

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 259

March 3, 2000

NEWS

North Jersey Projects Back on Track?

After unanimously voting down NJ Transit's 2001 capital programs list two weeks ago, NJTPA accepted a new project plan from the agency last Monday that now includes \$10 million per year towards new rail project.

The new plan, however, still represents a reduction in funding for new rail starts. NJTPA's five-year Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) earmarks \$40 million per year for beginning work on some of a handful of contemplated projects like a Union County light rail line, the Middlesex-Ocean-Monmouth line, and the restoration of passenger service to the West Trenton and West Shore lines. Earlier versions of the NJ Transit program also reflected this level of commitment.

Nassau Legislature Hears Outcry Over Long Island Bus Cuts

At Monday's Nassau County Legislature session, the public speaking period was **dominated by citizens opposed to severe pending cuts in Long Island Bus service.** Speakers spotlighted issues of elderly, working class and student mobility and environmental and traffic issues. Speakers were riders and representatives of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, ACORN and NYPIRG. Long Island Bus has scheduled the cuts in response to reduction in County operating assistance.

The Legislature's Majority Leader, **Judith Jacobs, responded to the comments by saying she too opposed the cuts,** which were announced by County Executive Thomas Gulotta in December. She said she was attempting to develop a plan to finance the bus budget deficit before the service cuts take effect.

LI Bus Service Reduction Public Hearing

Long Island Bus has issued a formal notice of public hearing for severe pending reductions in service, "due to a \$12.5 million reduction in the operating subsidy provided by Nassau County, as part of the County's fiscal year 2000 budget." The cuts would eliminate 23 weekday and 13 weekend routes, and cause less service on 18 weekday and 17 weekend routes. Paratransit service would also be reduced.

Time and place:

Tuesday, March 28, 4 p.m. (registration to speak closes at 8 p.m.)

Nassau County Medical Center
2201 Hempstead Turnpike, East Meadow

For info or to sign up to speak at the hearing, call MTA communications at 212-878-7483

B'haven Road Projects, Secret Data Rapped

The Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Organization (ABCO) and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign have called on Brookhaven-area state legislators to help unearth NY State DOT modeling data for a network of planned highway expansion projects.

DOT documents and correspondence indicate the agency **will seek to widen NY Routes 25, 347 and 112 in Brookhaven and Smithtown** in the next few years.

The Campaign believes DOT modeling efforts for the "Long Island Transportation Plan 2000" and preparation of environmental review materials for the Brookhaven projects have produced estimates of traffic growth in the corridors for both "build" and "no-build" scenarios.

The Campaign has asked NYSDOT for these estimates several times since August 1999. The only reply from the agency was a December letter that vaguely defended the projects (Campaign information requests had not addressed the projects' merits) but **ignored clear and repeated requests for data.**

Civic leaders and smart growth advocates are worried that the highway expansion projects will do little but accelerate sprawl and traffic growth. Community groups have attempted to engage DOT in dialogue about local impacts of the pending projects, especially along Route 25, but to no avail.

"Our many meetings have obviously not resulted in a change of philosophy or policy with the Dept. of Transportation. The DOT stubbornly continues to try to resolve traffic problems by widening highways," said ABCO president Connie Kepert.

Citizens along Route 25 in Middle Island have voiced interest in a project that would calm traffic and better accommodate pedestrians and cyclists. The **DOT's project would increase through-lanes from two to four and also add a fifth lane for turning traffic.** That plan will boost speeds, make the road even less hospitable for pedestrians and preclude any future redesign along pedestrian-friendly "smart growth" lines.

"ABCO and the communities which will be impacted by these projects need answers, and we believe the DOT has those answers," said Kepert. "We have officially requested that our state representatives step in and get the DOT to cooperate with us."

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

Mark Green Speaks

NYC Public Advocate and likely candidate for mayor Mark Green addressed a meeting of the Council on Transportation Tuesday morning. Green displayed a wide-ranging interest and versatility regarding transportation issues rarely seen among top elected officials.

Green raised the specter of national and international

Green's Top Ten list of fast, low cost transportation improvements:

- Double the number of benches in subway stations
- Replicate British "Kill your speed, not a child" traffic calming public education campaign
- Give priority to advanced public information systems for bus and subway riders
- Better transit announcements, vehicle cleaning
- Widen sidewalks in Times and Herald Squares
- More red light cameras and photo radar to catch and deter speeders
- Strong NYC DOT commitment to traffic calming in residential neighborhoods
- Enforcement of city bus lanes
- An 800 number to report road rage incidents
- Reduce issuance of city parking permits

Green's office says it is interested in hearing citizens' ideas for other improvements like these. Send suggestions to jgrappaport@pubadvocate.nyc.gov

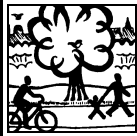
Route 92 Looms Over Middlesex Farmland

The Middlesex County Agricultural Development Board is currently reviewing a farmer's petition to set aside 120 acres as permanent open space. The land now stands in the path of the NJ Turnpike's proposed **6.7 mile Route 92**. Farmer Nicholas Boyko said at a Feb 16 hearing that either his land becomes an Agricultural Development Area, to be protected under state law for perpetuity, or he will sell to a housing developer — anything but yield the land to the Turnpike.

Boyko's property is located at a large concentration of county green space, adjacent to the Plainsboro Preserve and the Sondek and Tall Timbers parks in South Brunswick. If added to two undeveloped areas on the South Brunswick Township acquisition list, the area would add up to **800 acres of unbroken open space**.

As expected, Turnpike officials are opposed to the designation, but county planning officials also object, despite the farmland's strategic location and in the face of the preservation directives of the State Development Plan. Supporters of Route 92 sit on the board itself, creating a high hurdle for Boyko. A decision on the petition is expected by March 15.

Cars Out: Sign Here



Car-free Prospect Park activists have launched an on-line petition drive. Link to the e-petition via Transportation Alternatives' web site:

competition for business investment, and said he **supported construction of a full Second Avenue subway and a cross-harbor rail freight tunnel**. He listed truck impacts in communities and diesel pollution among problems the city must grapple with.

Green also called for a NYC Transit program of greater investment in new subway cars and subway operations to cut rush hour subway waiting times. Consistent with a recent report he issued (see *MTR #257*), he also called for **better commuter rail service within the city** in the form of lower fares, better stations, more frequent trains and a regional transit pass.

He said he believed PA investment patterns favored New Jersey, but that the bi-state agency could only function if a reasonable working relationship between the agency, the City and NJ and NY could be restored.

In response to questions, Green said he would ensure that the Mayor's Transportation Office was a full and active participant in critical planning and decision-making processes affecting the city. He also said he favored prioritizing investment in public transit — he said he opposed **building a Goethals "twin" bridge, which he said would lead to what he called the "Long Island Expressway effect,"** where traffic expands to fill additional highway capacity.

Green also addressed a gathering of the General Contractors Association this week.

Senate Hopefuls to Debate at NJ Transport Confab

Newly added to the already-extensive proceedings at the April 25-27 TransAction Conference in Atlantic City is a debate between all of the Democratic and Republican candidates for New Jersey's open U.S. Senate seat.

The debate will take place from 7-9pm on Tuesday, April 25. The TransAction conference is being held at the Tropicana Conference Center (see calendar section).

CT Mall Plan Still Begs Traffic Questions

Last week, two Connecticut environmental and transportation advocacy groups again voiced their frustration with a state analysis of the traffic impacts of building the Long Wharf Galleria, a 1.2 million square foot mall planned for the junction of I-95 and I-91. Both the Connecticut Fund for the Environment and the Environment & Human Health group released statements saying the **New Haven area mall will lead to significant traffic back-ups on the two highways and surrounding ramps** likely to have detrimental effects on public health. The highway intersection already sees 1,000 more vehicles per hour than it was originally designed to handle and the Long Wharf mall is expected to draw 34,000 vehicles per day.

The two groups criticized a draft study performed by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development released last year that found no significant environmental impact from the development as

“extremely flawed” for failing to account for idling cars and trucks that would produce more emissions leading to **increased asthma and cancer risks for the region's residents**. New Haven already suffers from one of the highest child asthma rates in the state with one child in four afflicted. A final report is expected from the agency in the near future.

Karyl Lee Hall, CFE Senior Attorney, said that full compliance with the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) would require the project to undergo more extensive federal environmental impact assessment. A senior analyst for the State DEP also told the *New Haven Register* that serious environmental impact questions remained unanswered.

Traffic patterns are already disrupted at the intersection due to planned lane expansions on the near-by Q-Bridge (See MTR # 233). ConnDOT could reduce the region's pending grid-lock by **implementing the transit improvement suggestions** put forward by an advisory committee (ICDC) made up of environmental, trucking, highway construction, and neighborhood interests (see MTR #205) such as increasing train service on the Shoreline East, a new train station in East Haven, doubling bus service on popular routes in East Haven and Branford and reducing fares on buses and trains.

NYC Council: Hard Look at Long Buses

This week East-side NYC Councilmembers Gifford Miller and Eva Moskowitz called for a Council hearing on the MTA's introduction of articulated buses to Manhattan routes 79 and 86. The 60 foot long buses with an accordion-like flexible segment have run on these popular cross-town routes since November and have served Bronx routes 1 and 2, 12, and 55 since early 1997 (see MTR #117). More buses are expected to be placed on BX 5, 22, and 39 within the next year.



Articulated buses are twenty feet longer than the MTA's standard buses and contain 30-odd more seats, but in the case of both Manhattan and Bronx their **introduction was accompanied by substantial reductions in service frequency**, creating longer waits at the bus stop for transit riders. During rush hour the MTA now sends three articulated buses down Manhattan routes for every four regular buses previously run, and in total offers 15% fewer weekday bus trips. In the transit dependant Bronx, service reductions on articulated lines were even more extreme **with a 22% cut on the BX 1 and 2 and a 47% cut on BX 55**. The MTA's consistent use of the extra-long buses to mask overall service reductions has rider advocates wary of the request for 400 new articulated buses in the previously vetted version of MTA's 2000-2004 capital plan.

The MTA's expansion of its articulated bus fleet also raises environmental and public health issues as all articulated buses currently in service as well as the

model proposed for future purchase are powered by diesel fuel (see following article).

Riders and drivers have further complaints that the long buses block driver visibility and cause traffic backups around tight corners like 86th St. and West End. The buses are also described as difficult to board, especially for the elderly and the disabled.

For five months, the MTA has refused to meet with East-side residents or their representatives to discuss these concerns. The two Councilmembers believe that a hearing would lead to **greater public scrutiny of the problems associated with articulated buses** and expect it to create pressure on the MTA to use the longer buses to add additional seats to crowded routes, rather than as an occasion for service cuts.

The Million-Excuse March

Documents describing a variety of “bus rapid transit” projects sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration (see article below) indicate that transit officials in **Boston and Cleveland are teaming up to procure CNG-powered articulated buses**.

In the debate over its 2000-2004 capital program, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has justified the purchase of hundreds of new diesel buses with the argument that CNG-powered express and articulated buses aren't commercially available.

CNG-powered express buses are already on the road in New Jersey. The seeming confidence of smaller transit systems in creating a market for production of CNG articulated buses would also seem to reveal the MTA's position for what it is: another tactic in a long campaign of deflection and delay to avoid adopting a clean fuel bus policy.

Cities, Suburbs Test New Transit Solutions

Projects demonstrating different aspects of “bus rapid transit” systems are underway around the country, with sponsorship from the Federal Transit Administration and local transit agencies.

The closest of the demonstration projects to the NYC metro area is the Hartford-New Britain Busway. It would develop a nine-mile exclusive bus way with 12 boarding stations between downtown New Britain and Hartford's Union Station. One portion of the route will use an abandoned rail right-of-way. Another shares a wide right-of-way with existing railroad operation. Express bus service from beyond New Britain would reach the bus-way via I-84. Plans also envision a significant reverse-commute role for the bus corridor. As planned, the project would begin operations in 2003. Having agreed to its funding share, Connecticut is seeking full federal participation. There is some concern in the Hartford area over adding to existing bus operating costs (the project would add at least 23 buses to the corridor). Available documents do not estimate projected ridership.

Other projects are geared more to mobility within

cities. Boston's Silver Line and Cleveland's Euclid Corridor projects will both rebuild arterial streets around bus-ways using dedicated lanes to link busy sub-centers to central business districts. Both feature major links with city rapid rail systems, and the Boston project will ultimately provide new transit access from city to airport. The Cleveland project will also create a "transit zone" downtown that prioritizes bus access and movement. The Cleveland project would be finished by 2004, according to current schedules. The Silver Line has several phases — the earliest phase, from Roxbury to downtown Boston, will begin revenue service this year, and is funded locally. Another part of the line in the emerging South Boston Piers area has an FTA "full funding agreement" and is scheduled for operation in 2002. A third phase to link the first two involves tunneling downtown and is some time off.

Meanwhile, New York, which has the slowest transit buses in the country, booming transit ridership and jammed highways, has **no innovative bus projects underway**. Any number of city arterials could use effective bus-priority treatment, while **the clogged Gowanus HOV lane** — where over 80% of the passengers are bus riders — **is a prime candidate for an**

express bus-way from SI and Brooklyn to Manhattan.

"Bus rapid transit" demonstration projects are taking shape from Washington, D.C. and Florida to Hawaii. For more information, visit the internet at <http://brt.volpe.dot.gov/>

Bus Info System: Thing of the Present

The Port Authority has successfully installed global positioning system technology to track its JFK Airport circulator buses, according to the *Daily News*. The system gives drivers and dispatchers more control over spacing and schedules, and **provides real information to riders about when buses will arrive**. The PA already has a similar system in use at Newark Airport. The JFK bus system consists at its peak of 24 buses serving six routes.

NYC Transit is testing a global positioning system for its buses on the Manhattan's West Side, but has experienced problems with the high buildings blocking signals. The Port Authority's success at JFK may suggest that **a better area for early deployment of the technology by NYC Transit is a low-rise area like southeastern Queens**. The neighborhoods north of JFK are among the city's most heavily reliant on buses.

Calendar

March 6, 7:30 pm Congressman Ben Gilman's transportation forum. Officials from NY State Thruway, Gov. Pataki's office, FHWA, NY State DOT. 10 Maple Ave., New City. 914-357-9000.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



MTR#259 Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kristen Fountain Executive Director, Janine Bauer

240 West 35th Street #801, New York, NY 10001 tel. 212-268-7474 fax 212-268-7333 email tstc@tstc.org

March 8, 6pm No More Garbage! Public meeting on Hunts Point truck and waste export issues. I.S. 74, 730 Bryant Avenue, Bronx. 718-542-4139

March 9, 11:45 am "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, 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@spyral.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, 7 pm 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