

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 258

February 25, 2000

NEWS

California Sets Clean Bus Trend

Yesterday the California Air Resources Board (CARB) voted unanimously to adopt **strict air emissions regulations for the transit buses** in the state, a move with likely nation-wide ramifications.

Established in 1967 to define air quality standards for California's unique topography, CARB set forth guidelines for low-emission and zero-emission cars in 1990 that have since been adopted by NY State and served as the back-bone of the strict Federal EPA "Tier 2" auto emissions regulations. Observers now expect that the pollution reduction course California has laid for its 8,500 transit buses will similarly lead to nation-wide standards and regulatory action.

CARB's board — made up of 11 industry, public health and government members — also see wider implications. CARB Executive Officer Michael Kenny told the *Sacramento Bee* he believes bus emissions innovations will smooth the way for **future rules** regarding school bus, garbage truck and eventually **commercial truck** and construction equipment emissions.

The CARB regulations set clear and ambitious goals for reducing particulate and NOx emissions while offering two paths for fleets to reach them. The "alternative fuel" path requires 85% of all new buses to burn compressed or liquefied natural gas, propane or methanol. The "diesel" path allows fleets to buy diesel buses, but beginning in July 2002, all buses must use low sulfur diesel fuel and be fitted with particulate-catching filters and other control devices (the rule may drive commercial availability of some of this technology, which is mainly experimental now). The emission standard may be so tight that agencies will have to retire the oldest, most polluting buses. By the turn of 2004 both particulate and NOx emissions from diesels must be down by 80% and 75% respectively. "Diesel" path agencies must participate in **early tests of zero-emission fuel cell buses**, and attain a 15% share of zero-emission bus purchases two years ahead of "alternative fuel" agencies (2008).

In both cases, all diesel buses must be retro-fitted with pollution control technology by 2002, the first time in the history of U.S air pollution regulation that a new requirement will **apply to vehicles on the road**. Agency fleets of more than 200 must make zero-emissions buses 15% of purchases by 2010.

CA transit agencies called the reduction goals fair, but had differing views on the two paths. Sacramento officials favored CNG buses for their lower operating costs.

Transportation Finance in NY: Mixed Message

At Governor Pataki's request, the NY State Thruway Authority withdrew its proposal to implement a modest toll increase later this year, and to tie toll rates in the future to the cost of construction services and materials (see *MTR #255*). The Thruway took the action at its board meeting Wednesday.

Thruway officials said the inability to raise tolls creates a **\$216 million hole** in the roughly \$1 billion capital program the agency seeks over the next six years.

The proposed hike had been attacked by State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and, more vociferously, by State Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno. The Thruway said it hopes to work with the Governor and Legislature to meet its needs

But the Governor and Legislature have bigger transportation finance problems, in the forms of the unfunded parts of the **MTA 2000-2004 capital program** and **demands by the road industry and State Senate for more highway spending**.

The Thruway toll hike's quick demise may be a strong signal that questions of new money for transportation capital needs will wait for resolution until after this November's election. On the other hand, Albany *Times Union* coverage of opposition to the toll hike said some legislators thought that including Thruway needs in a potential transportation bond issue to be put before voters was a possibility.

Local Officials Reject NJDOT, NJ Transit Capital Programs

At the Feb. 14th meeting of the North Jersey Transportation Authority, local elected officials voted unanimously to reject NJDOT's and NJTransit's proposed 2001 capital program. The meeting began with the usual complaints that the program was delivered so late (Feb. 2) that staff had no time to analyze it. County freeholders had even less time to consult their constituent towns about delayed or dropped projects.

Further controversy focused on bad DOT assumptions underlying the 2001 plan. DOT representatives said they believed they would have a newly funded Transportation Trust Fund, even though the proposal to re-fund it with a nickel gas tax hike died as early as June 1998. The three-year 2000 – 2002 TIP assumed a funding level of about \$100 million more than is available. DOT claimed it was further caught by surprise when Gov. Whitman's budget funded transportation at just \$830 million from the general fund, rather than the "usual"

\$900 million or \$1 billion. Elected officials from both parties were skeptical and angry at these explanations.

The NJTPA director's report focused on federal agency concerns raised during the current MPO certifi-

NJ Transit Zeroes Out New Rail Projects Until 2004

Controversy at the Feb. 14 TPA meeting also surrounded NJ Transit's part of the capital program. Experienced players like former House Transportation Committee chair Robert Roe and local elected officials alike were stunned when NJ Transit released a plan that **dropped its entire New Rail Starts program** (\$40 million), abandoned an earlier agreement to spend \$3 million to operate local train station jitneys, and otherwise substantially altered funding for over half of the items in its capital program. In light of NJ Transit Board chair Jim Weinstein's remarks at a January Alliance for Action, where he **proclaimed public transit as the future** of mobility in New Jersey, the NJ Transit budget brought usually staid TPA regulars close to a frenzy.

Roe and others claimed that deferring new rail starts had already cost the agency \$17 million because it had delayed on the NY Susquehanna & Western commuter rail restoration project for so long (Roe got the earmark for NJ in the 1991 ISTEA), and that southern and western states would not tolerate more funding requests from NJ when TEA-21 expires if the state hadn't put aside some of its own money.

The \$40 million loss for new rail projects included monies for one of several options under consideration in Bergen County, Union County light rail, restoration of passenger service on the West Trenton line, and the Middlesex-Ocean-Monmouth line. Other cuts were \$12 million for planning for a new Hudson River tunnel, **\$11 million in upgrades to permit more service on the Main, Bergen and Pascack Valley lines** and \$17 million for Hudson Bergen light rail phase 2.

NJ Transit officials' weak reply that the agency had all the money it needed to do necessary planning and that no projects would be stalled was met with disbelief. When elected officials came close to accusing NJ Transit of **purposely delaying projects** because its planners don't think they are worthy of construction, the NJ Transit rep coyly noted that he'd learned, after four years at DOT, never to *say* the agency didn't want to build a highway or transit project.

Since the meeting, NJT has attempted to appease elected officials on the TPA board by **restoring \$10 million per year for new starts** and setting aside \$1 million in federal funds for jitney operating funds. The source of the \$10 million has yet to be identified, however. It seems unlikely that the Governor's 1998 "Vision Statement" goal of two new rail starts will be realizing in NJT's current planning environment.

A capital program deal must be struck within a week; the program will be delivered by DOT to the Legislature for approval by the March 1st statutory deadline.

cation process — foremost was the high number amendments and modifications to the NJTPA TIP that DOT has requested or required.

Tri-State Transportation Campaign director Janine Bauer urged the freeholders to **bring stability to future capital programs** by supporting inclusion of **spending controls** in the state's Transportation Trust Fund renewal bill. Unless annual spending is tied to a real plan with objectives and performance measures, she said, the annual ritual — changed project plans, surprised and angry local officials, furious negotiations, compromised planning and constant amendments — will continue indefinitely.

Despite recent trends toward an overall maintenance and repair orientation, DOT's capital program is now swinging back to a **steady rise in spending for new highway capacity**, with continued underfunding for bike, pedestrian and rail freight programs.

NJ DOT Proposed Capital Program (Federal and State Funding — millions)

	2001	2002	2003	2004
Bridge Preservation	\$361	\$335	\$299	\$413
Roadway Preservation	194	189	181	160
"Intermodal" (railroad/aviation/ped/bike)	68	65	61	56
"Strategic mobility" (largely new highway capacity)	79	93	106	172

Non-Stop Parkway Bill Absent in NJ Senate

On January 7th, the Parkway Barrier Toll Removal Act (A35) passed the NJ Assembly Transportation Committee with five votes in support, one against, and one abstention. The bill is now with the Assembly Appropriations Committee. The bill calls for installment of high-speed, electronic payment toll lanes by reorganizing "barrier" toll plazas that lie across the highway mainline to permit high speed non-stop toll collection for E-ZPass users. The legislation requires that such changes be made once E-Z pass users make up 2/3 of all drivers on the Garden State Parkway. The reconfiguration of the plazas would be paid for by a 15 cent toll increase for cash-payers, which also creates an incentive for drivers to adopt the congestion-busting technology.

But the Act's future is uncertain. We mistakenly reported in *MTR #255* that the bill had been introduced in the State Senate, but it has not. The office of Senator Robert Martin (R-Morris), the bill's primary sponsor last year, told the Campaign that Senator Martin is "still considering" introducing S2062 this session. Perhaps he is weighing the comments of Senate Transportation Committee Chair and last year's bill co-sponsor, Senator Ciesla (R-Ocean County) reported recently in the *Asbury Park Press*. Ciesla said that "right now" he does not plan to put his name on the Toll Removal Act.

Senator Ciesla reasoned that installing high-speed toll

collection lanes would be a “complex and costly” endeavor, citing specifically the challenge of safely merging the slowed vehicles of cash-paying drivers with the high-speed lanes. The Senator should inspect the engineering solution developed by the **NJ Turnpike** already installed at **Interchange 6**, and at toll roads elsewhere in the country to permit high speed toll payment, and decide whether the Parkway is up to the job of **replicating already proven toll plaza designs**.

Third Time as Farce

— ConnDOT Tries Again for Twice-rejected Road —

On February 9th, three months after CT Dept. of Transportation submitted yet another proposal to construct a **new expressway in the Route 6 corridor** east of Hartford (*MTR #244*), the Army Corps of Engineers said it would require the state to develop a full analysis to determine whether the plan is the least environmentally damaging among several options.

A coalition of regional environmentalists commended the Corps on this commitment. A letter from CT Fund for the Environment, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and others reminded decision-makers that since 1995, ConnDOT has submitted and **been denied permits** for two other strikingly similar road construction alignments which were staunchly opposed by the US EPA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency.

As before, a big concern is the highway’s relation to the Hop River watershed, which contains some of the state’s largest tracts of valuable wetlands. Another is that the project, to run from the current terminus of I-384 towards Rhode Island, would be a leg of an eventual east-west highway **connecting Hartford and Providence**, a ConnDOT goal for thirty-three years. Opponents feel such an interstate would drive traffic to new heights and encourage sprawl development.

Though buoyed by the Corps decision, expressway critics worry about the limited nature of the alternatives ConnDOT will analyze. All alignments under consideration are variations on a route that crosses the Hop River and encroaches on sensitive wetlands to the north. Two strategies are not included: up-grading the two-lane Route 6 and keeping the whole road south of the river.

The Army Corps concluded in 1998 that the upgrade option would not sufficiently meet the safety and traffic needs of corridor, but the reasons for this finding have never been publicly released or defended. Similarly, no official reasons have been given for dropping the southern alignment alternative, but some of the same towns that pushed ConnDOT to resubmit its proposal strongly oppose it. Karyl Lee Hall, Staff Attorney for the CT Fund for the Environment, said that a truly complete analysis would include these alternatives.

ConnDOT has promised an alternatives analysis by early May. The Corps expects to announce its finding of the least environmentally damaging course for the controversial highway by August.

Bronx Leaders Turn Out for Safe Streets

Political enthusiasm for traffic calming in the Bronx is alive and well, but doubt remains about the city’s will to see it through. In early February, Assemblyman Peter Rivera agreed to earmark \$125,000 of NY State multi-modal funds for design and construction of **traffic calming plans at several schools** in his district. All



eight Bronx City Councilmembers have also written to Mayor Giuliani, calling for implementation of pedestrian safety designs developed for 24 sites by the Bronx “Safe Routes to

School” program. This innovative effort to slow down traffic in school zones by installing speed humps, raising crosswalks, and narrowing some streets is a project of Transportation Alternatives, the Bronx Borough President and the Governor’s Traffic Safety Committee.

However, despite its avowed commitment to the project, the NYC Dept. of Transportation has **only installed calming devices around one school** of the twenty-four, and has no timeline or even loose plans for starting in on the remainder. In fact, doubt remains as to whether there is any NYC DOT commitment to traffic calming at all, in light of disparaging comments made about speed humps by Transportation Commissioner Wilbur Chapman at a City Council meeting last November (*MTR #245*). Over 1,000 neighborhood requests for speed humps remain unfilled.

Crash City

Sounds of crushing metal and breaking glass are NYC streets’ cries for traffic calming, according to last week’s *NY Post* ranking of the city’s top 24 intersection crash-sites. One Bronx intersection — E. 177th St and Harding Ave. — ranked tenth overall, with 112 crashes last year. Other bad spots are the corner of Second Ave. and E. 59th St. in Manhattan and Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, in first and second place respectively.

Transportation safety experts noted that the *Post*’s numbers do not actually reveal the most dangerous intersections in the city, because they tally crashes only and not results like death and injuries, or who is getting hurt. Bicyclists and pedestrians are well over half of total NYC traffic fatalities and injuries, but these weren’t broken out by the *Post*. The vital statistics won’t be available until the DOT releases its crash reports to the public, as advocates have urged them to do since 1999 NYPD fatality and injury figures were reported in the press last month.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

Calendar

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

Feb. 29, 3-8pm NJ Transit public information meeting for supplemental draft EIS for the Newark- Elizabeth Rail Link- Elizabeth Segment, Jersey Gardens Mall Training Center, Lower Level, North Side (off Exit 13A NJTurnpike), 973-491-7210

March 1, 3-8pm NJ Transit public information meeting for supplemental draft EIS for the Newark- Elizabeth Rail Link- Elizabeth Segment, Elizabeth City Hall, City Council Chambers, 3rd Fl., 50 Winfield Scott Plaza, Elizabeth 973-491-7210

March 2, Noon Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 5th floor. 212-878-7087.

March 2, 1-4 pm The Future of Alternative Fuel Vehicles in NY State: a Discussion with Ford Motor Company and Baker Electromotive, Legislative Office Bldg, Room 711A, Albany, NY. Registration. 518-276-2164

March 7, 10:30 am NYMTC Freight Transportation Working Group. State Office Building, 270 Broadway, 25th Fl., Rm 2527. 212-938-4367. RSVP 212-938-3388 by 3/6

March 7, 6-8 pm MTA/LIRR Public information meeting on GCT East Side Access Project. The Hotel Pennsylvania, Skytop Ballroom, 401 7th Ave., Manhattan. 718-725-2626

March 7, 7 pm Public information meeting on NYSDOT Route 120 plan. North Castle Town Hall Annex, 15 Bedford St., Armonk. 518-457-6400.

March 8, 9:30 am NJ Senate Public Hearings on 2001 State Budget; New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Banquet Hall, second tier; 1 Center St., Newark, NJ. 609-292-8030

March 8, 10 am NJ Transit Board meeting, 1 Penn Plaza, Newark, NJ. 973-491-7000

March 9, 11:45 "National Trends in Intermodal Rail Freight Equipment" Ronald Sucik, TTX. Transp. Research Forum, 100 Washington St., Manhattan \$ 212-435-4086, pgessner@panynj.gov

March 15, 9:30 am NJ Senate Public Hearings on 2001 State Budget; Mercer County Community College, Gymnasium, 1200 Old Trenton Road,

— Job Announcement —

Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Full-Time Office Manager/Admin. Assistant

Needed to work in our NYC office. Responsibilities include: answering phones, monitoring Executive Director's schedule, filing, ordering supplies, monitoring employee benefits and health insurance/ pension policies.

Must be well-organized and possess strong computer skills.

Mail, fax, or e-mail resumes to: Tri-State Transportation Campaign, 240 West 35th Street, NYC

West Windsor, NJ 609-292-8030

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@spral.net

March 22, 9:30 am NJ Senate Public Hearings on 2001 State Budget; Burlington County College, Gymnasium, County Route 530, Pemberton, NJ ? 609-292-8030

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 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.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

MTR#258 Contributing: Janine Bauer, Ellen Cavanagh Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kristen Fountain Executive Director, Janine Bauer

240 West 35th Street #801, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10001 tel. 212-268-7474 fax 212-268-7333 email