

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### PA Argument Doesn't Support New Span

The Port Authority's new rationale for Goethals Bridge "twin" construction — that growth at Staten Island's **Howland Hook container terminal** will be choked off without better highway access to New Jersey — dramatically overstates the difficulties of moving freight over the existing Goethals span and dodges the fact that the PA's fight with Union County, NJ, continues to **hold up development of rail freight access** to Howland Hook.

PA officials recently told the *Staten Island Advance* that without a second bridge, Howland Hook would fall short of its potential.

But the old Goethals Bridge remains uncongested for most of each day. Rail access would clearly represent a greater step forward for Howland Hook than the convenience a second bridge would afford trucks. S.I. officials would do well to raise this issue as the Port Authority continues to pitch its construction plans.

### South Bronx Trucks: a Better Way

In August, South Bronx community groups discovered an \$11 million allocation in NY State DOT's budget for a new **truck-only route** along Edgewater Road between the southbound Sheridan Expressway and the Hunts Point Market (*MTR #232*). The groups were angered because the proposed road would use city-owned **Bronx River waterfront land** that community activists want to transform into permanent public open space.

A Pratt University design team enlisted by the Bronx groups found the best way to get trucks directly into the market and off local streets is to build an **off-ramp from the Bruckner Expressway** onto Leggett Avenue. The plan would capture trucks coming south on the Sheridan Expressway, and east or west on the Bruckner, thus serving more trucks than the Edgewater route. DOT figures show only 7.5% of Hunts Point Market trips use the southbound Sheridan, but 27.5% use the Bruckner.

While NYSDOT has not fully estimated the cost of the Edgewater Rd. plan, it has stated that the Leggett Ave. proposal would cost \$30-36 million — too costly in the agency's eyes. But the agency continues to plan upgrades to interchanges at either end of the Sheridan Expressway that will attract more traffic and cost hundreds of millions.

Bronx residents are calling on elected officials this holiday season to give a real gift to the community — a Hunts Point Market truck route that works for them and their aspirations for vibrant, liveable neighborhoods.

### NY Senate Demands Transit-Highway \$ Parity

The New York State Senate, through its representative on the MTA Capital Program Review Board, Senator Dean Skelos (R-Nassau Cty), vetoed the MTA's 2000-2004 capital program proposal on Tuesday, Dec. 21.

The veto is similar to one issued by the late Senator Norman Levy in 1996. It's intent is to continue an old Albany tradition — ensuring the state's **5-year highway spending program** roughly matches the size of the MTA capital program.

Skelos' letter said the MTA transit program and the NYSDOT's highway capital program should be considered together. On Dec. 22, *Newsday* reported Skelos saying the Senate wants "**rough parity**" in the **5-year transit and road budgets**. The NYS highway budget will be released as part of Governor Pataki's executive budget in January.

But there are compelling reasons to do away with transit-highway spending parity.

### — An Outmoded Political Formula —

Foremost, the state's overall transportation budget should reflect needs and priorities rather than crude formulas. The MTA's \$17.5 billion proposal clearly spells out why that level of funding is required to continue progress toward a state of good repair and to begin work on the LIRR-Grand Central connection. On the other hand, the NY Senate simply asserts that the state should spend an equivalent amount on roads. The Senate's position is not accompanied by any needs analysis or list of projects.

It may be theoretically possible for the NYS DOT and the local governments that receive DOT local aid to spend \$17 billion or more over the next five years. However, it's worth remembering that the present \$12.5 billion NYDOT capital program represents **record levels of NY State highway spending**. Within that program, DOT has made strong progress in a variety of infrastructure maintenance areas, with money left over to begin building the Utica-Rome Expressway and widen the LIE, the Taconic Parkway, the Sunrise Highway and other roads around the state.

Second, it's by no means clear that NY State can or will pay for two significantly expanded transportation capital programs. Meeting the revenue needs of the MTA's \$17.5 billion capital program will require a new funding commitment by NY State government. Dramatically hiking the State DOT budget at the same time will

raise even tougher revenue questions for Albany.

Is a **smaller transit program** the price of transit-highway parity? A strong coalition of business, environmental and other organizations have already called for a larger transit program — \$18.2 billion — than the MTA has proposed (\$1 billion of the MTA program is for its highway bridges and tunnels. Thus its transit proposal amounts to \$16.5 billion).

New York is finally considering the **first transit expansion projects in generations** after decades of road construction. This alone is a strong reason why the overall state transportation capital program should put transit first. Moreover, a consensus is building around the country and the world that adding road capacity to address traffic congestion is a self-defeating proposition.

A **highway lobby coalition** is very active in spotlighting what it says is a crisis in NY road and bridge maintenance. The road industry never suggests devoting additional funds to maintenance from within the highway budget. It simply uses **rhetoric about maintenance** to call for **more public spending** on every conceivable type of highway project.

In fact, NY State DOT has made significant progress since 1994 in reducing poor pavement conditions and bridge deficiency rates throughout the state. A modestly higher State DOT budget that minimizes unpopular highway expansion projects in favor of fixing highway infrastructure could produce **big increases in the DOT's pavement and bridge programs**, as well as build on positive developments like Governor Pataki's increase in state investment in rail freight last year.

#### **Maintenance crisis ? DOT has plenty for road expansion**

Road expansion projects NYS DOT has already slated for its next five year program include a network of highway expansion projects in Brookhaven, Long Island, including state routes 347, 25 and 112, together with several county projects, completing the Long Island Expressway expansion in Nassau County and eastern Queens and transforming Route 120 into the the Kensico Expressway in lower Westchester. The Tri-State Transportation Campaign estimates that, downstate, DOT will **invest over \$800 million in highway expansion** during 2000-2004.

Other big road construction or expansion projects on the DOT horizon (after 2004) include widening a network of Long Island parkways, including the Northern State and the Meadowbrook, widening the Staten Island Expressway, upgrading Route 17 to an interstate across the state's southern tier and blazing an east-west interstate across the northern Adirondacks.

**Mobilizing the Region #251 will be issued January 7, 2000. The Campaign wishes all our readers a happy New Year. Avoid gridlock — use transit!**

## **Freight Report Carries Highway Baggage**

Last month, the NYC Department of City Planning released the first volume of its overview of the region's major freight-related infrastructure development plans. Entitled "Freight Synthesis," the report provides a picture of the **regional onslaught of truck traffic** that analysts predict over the coming decades plus a good overview of various agency plans to deal with the trend. Unfortunately, the report's most concrete recommendations include construction of a **second Goethals bridge** and **widening the Staten Island Expressway**, measures certain only to deepen the region's reliance on trucks.

The report presents statistics that portray current extreme regional dependence on trucks for freight movement. Nation-wide, railcars carry one-third of all freight, but less than 5% in the NYC region. Even compared to the urbanized Northeast, the NJ/NY/CT region comes out more dependent on trucks, shipping between 6-9% more tonnage on trucks than other metropolitan areas.

This big-rig addiction exacerbates congestion and heightens stress on highway infrastructure. Between 1995 and 1997, truck traffic at some of NYC's tolled bridges and tunnels increased by 35%, mainly between the peak commuting hours of 7 to 9AM. On favored routes like the Gowanus Expressway, trucks constitute roughly 14% of AM rush hour traffic. The Department of City Planning's 1999 "Off-Peak Delivery Study" revealed that less than 40% of trucks clogging streets in the NYC area deliver goods there. The rest are bound to warehouses, ports, and other parts of the country.

Such a picture would seem to cry out for rail freight and ship-to-rail port development. However, **only the NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) has offered proposals to move the region in this direction**. Projecting that demand for port facilities will outpace current facilities by 2006, both the EDC and the PA produced major port expansion proposals in 1999.

The EDC plans include construction of a shuttle train route on First Avenue to serve a Sunset Park terminal and connect it with a new float bridge at 65th St. and the LIRR Bay Ridge Line. Both the EDC and Port Authority call for the construction of an on-dock rail transfer station at Howland Hook to be served by a reactivated Staten Island Railroad that will link to the rail network in New Jersey. But the EDC vision for Howland Hook also includes development of 100 more acres of intermodal/rail warehousing as well as an ambitious cross-Hudson transport strategy to make the expanded terminal a central hub for a New Jersey-Brooklyn rail-line.

The center-piece of the EDC plan is construction of a **cross-harbor freight tunnel**. Currently, all freight crossing the Harbor in a rail car is barged from 51st Street in South Brooklyn to the Greenville, New Jersey railyard via barges. The only other rail route to East-of-Hudson markets requires a 2-day, 600 mile detour to Selkirk, then back down the Hudson Valley. The EDC

plan puts forth two possible tunnel locations: One option connects the Brooklyn waterfronts to the Staten Island Railroad, which itself would connect to the continental rail network via the Arthur Kill lift bridge. The other runs between Greenville, NJ to the Brooklyn waterfront. Building such a tunnel was a priority project for the PA as early as 1921. But the agency argued against it in a 1980 study, and has not reconsidered that position since.

Any version of the tunnel is not likely to see completion for at least a decade. In the near future, a functional rail route across the Hudson depends on **aggressive expansion of rail car float facilities and service.** Adding four float bridges at 65th Street for traffic to and from Greenville and two float bridges between Brooklyn and the Howland Hook terminal could supplant almost 12% of Hudson truck crossings, the EDC estimates.

To Department of City Planning report suggests that prospects for the Tunnel be pursued and that "new float bridges are essential to increase...capacity in the interim." But expanding truck capacity at the Goethals Bridge and across Staten Island will compete with efforts to build a stronger rail freight market in NYC and Long Island, and have big impacts on Staten Island. If an onslaught of trucks is coming, the region's agencies should be planning to head it off and minimize its impact rather than ensure that it is as large as possible.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

## Calendar

**Jan. 5, 7:30pm** Informational meeting on Tappan Zee Bridge replacement proposal. W/ Thruway president John Platt. Tappan Zee Preservation Coalition. 58 Depew Ave., Nyack. 914-359-1373, [gromada@alumni.duke.edu](mailto:gromada@alumni.duke.edu)

**Jan. 7, 1pm** NYC Council's Environmental Protection Committee hearing on Route 120. NYC City Hall, 212-788-7700

**Jan. 10, 1pm** North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority board meeting. One Newark Center, 17th Floor. 973-639-8400

**Jan. 13, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum Luncheon: President & CEO of St. Lawrence and Hudson Railway, Jacques Coté speaks on "CP Expansion in the Northeastern United States" Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St. (at Rector St.) \$ 212-435-4086

**Jan. 13, 6:30pm** City cycling forum — discussion of improvements needed in NYC. Transportation Alternatives, 115 West 30th Street, 12th floor, Manhattan. 212-629-8080.

**Jan. 14, 8:30am** Forum on potential guided busway for Staten Island. State Senator Vincent Gentile and S.I. Chamber of Commerce. 130 Bay Street, Staten Island. 718-727-1900.

**Jan. 20, 8am-Noon** "Transportation to Work Solutions" conference. Sustainable Long Island and others. L.I. Technology Center, Great River. 516-424-1799.

**Jan. 25, 6pm** Auto-Free New York: "Transforming a Roadway into a Park — the story of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza" Lou Sepersky, community board 8, at Transportation Alternatives, 115 West 30th St, #1207 Manhattan. 212-475-3394.

### Give a gift that won't go up in smoke



Last month, the president of the New Jersey chapter of the American Planning Association said, "If the Tri-State Transportation Campaign didn't exist, we'd have to invent it."

That's because of the real-world changes and developments we're able to bring about, like a New Jersey transportation funding act that contained no highway widenings, a new traffic calming program for Long Island and plans for congestion pricing on the NJ Turnpike.

Victories like these are why the New York Motorist Association has described us as "vocal and well organized."

You can help us maintain our voice in the debates that will shape the future of the Tri-State metropolitan region. If you had a good year, help us start the next one in better shape than ever.

**Make tax-deductible contributions payable to the Tri-State Transportation Campaign,**

**240 West 35th Street, # 801, New York, NY 10001**

**For more information, call 212-268-7474**

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