

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 256

February 11, 2000

NEWS

Further Study Ruled for NJ's Route 92

On Monday, January 7th the Army Corps of Engineers announced the NJ Turnpike Authority must submit its Route 92 project to a **full environmental impact study** before it can have the wetlands filling permits needed to construct the new 6.7 mile limited-access toll highway. Fourteen months after the NJ DEP ceded jurisdiction for the decision to the federal agency, the Corps concluded that the controversial highway could result in "significant impact to the environment" that required further analysis. The new highway would connect the Turnpike to U.S. Route 1 through one of the biggest undeveloped portions of Middlesex County.

Long-time local opponents of the project, including officials from South Brunswick, Hopewell, Franklin, and Montgomery townships, applauded the Corps decision to delve more deeply into the highway's likely problems. South Brunswick Mayor Debra Johnson told the *Home News* she is convinced that a federal EIS will show the highway to be bad for the region. Road foes contend that traffic flow problems in the region would be better addressed by intersection and signal improvements and that, in fact, **Route 92 is likely to bring more congestion** to the surrounding counties, increasing, for example, north-south traffic on Route 1 by almost 30,000 trips per day. Though a limited access highway, Route 92 is also expected to propel development pressure along its route, creating more traffic.

The Tri-State Campaign hailed the decision, noting that Route 92 would set off a domino effect of more traffic, trucks and sprawl in the area.

The EIS is likely to take eighteen months to two years to complete and will be paid for by the Turnpike Authority. In its response statement, the Turnpike made clear it would cooperate fully with the Army Corps during the EIS process, but that it was still committed to pursuing the project despite formidable obstacles.

A New Picture of West Brooklyn



The Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corp. is sponsoring a design competition for ideas about how to use land and streetscape that would be freed if Brooklyn's Gowanus Expressway is sunk into a tunnel.

\$500 winning prize for non-designers,

\$2,000 for design professionals.

www.swbidc.org or 718-965-3100.

Highway Lobby's Albany Offensive

Aim for the Moon: Want Road Spending Doubled



At a joint Assembly/Senate hearing on the transportation elements of Governor Pataki's executive budget Tuesday, highway construction industry representatives **attacked the Governor's proposed \$14.3 billion 2000-2004 State DOT capital program as paltry**. The industry, represented at the hearing by the Long Island Contractors Council, the lower Hudson Construction Industry Council, the General Contractors Association and a state-wide coalition group known as the "Crisis Program," appears to be ready to burn bridges with the Pataki Administration. They harshly criticized the Governor for abdicating responsibility to invest in the highway system, and **called instead on the Legislature to step up as the industry's champion**. The highway construction groups will soon release a report calling for a \$26 billion highway program. The "Crisis Program's" message is one of crumbling infrastructure — needed **road and bridge repair** is not being done. However, the group's forthcoming study reportedly refers extensively to the need for "**congestion relief**," and it is unlikely a \$26 billion or even a more realistically expanded NYS DOT program would focus exclusively on maintenance. The group briefed the State Senate Transportation Committee on its agenda Monday.

The Governor's \$14.3 billion proposal is an increase from the 1995-2000 program, which was worth approximately \$12.5 billion.

Transportation Commissioner Boardman presented the Governor's program at the budget hearing, stating that the 1995-2000 capital program had reduced bridge and pavement deficiencies somewhat. He said the \$14.3 billion 2000-2004 program would essentially allow the state to remain in place regarding road and bridge conditions, but not make significant improvements. Assembly Transportation Chair Gannt went to lengths to prod Boardman into saying he needed more money, but Boardman said the funding level reflected a "prudent" choice by Governor Pataki to keep the highway system from deteriorating, given a variety of budget considerations, including those in the transportation sector.

A number of State Senators, including Senate Transportation Committee Chair Cesar Trunzo, rumbled about attaining **highway-transit "parity"** between the multi-year capital budgets, and told Boardman he might have to live with a one-year program while funding

issues are hammered out in Albany. The Senate's veto of the MTA capital program (*MTR #250*) referred directly to the issue of highway spending and road-transit parity.

The MTA's proposed capital program, which the Governor backs, is for \$16.5 billion. The Governor's proposal breaks from a recent tradition of approving roughly **equivalent DOT and MTA budgets** (see *MTR #252*). "Parity" is essentially a political formula, and indeed road industry representatives said on Tuesday that parity should be abandoned in favor of their huge highway spending proposal. On the other hand, if one takes a **more encompassing look** at transportation agencies, capital spending proposals on the table in NY State in fact add up to a rough road-transit parity:

- MTA 2000-2004 transit proposal: \$16.5 billion
 - Pataki proposed non-MTA transit capital: \$146 million
 - Pataki 2000-2004 NYSDOT proposal: \$14.3 billion
 - MTA Bridges/Tunnels 2000-2004 proposal: \$1 billion
 - Thruway proposed 5-year capital program: \$1 billion
- Transit = \$16.6 billion Highways = \$16.3 billion**

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign testified in favor of the general priority to transit that the Governor's budget reflects, but called for implementation the Empire State Transportation Alliance's \$18.2 billion MTA program. The Campaign said DOT would have more money for needed road repair if it abandoned unpopular **road widening projects** like that for Route 120 along the Kensico Reservoir in Westchester and for Route 347 in Brookhaven, and that any new funding for NYSDOT should have program language attached dedicating it to road and bridge repair. The Campaign also backed calls by county and municipal associations for the Governor to rescind proposed cuts to the roadway local aid budget.

Citizens, Smart Growth = Ped-Friendly Street

A weekend-long charrette convened by Vision Huntington and Sustainable Long Island, with the help of Florida consultant Walkable Communities, developed an extended planning outline for **rebuilding Huntington's Gerard Street**. *Newsday* calls present-day Gerard Street a "sterile patch of stores and offices." The groups believe the neighborhood has strong potential for "smart growth" style redevelopment.

After weighing options, participants voted in favor of adding benches, plantings and bike lanes to the street, as well as for **longer-term plans to in-fill new buildings** with storefronts and reduce the parking foot-print in the neighborhood with a well-designed parking structure.

Vision Huntington's Eric Alexander said the participatory process was a healthy departure from planning-as-usual, which often sees government offer a near-finished plan that the public takes shots at from outside. Huntington Supervisor Frank Petrone told *Newsday* he felt the town would act on some of the charrette's output, and that a similar process would be used for pending redevelopment of the Huntington train station area.

Pressure Mounts on MTA Bus Plan

At Tuesday's Legislative hearing on Governor Pataki's executive budget, clean fuel bus strategies and the Second Avenue subway controversy dominated testimony and discussion of mass transit issues.

MTA director Marc Shaw presented the now-familiar outline of the MTA \$16.5 billion 5-year proposal. The MTA's plan to purchase 756 new diesel buses and extend the life of older buses excited the most attention from Assembly representatives on the panel. Manhattan's Pete Grannis and Brooklyn's Al Vann and Darryl Towns pressed Shaw on NYC Transit's fuel policy, especially its **unwillingness to fully embrace proven compressed natural gas technology**. Shaw attempted to set the issue aside by minimizing transit buses' contribution to NYC particulate pollution, saying new diesel-electric hybrid buses would surpass the cleanliness of compressed natural gas buses. The MTA has never offered any support for either of these positions. Shaw also asserted that "all of our buses will be clean fuel of one sort or another," despite the proposed purchase of the 756 diesel express and articulated buses (Shaw did note that **NJ Transit was using CNG-fueled express buses**). Vann said he had heard the MTA's "cleanest possible fleet" rhetoric 5 years ago, and said bad planning was pushing the agency to increase its diesel dependence when it should be moving in the other direction.

In a testy colloquy, Grannis told Shaw "Your reluctance [to boost use of clean buses] has major ramifications for health in New York City," and compared the MTA to the NYC Board of Education as "too big and bad" to undertake innovation in the public interest. He concluded: "Here's our message: **the plan was vetoed because it didn't have enough CNG. We expect a much, much bigger CNG commitment.**"

Regarding the Second Avenue Subway, Shaw stated that "We're **committed to a full build eventually.**"

The Regional Plan Association's Steve Weber presented the Empire State Transportation Alliance's critique of the MTA capital program proposal (see *MTR #236*), noting that it:

- Plans a 2nd Ave. "stubway" for the Upper East Side that will **not ease Lexington line overcrowding**;
- Proposes subway car and bus purchases too small to provide sufficient additional service to reduce crowding and attract new riders;
- Does not paint a clear picture of how the LIRR East Side Access or 2nd Avenue subway projects will be completed.

Assemblymember Towns asked whether an additional \$200-\$300 million in the capital program would be enough for planning a full-length 2nd Ave. subway. Shaw said it was.

The Manhattan Borough President's office also testified on behalf of a full-length 2nd Avenue line. The General Contractors Association called for more transit funding in the context of boosting state transportation

spending overall. The NY Public Transit Association testified on behalf of its "Transit 2000" plan for more capital funding and a multi-year operating assistance

Nassau Fiddles With Bus System on Brink

The MTA and Long Island Bus have scheduled a public hearing for March 28 at the Nassau County Medical Center on the **plan to slash bus service**. The cuts are in response to Nassau County's removal of \$7 million in operating support for L.I. Bus in December, stemming in turn from the county's budget melt-down. L.I. Bus says the County's 2000 budget had started off \$5.5 million below the agency's required level of support, for an **overall deficit of \$12.5 million** in county support.

Neither County Executive Thomas Gulotta nor the new Democratic majority in the county legislature has proposed a realistic plan for heading off the cuts.

The proposed service reductions would eliminate 23 weekday bus routes and reduce service on 18 more. Weekend service would be also dramatically affected. The cuts would chase a large percentage of **riders out of the system**, further reducing L.I. Bus' revenue and its ability to provide worthwhile bus service.

Business Backs S.I. Bus-way

The Staten Island Chamber of Commerce voted this week to support installing a guided busway on the Staten Island Expressway. The Chamber's president and CEO told the *Staten Island Advance* that "The Chamber believes that the solution to the transportation problem on Staten Island lies within exploration of 21st-Century technology like the guided busway."

Guided busways are prefabricated tracks equipped to handle only buses. While on the tracks, buses can move almost as fast as trains. Buses can leave the tracks and operate as a regular buses, accommodating local routes and off-track destinations. Guided busways cost about one-third less than light rail.

A guided busway along the Staten Island Expressway would probably optimally continue over the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and up the Gowanus Expressway, providing Staten Islanders with a one-seat rapid transit ride into Manhattan. The Gowanus HOV lane, now clogged with cars (many of which are single-occupant cheaters) should first be converted to bus-only status.

The NY State DOT, however, is likely to propose building new car and truck lanes on the Expressway. The agency is under pressure to drop this option and elaborate on its bus-way analysis.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site:

www.tstc.org

New this week:

- Fact-sheets and analysis on the NY Thruway Authority's plan to replace the Tappan Zee Bridge

City Truck Route Revision Still Stalled



The NYC DOT plan to review and revise the city's truck routes in order to "increase operator efficiency" has hit a new roadblock. Hopefully, it will force the agency to **rethink**

the limited criteria it intends to use for the effort.

In the spring of 1999, the Tri-State Campaign and the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance organized a coalition of 19 elected officials and 26 community groups to push NYC DOT to consider **safety, noise and physical damage** in designating truck routes (*MTR #215*).

A letter to DOT from the Federal Highway Administration dated February 7, 2000 stated that FHWA "understands that there is some concern within the city regarding how well the study will consider the truck traffic impacts on neighborhoods. If CMAQ funding is pursued, we will consider these comments during our review of the scope of the work." The city had sought to use federal Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality funds for the project, which distorted it by requiring it to **demonstrate air pollution reduction** — hence, "increase [truck] operator efficiency." It will not be a bad thing if NYC DOT is forced to find another funding source for the truck route project, one that will permit it to expand the aims of the effort and accommodate a pro-neighborhood perspective.

The Feb. 7 letter says FHWA has not "reviewed or approved the proposed scope of work for the study, a requirement prior to the Federal approval of funding."

New Scheme for One-Seat JFK Ride ?

Last Tuesday, New York State's economic development agency announced it would seek to facilitate a "public-private partnership" to pursue New York City's long-held ambition to develop a no-transfer rail trip from Manhattan's business district to JFK airport. Transit trips to JFK now take over an hour and require numerous transfers and arrival by bus.

The development agency is soliciting expressions of interest in the project from **private firms who would be expected to foot the entire bill**, reaping an eventual profit from fares. Previous studies of one-seat ride options suggest that — depending on ticket price — roughly 11,000 riders would make the trip to and from Manhattan daily. 2,600 of the trips would be by airport workers.

Simultaneously, the MTA is polishing off a Manhattan-airport one-seat ride proposal, while the **Port Authority** is moving ahead with its own **Air-train line** to run between Jamaica Station and JFK. With all these projects in the mix, political and engineering challenges await any ESDC-forged partnership. The one-seat route would use LIRR main-line tracks from Penn to Jamaica station, then switch to Air-train tracks

at Jamaica for the trip to and around the airport.

The ESDC envisions trains traveling from Penn Station every 12 to 15 minutes. A PA spokesperson said current thinking there has the Air-train running with a 4-5 minute head-way and that "one-seat ride" trains from JFK, when and if they come on line, would be **fit into circulation** by taking up 4 of the 12 slots available per hour. Peak-hour line-sharing may be more difficult to negotiate on the LIRR main-line, especially with planned service expansion to Grand Central.

Air-train stations are to be built with on-platform doors, and the route involves turns too tight and grades too steep for typical heavy-rail cars. For all these reasons, a new, yet-to-be designed hybrid car would be

needed for the one-seat system.

Given all these difficulties, ESDC's advertised timeline for a one-seat ride to JFK by 2004 seems **wildly ambitious**, leading some to wonder whether last week's announcement carries any weight. Jeffrey Zupan of the Regional Planning Association speculated that the ESDC could be simply "stirring the pot" in order to spur action by the Port Authority and MTA.

In the meantime, NJ Transit should be able to offer a ride from NY Penn Station to the Newark Airport monorail by early next year. Newark has become increasingly popular among NYC air travelers: since 1990, while JFK departures have increased by less than 4%, Newark trips have ballooned almost 30%.

Calendar

Feb. 16, 7:30 pm CT Rail Commuter Council Meeting, CDOT Offices, Bridgeport Railroad Station, www.trainweb/ct, 1-800-842-8299

Feb 17 Noon Metro-North RR Commuter Council, regular meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 10th floor. 212-878-7087.

Feb 22, 6pm "German Green Streets and Networks." Michael King, traffic calming planner. Auto-Free NY, @ Transportation Alternatives, 115 West 30th St., Manhattan #1207. 212-475-3394.

Feb 24, Noon NYC Transit Riders Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan 5th floor 212-878-7087.

February 25, 9:30am "Economics of Amtrak: Choices w/in the Policy Framework." John Bennett, Amtrak VP. Oval Room, 1 World Trade Center, 43rd floor, Manhattan. University Transportation Research Center, 212-650-8050.

Feb. 28-29 New York Public Transit Association Winter Conference, Crowne Plaza, Albany, NY, 518-434-9060. Also transit lobby day at Capitol. www.nytransit.org

March 21, 6 pm Chamber of Commerce of the Nyacks general membership meeting and panel discussion: "The Tappan Zee Bridge? Nyack Needs to Know." Seaport Center, 21 Burd St. 914-353-2221 coc@spyril.net

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



M o b i l i z i n g t h e R e g i o n

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March 23, 7pm Public Forum to examine the I-287 Task Force Report and to discuss the future of the Tappan-Zee Bridge sponsored by Assemblyman Alexander Gromack, Assemblyman Sam Colman and Senator Tom Morahan, Rockland Community College, 914-634-9791

March 24 Congressman Ben Gilman's town meeting on transportation issues. With Governor Pataki's Rockland County aide. Time, location TBA. 914-343-6666.

March 28 4-8pm Public hearing on drastic Long Island Bus service cuts. Nassau County Medical Center. 516-542-0100

March 28, 6pm "Update on Electric Cars and Buses." Patrick Centolanzi, NY Power Authority. Auto-Free NY, @ Transportation Alternatives, 115 West 30th St., Manhattan #1207. 212-475-3394.

April 6-9 "Preserving the Historic Road in America," 2nd national conference on historic roads, National Trust for Historic Preservation, NJ & NYS DOT's, others. Historic & landscape significance of roads, rehabi & traffic calming efforts. Tours. \$ 800-627-8726.

April 8-12 "Commuter Rail Conference" Panels & workshops on transit planning, design & operation American Public Transportation Assn. @ the Hilton & Marriott Hotels in Melville and Huntington, NY 202 898-4076, info@apta.com or liwww.apta.com/meetings/commuter/

April 25, 6pm "Strategies for Reducing Car Use in NYC" George Haikalis. Auto-Free NY, @ Transportation Alternatives, 115 West 30th St., Manhattan #1207. 212-475-3394.

April 25-27 Transaction 2000, NJ state-wide transportation conference, Atlantic City. 50+ workshops, major expo, more. 908-903-1077