani.

Now the Mayor has insisted on earmarking the city's contribution to the transit capital program entirely for a rail connection to LaGuardia Airport, a project still searching for a workable plan. That project will in fact cost more than the city's total 2000-2004 contribution to the program.

Fare hikes are far more likely and severe when political leaders refuse to find other resources to support public transit, the backbone of New York City. Depending on how MTA finance issues work out, Mayor Giuliani's main transit legacy may have less to do with airport access and more to do with presiding over the **two largest fare increases** in the city's history.

Governor Pataki's response to fare questions this week seemed more constructive. He said he hoped a fare hike could be avoided or minimized, and that he was ready to work with the Legislature on the transit plan.

### Silver Backs Clean Bus Campaign

— "Dump Diesel" Effort in the Mainstream —

While Assembly Speaker Silver's position favoring Second Avenue construction the length of Manhattan has become well-known, and Assembly Democrats have a general distaste for heavy farebox financing of MTA programs, the **biggest new development** at Wednesday's NY Assembly hearing was the emergence of **bus pollution as a mainstream transit issue.**

The MTA has claimed for years to be moving ahead with clean bus plans, but its proposed bus purchase will increase NYC Transit's reliance on diesels (MTR #239).

Silver told MTA Chair E. Virgil Conway that NYC Transit's plan for huge purchases of diesel buses were a "major concern," and pointed to sky-high city childhood asthma rates and MTA L.I. Bus' diesel phase-out plan.

The Natural Resources Defense Council calls diesel particulate pollution the "**number one air pollution issue** in New York City." Thanks to the education and advocacy carried out by NRDC and community groups

### NJ Voters Back Fix-it Transportation Plan

By a nearly 2-1 margin, New Jersey voters approved a \$500 million transportation bond referendum on Tuesday. Half the proceeds will be directed to fix aging county and municipal bridges, while the other half will

fund projects under state control, including \$80 million for NJ Transit.

The bond's passage represents another public endorsement of the "**Fix It First**" principle of transportation investment. Last year, a Quinnipiac College Poll found that a big majority of New Jersey citizens surveyed favored public transit and maintenance of existing roadways as top transportation priorities. 23% said new highways should get priority (*MTR* #185). Later in 1998, Governor Whitman embraced the "Fix it First" mantra in articulating a broad "transportation vision."

NJDOT produced a detailed list prior to Election Day which outlined candidate projects after concerns were raised by Tri-State Transportation Campaign and others about funds from the so-called "Bridge Bond" being sent to new highway capacity projects.

The list contained no road widening projects. In addition to substantial sums for transit, highway, and bridge repair projects, the list also included small amounts for rail freight (\$8m), bicycle (\$5m), and pedestrian (\$4m) projects.

Voters' strong support for the Fix It First agenda will

### **ConnDOT Back on Road to Nowhere**

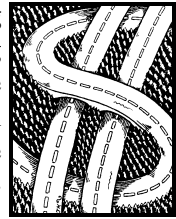
Defying the odds, ConnDOT today submitted a revamped application to the Army Corps of Engineers for a permit to **build an expressway** east of Hartford to replace the two-lane **Route 6**. Undoubtedly spurred by an August letter sent to the agency by officials from the towns of Bolton, Columbia, Manchester and Windham (see last week's *MTR*), the renewed effort may again pitch DOT against citizen and environmental groups over an unpopular highway expansion initiative.

Corps officials report that they have not yet reviewed the new proposal and declined to comment on it. All signs suggest that what is in hand varies little from previous ConnDOT applications, **all rejected by the Corps** for their extreme impacts on wetlands and wildlife. In particular, the route still runs through sensitive habitat north of the Hop River. An alternative route — running south of the river — sends the road through the towns of Columbia and Manchester and is not favored by locals. Changes made to the proposal to make it more "environmentally sensitive" may include increases in median width and the addition of bridges and wildlife underpasses to span the wetlands. However, these changes are unlikely to mitigate the fact that the plan would represent one of the largest wetlands fills in New England in over a decade.

Sources watching the developments say they would be shocked if the Corps approved the new application. Karyl Lee Hall of the Connecticut Fund for the Environment said that, with so **many worthy transportation projects** seeking funding, "it's a shame that this one keeps coming back at the taxpayer's expense."

Reportedly, the Corps recently contacted DOT to request that the project not be resubmitted, calling it a waste of time and money on the part of both agencies.

be **put to the test in the upcoming legislative session**, when implementing legislation is drawn up for expenditure of bond funds. In spite of the details in NJDOT's spending plan, it's possible that it could fall prey to political horse-trading, with projects added or dropped as a result.



This risk, and the strong support received by the Fix It First project mix, gives further credence to the need for legislative spending controls in Transportation Trust Fund legislation. Measures should ensure adequate spending on infrastructure repair and maintenance, and investment in alternatives to highways.

The bond is widely seen as a stopgap for the Transportation Trust Fund, which due to heavy borrowing in the past, will be out of money for new projects in June 2000. Renewal of the Trust Fund, or temporary life support through diverted petroleum taxes, are expected to be hot legislative issues in the coming year.

### **High Demand for Innovative Local Aid**

This week, Governor Whitman and NJDOT announced \$1.25m in awards under the state's "Local Aid to Centers" program. Nine municipalities received awards, mainly for streetscape and city parks enhancements.

The program is designed to foster enhancement of "centers" and "communities of place" consistent with NJ's State Plan, and as distinguished from land-eating, car-spawning sprawl development.

However, the program is far too small to have a significant impact on land use trends at the state level. **Demand for the funding exceeds grant awards** considerably. Even considering the small size of the available pot, NJDOT received \$5 million worth of project proposals from 29 municipalities. This experience is consistent with trends seen with bike and pedestrian project funds offered by DOT's Local Aid office — local demand for pedestrian safety projects this year **outstripped available funding** by over \$25 million.

### **Highways vs. Transit in New Haven**

Writing in the *New Haven Register* this week, Connecticut Fund for the Environment's Curt Johnson says ConnDOT efforts to add transit elements to its massive plan to widen I-95 through New Haven still fall short.

Some local officials are trying to restore balance between ConnDOT's huge highway proposal and the paltry transit components it is offering. In the spring, the agency agreed to improve a number of stations on the **Shore Line East** commuter rail line, and recently agreed to increase train frequency. But municipal officials say it's **not enough**, and that other promising plans wait to be implemented. Now Conn-DOT has accused them of "playing politics" regarding the project.

ConnDOT's highway project is an \$800 million expansion of the decrepit I-95 Quinnipiac River Bridge from 6 to 10 lanes. The project was meant to be an outgrowth of a collaborative planning process in which



transit was a foci. Johnson writes:

“During the planning process, certain things became obvious. Waiting times for buses and trains are too long. Night and weekend service are virtually nonexistent. Buses and trains don’t connect well with each other. Our regional transit as currently operated can hardly be called a ‘system.’”

Transit options the collaborative plan identified included an on-street **express busway** to speed bus service between New Haven, East Haven and Branford; a new express bus link allowing people to take the train to Union Station, then be whisked to Tweed-New Haven within 15 minutes; **after-hours transit service** to allow commuters to work late and still take the train or bus home; more **local train connections to Amtrak’s high speed service**, which promises to leapfrog from Union Station over chronically clogged I-95 to Manhattan in under an hour; new train stops and parking lots more convenient to the highway; lower transit fares.

But, Johnson states, where ConnDOT has chosen the most elaborate and expensive road expansion proposal available, it has given the shaft to all transit projects except modest Shore Line East improvements, and those only under concerted political pressure.

The highway project will take 12 years to build, and will only yield a projected 45 seconds in travel time savings when complete. On the other hand, ConnDOT transit projections, which have historically been low, say the measures proposed by the advisory group would shift another 2,300 commuters to transit.

The US EPA criticized ConnDOT’s stance on the road project and transit measures in a letter in August.

Connecticut Fund for the Environment urges New Haven area officials to remain steadfast in their efforts to change the plan. “A transit system that represents **an alternative to 12 years of driving through highway construction** has been carefully designed for success, fully evaluated and enjoys widespread support from institutions and local political leaders. It’s time to invest in it,” says Johnson.

### Trash Trucking on Trial

As **New York City garbage trucks prepared to roll into Newark and Elizabeth** (see last week’s *MTR*), Union County officials filed suit in New Jersey Superior Court last Friday. The County argued that Waste Management’s transfer stations in Elizabeth lack appropriate permits and that the garbage transfer violates New Jersey’s Solid Waste Management Act. The Act requires a much higher level of solid waste recycling — 60% — than the 9% demanded by New York City law.

“We’re attempting to prevent Waste Management from accepting (NY’s) garbage because it does not reach the levels of recycling required by the state,” Elizabeth Mayor Christian Bollwage told the *Star-Ledger*.

### PATH MetroCard in the Works ?

A memo obtained by the *Star-Ledger* last week says the Port Authority is taking steps to replace the PATH “Quickcard” fare card with a more up-to-date electronic fare collection system. The memo says specifications for a proposed PATH electronic “no cash” fare payment system are being drawn up pending advertising for bids.

Transit activists hope the new system is being designed with **MetroCard interchangeability** in mind. If not, Governor Pataki should direct his PA board representatives to arrest the plan and ensure compatibility between PATH and NYC Transit fare cards.

MTA and PA spokespersons declined to comment on the issue today. However, the agencies have said for years they are working toward a regional transit card. MTA’s new proposed Strategic Business Plan makes a vague reference to extending MetroCard’s reach.

The MTA, Port Authority and other highway toll agencies have **integrated their E-ZPass toll payment systems**, despite charging a wide variety of toll rates at various facilities. Developing a PATH fare system that works with the MetroCard should be easy by comparison, and transit riders deserve no less.

### The Mayor from Another Planet

John Norquist, Mayor of Milwaukee, provided a refreshing vision for cities in the next century in a speech at Cooper Union last night. Adamant in his **objection to urban highways**, he pointed to a slide of a massive spaghetti-like interchange — the largest public works project in Wisconsin — and stated, “you would not hold a parade, have a marathon, make a postcard or even film a car advertisement there.”

Using three images of downtown Milwaukee, Norquist demonstrated how highways destroy neighborhoods. The first picture showed the area before the Second World War when buildings filled the grid pattern of streets. In the second slide, a **highway slices through downtown neighborhoods** and in the final one there are no buildings for blocks around the highway. The contrasts were similar to before and after images of highway construction in Brooklyn or the Bronx. These images are of the Park East, a highway succeeded in securing federal funding and local and state support for eliminating. A similar campaign is underway in the Bronx, where community groups and elected officials have called on the New York State Department of Transportation to study elimination of the **Sheridan Expressway** in an upcoming EIS (see *MTR* #199).

When asked if sprawl and car use weren’t the preferences of most people, the Mayor stated that the relationship between Americans and their cars was a “shotgun marriage” and that government should **give people real choices between cars and transit**. He discussed transit-ways that allow buses to compete with cars as a practical policy that allows people to leave their cars at home, bringing to mind efforts by the

Tri-State Campaign and others to secure a bus-only lane on the Gowanus Expressway (MTR #229). He criticized the language used about transportation: "we say we invest in roads but subsidize transit."

### Washington Worthies

➤ Last week, Senator Frank Lautenberg introduced a new "High Speed Rail and Investment Act." This Act would authorize **Amtrak** to sell **\$10 billion in rail bonds** over the next ten years to build high speed rail corridors in various parts of the U.S. Rail upgrades in busy corridors like San Diego-Los Angeles, Milwaukee-Chicago and between Florida cities have been proposed for years. Lautenberg seemed also to offer the possibility of further improvements in the Northeast Corridor, where Amtrak is launching high-speed service next year.

Lautenberg praised high speed rail as "a smart investment", saying his legislation would be a large step towards giving passenger rail the same level of **public support offered for decades to highways and air travel**, and could ease both road and runway congestion. The bill is expected to be submitted before Congress recesses next week. Co-sponsors are NY's Senator-Moynihan, Vermont's Jim Jeffords, and Joseph Biden of Delaware. Pro-rail activists are presently rounding up midwestern co-sponsors.

➤ This week, the EPA convened a hearing on a new rule to finally crack down on pollution from heavy vehicles. The rule would **reduce the amount of sulfur allowed in diesel fuel** and **close a loophole that exempts SUV's** from a wide range of air emission regulations. Because sulfur creates large particles when burned, any reduction will mean cleaner air. Even more importantly, sulfur contaminates catalysts used to clean emissions before they are released into the air. Over time this can severely limit the cleaning capacity of converters. Scientists estimate 90% of the nation's trucks and buses belch out excess pollutants due to this effect. For New Yorkers living along Canal Street or the Cross-Bronx Expressway, this rule should offer some respite when its requirements come into effect over the next five to ten years.

Clean air advocates still want the rule tightened. They say emission standards should be stricter and go into effect sooner, and want trucks to be subject to emissions tests throughout their lifetimes. Another failing of the rule is that it does not extend pollution standards to off-road vehicles like construction equipment that, per vehicle, pollute 15 times more than comparable on-road counterparts.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

### Calendar

**Nov 8-9 9am-5pm** Port Authority demonstration of intelligent transportation systems for trucks. Port Newark. Also 11/10 at Seaman's Church Institute, Manhattan and 11/15-16 at Howland Hook Terminal. Call 212-435-4086

**Nov. 9, 6pm** LIRR public information meeting on East Side (Grand Central) access project. 101 Court Seat Drive, Mineola. 718-558-7520

**Nov. 9, 6pm** Town Hall meeting for a West Bronx traffic safety plan. City Council Member Carrion. 2100 Walton Avenue, Bronx. 718-584-6004.

**Nov. 10, 8:30am-3pm** Alternative fuel vehicle forum (see Nov. 5) Westchester County Center, White Plains. 518-276-2164.

**Nov. 10, 6pm** LIRR public information meeting on East Side (Grand Central) access project. Babylon Town Hall, 200 East Sunrise Highway, Lindenhurst. 718-558-7520

**Nov. 11, Noon** Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council, monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 10th floor. 212-878-7087.

**Nov. 16 6pm** LIRR East Side Access public info meeting, LaGuardia Community College, 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Queens. 718-558-7520.

**Nov. 18, Noon** NYC Transit Riders Council, monthly meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan, 3rd floor. 212-878-7087.

**Nov. 22, 9am** MTA board meeting, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 5th floor. 212-878-7178.

**Nov. 22, 1pm** North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority meeting. 1 Newark Center, 17th floor. 973-639-8406.

**Dec. 9, 7 pm** Jersey City forum on NYC garbage policy, sponsored by Hudson Alliance for Rational Transportation. Barrow Mansion, 83 Wayne St., Jersey City. 201-200-1958 [www.hartwheels.org](http://www.hartwheels.org).

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

*Mobilizing the Region* is a publication of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, available by fax or internet. We invite suggestions and calendar items from readers. The Campaign was formed in 1993 by 14 leading public interest organizations dedicated to restructuring transportation policy and choices in the 32-county region in and surrounding New York City.

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