

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Local Leaders Mobilize vs. Rush for TZ II

In a letter published in Thursday's *NY Times*, Greenburgh Town Supervisor and candidate for Congress Paul Feiner urged that all cheaper, short-term alternatives to reduce traffic on the Tappan-Zee Bridge be exhausted before the NY State Thruway Authority moves ahead with a plan to replace the forty-five year old span. Responding to the release of the I-287 Task Force report last week, Feiner said a second opinion is needed to determine whether a new bridge and the **vaguely proposed Rockland-Westchester transit system** is the most cost-effective way to provide better mass transit and mobility in the lower Hudson Valley.

On Wednesday the Greenburgh Town Council unanimously approved a resolution calling on Governor Pataki to ensure that the Thruway Authority does not begin an Environmental Impact Study for replacing the Tappan Zee Bridge until an independent **transit feasibility study** is conducted. The Council urged the Governor to direct his agencies to pursue near-term congestion relief options like creating car-pooling incentives, instituting variable tolls on the Tappan-Zee Bridge, and reviving West Shore rail passenger service.

### Linking Transport, Land Use in Hudson Valley

The first of three public workshops held as part of the Route 303 Sustainable Development Study will take place on Saturday, May 6th in Sparkill, New York (see calendar). A joint project by the Town of Orangetown, Rockland County, the NYMTC, and NYS DOT, the study will develop an overall land use and transportation plan for the corridor between Orangetown and Clarkstown by Spring of 2001. The workshop will explore the **interaction between local land use decisions and state-funded transportation projects** with topics of discussion including transit/West Shore Rail, open space and bicycle/pedestrian linkages, traffic calming/safety, and retail and commercial development and freight movement. More information about the process is available at <http://www.route303.net>.

On the other hand, Tappan Zee II proponent E. Virgil Conway told the *Journal News* this week that the new bridge/transit environmental impact study the I-287 Task Force has proposed to Governor Pataki **will not look at land use issues**, because that is the province of local government. Conway's comment seeks to make a virtue of Tri-State region transportation planning's **greatest deficiency**, which other officials are trying to overcome with small steps like the Route 303 project.

### Reform NJ's Transportation Trust Fund

At the New Jersey state-wide "Trans-Action" conference this week in Atlantic City, the buzz was about pending renewal of **NJ's Transportation Trust Fund**. The Trust Fund must have new revenue sources dedicated to it this year in order to continue providing monies for New Jersey's transit, highway and local aid capital projects. The reauthorization bill introduced by State Senate president Donald DiFrancesco in January is tentatively scheduled to receive a hearing before the **Senate Transportation Committee** on Thursday, **May 4th** at 1 pm. No bill has yet been introduced in the Assembly.

Tri-State Transportation Campaign director Janine Bauer **presented a Trust Fund reform agenda** during a panel discussion on the topic Wednesday. Campaign literature describing the reform program was also distributed to most conference-goers.

The Campaign has proposed amending the reauthorization bill to enshrine the following directives in law:

- Adherence to the 'fix-it-first' principle.
- Prioritizing and speeding up new transit projects
- Protecting open space and reducing traffic by (1) Prohibiting DOT from building new highway capacity in State Plan designated rural farmland or critical habitat or Green Acres protected land. (2) Encouraging DOT to seek land use agreements from municipalities where new or wider highways are planned so that new developments do not eat away investment in better traffic flow.
- Increasing local aid to counties and municipalities.
- Full funding for the projects designated in the 1999 State Rail Freight Master Plan.
- Reducing dependence on polluting diesel-fuel mass transit buses.
- Providing equitable transit service for urban stations and complying with federal anti-sprawl guidelines in planning new rail projects.
- Investing to reduce pedestrian fatalities by 1/3 and to build 200 miles of bike lanes annually for five years.

### Skelos: MTA Should Adopt LI Bus Financing

NY State Senator Dean Skelos, who represents part of Nassau County and is the State Senate's point person on transit issues, announced Thursday he believes the Metropolitan Transportation Authority should assume **budget authority** over Long Island Bus.

Long Island Bus is institutionally anomalous — the

MTA nominally operates the agency, but its funding comes entirely from fares, direct state aid and a contribution from Nassau County, not from the MTA. LI Bus carries over 100,000 passengers per day and had a 1999 operating budget in the neighborhood of \$80 million. Steep budget cuts imposed by Nassau County Executive Thomas Gulotta has led to turmoil this year over possible service cuts. Emergency state funding secured by Skelos and Assembly Member Thomas DiNapoli promised to head off any service reduction, but Gulotta has threatened additional cuts (*MTR #*'s 266, 265).

Skelos' plan is to insulate Long Island Bus service from **Nassau County's budget problems**. That may be an important benefit, but any such plan should consider a number of points:

- The MTA budget is spoken for by operating agencies like NYC Transit and Long Island Railroad. Where will funds for Long Island Bus be diverted from ?
- Any MTA support that is forthcoming should be seen as a chance to **augment LI Bus' budget and service**, not simply substitute MTA dollars for Nassau County ones. LI Bus riders, drivers and several studies all point to the need for additional Nassau bus routes and higher service frequencies on existing ones.
- Any new Long Island Bus funding agreement should condition state and MTA budget support on **strict county matching requirements** so that Nassau will be unable to unilaterally pull the plug in the future.

#### **L.I. Civic: Traffic Calming, not Road Widening**

In March testimony responding to Suffolk County's plan to widen County Route 16 (Portion Rd.) in Brookhaven, Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Organization (ABCO) president Connie Kepert said expanding the highway from two to four lanes would **neither improve safety nor ease traffic flow** over the long term. Kepert proposed that the county instead adopt traffic calming measures like narrow lanes, medians and street trees to reduce speeding. She also noted the tendency of traffic to fill available road space, and so recommended smaller intersection improvements over wholesale highway expansion. She called for clearly-marked bicycle lanes along the road, and generally called on the county to adopt measures that would reverse, not exacerbate Suffolk County's high levels of traffic death and injury.

Northern Brookhaven is also facing three major NY State DOT highway expansion projects (*MTR #*245)

#### **Public Transit Ridership Up Nation-wide**

According to figures released by the American Public Transportation Association last week, over 9 billion trips were taken last year in the U.S. on public transportation, representing **the highest national ridership in four decades**. With a 4.5% cumulative growth rate, growth was recorded across all modes including heavy and light rail, bus systems, and para-transit. The trend was found to hold across small towns, suburban regions, and large cities equally.

#### **NYS DOT Dangles Sheridan Removal Study**



At a Bronx community meeting Monday, the NYS Dept. of Transportation gave groups a taste of the agency's conclusions of regarding the likely traffic impacts of turning the Sheridan Expressway into parkland. A short fact sheet accompanied the talk. But the study itself will not be released until mid-summer, so many questions remain about its methodology and assumptions.

The study found that removal of the one-mile highway would result in an increase of 11,500 vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per day in the surrounding area by 2015, 5% more than a no-change scenario. In other words, without the Sheridan, cars and trucks on nearby streets will travel one-third mile per vehicle more per day, the equivalent of six city blocks. Even this relatively small increase may be over-blown as it is unclear whether the analysis incorporates the fact that elimination of the expressway could result in fewer car trips.

A London study found that the closure of a road or a lane in the city generally causes 20% of all users to find other modes of travel, not just other routes. Examples of this effect have also been seen in NYC: traffic counts two years after the West Side Highway collapsed in 1973 showed that only 47% of the vehicles on the road five years before returned once it reopened. Of the 53% of drivers turned away, all but 7% were found to have begun using other forms of travel. Similarly, since the closure of one lane on the Bruckner-Sheridan Interchange in 1990, the interchange has seen an 8-20% decrease in traffic and 17-20% fewer vehicles drive the Bruckner Expressway/Bruckner Boulevard.

Worries that decommissioning the Sheridan may worsen air quality in the area are also unfounded. If **the road is replaced with a park**, as many local community groups desire, the open green space and extra trees would help to clean the air, as well as provide much needed open space for the area.

#### **Picture of an Eco-Port**

Port advocates discussed visions for "green port" development at a recent meeting of a government/public working group on harbor dredging, which has become increasingly interested in transportation issues. Adding to presentations the NY/NJ Baykeeper and the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, Tri-State Campaign Director Janine Bauer set forth ten objectives to guide the Port of NY/NJ towards environmental improvements.

A central objective of a green port is to reduce reliance on trucks. **Of containers transferred in or out of the Port of New York/New Jersey, 80% go by truck**. In stark contrast, the port of Tacoma, WA moves 80% of the containers it receives in or out by rail. The number of containers en route through New York Bay is expected to double in the next ten years and grow five-fold by 2030. If trucks continue to be the overwhelming mode of choice, the state of the region's environment, roads, and commuters will worsen.

Using trucks as the region's primary goods mover increases air and water pollution due to greater exhaust emissions and road surface run-off. The EPA reports that **locomotives are roughly three times cleaner than trucks on emissions per ton-mile**. Pressure from trucks also helps generate highway expansion that often destroys precious habitat and adds to congestion problems. The stream of trucks in and through the region also accelerates roadway wear and tear, while increasing ambient noise and destructive vibrations.

Rail, as well as cross-harbor and coastal ferry and barge facilities, must be utilized and expanded over the coming decades. Successful shuttle trains at European ports and Los Angeles are challenging the common wisdom that rail is not an efficient mode for trips inside a radius of 250 to 300 miles. Based on a recent marketing survey of shippers, consultants have estimated that the number of ton-miles of goods moved by rail in New Jersey could be doubled.



**Rail cars float across NY Harbor**

Important steps should be taken now to increase rail's regional market share. In New Jersey, the \$221 State Rail

### TSTC Staff Notes

- **Jessica Astrof** is leaving the Tri-State Transportation Campaign staff at the end of April, to pursue further studies. In her two years with the Campaign, Jessica earned considerable respect as a skilled advocate and spokesperson, and a tenacious organizer. A Hudson Valley civic activist wrote recently:

*We are lucky to have this talented group of people working with us, particularly Jessica Astrof who has put in countless hours...working six and sometimes seven days a week. She has been with us in the rain at demonstrations, at MTA and Thruway board meetings in NYC and Albany, and numerous local meetings. She has worked tirelessly with and for us.*

Jessica has a bright future in public interest work. We've been proud to be her colleagues wish her the very best as she explores new opportunities.

- **Jennifer Jaroski** joined the Campaign's staff in March as our New Jersey coordinator, replacing **Greg Meyer**, who now reports on Bayonne issues for the Hudson County *Jersey Journal*. Jennifer works mainly in our Trenton office (609-396-2923).

- Since December of 1999, **Chris Hewitt** has been holding down the Campaign's Long Island office (516-719-9330). In the first part of this year, Chris was instrumental in our coordination of the campaign to save Long Island Bus, and is rapidly developing a network of civic leaders concerned about highway expansion and in favor of traffic calming across both Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

Freight Master Plan should be fully funded when the Transportation Trust Fund is renewed in the coming months. **Short-term capital projects should be aggressively pursued in New York** that would increase inter-modal, rail yard and rail line capacity, especially in NYC and on Long Island. These projects include re-starting rail-freight service on the Staten Island Railroad into Cranford, NJ and securing rail-yard properties in central Long Island. Finally, corporate tax incentives should be put in place in both states and in Connecticut that would encourage industries that can ship by rail to locate warehouses along a rail line.

### Ten Green Port Objectives:

- 1 Reduce port-related truck miles traveled
- 2 Boost the rail and barge share of cargo entering and leaving the port
- 3 Reduce emissions from on-port vehicles through the use of alternative fuels and low and zero emissions vehicles. Create fueling stations along highways as part of a nationwide network of "clean fuel travel corridors" for alternative fuel vehicles.
- 4 Provide convenient transit for employees to most port work sites.
- 5 Fill no additional wetlands or open waters. The Port Authority strategic plan currently calls for a 1500-acres expansion of the port, much of it on new fill.
- 6 Use as little land as possible in expansion, instead increase terminal through-put efficiency.
- 7 Revitalize surrounding "brownfields" for port, freight, and industrial use and ensure that remaining "greenfields" such as the Meadowlands and other undeveloped open space and farmlands are not used as the site of port-related warehouses or highway interchanges.
- 8 Maintain sediment and habitat able to sustain sensitive aquatic life.
- 9 Require the design of port-terminals and other structures to be energy conserving and context sensitive.
- 10 Provide public access to waterfronts.

### Dump Diesel Continued: City Gives Stinking Tour Buses the Boot

Last week, the *Daily News* reported that the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs moved to revoke the sightseeing license of Apple Tours, the city's largest tour operator, after bringing the license under review in December (MTR #249). The company pleaded guilty in Federal Court to misrepresenting the age of its fleet of open-top, double-decker British buses last September, paying New York City an \$800,000 fine. Apple Tour buses **exceed Federal Clean Air and NY state stan-**

**dards for diesel emissions** from which they were previously exempted because the company presented them as “historic vehicles.” The NYC Environmental Justice Alliance and the Lower-East side activist group, We Can’t Breathe, brought attention to the issue by demanding that the toxic-particulate-spewing vehicles be banned from the streets.

### Transit-Chek Gets Federal Mandate

In commemoration of Earth Day, President Clinton issued an executive order last week requiring all federal agencies in the Washington, DC area to begin providing **tax benefits to mass transit commuters** for employees by October 1, 2000. Under the edict, workers will be eligible for up to \$65 of pre-tax income to use on public transit in addition to current compensation. Bills introduced in the U.S. Senate and House earlier this year would **raise the monthly pre-tax limit** on the commuter benefit from \$65 to \$175 (MTR #262). Department of Transportation projections suggest that between 75,000 and 100,000 Federal employees will take advantage of the benefit.

A further component of the presidential order begins a three-year pilot program under which the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and DOT will offer the transit benefit to their employees across the country with the aim of eventually extending the benefit to **all Federal employees nationwide**. The pilot carries the potential to stimulate greater recognition of the program nationally among private companies. Last year workers in New York City made up 60% of total participants, expected to become 80% when **city employees** are offered the benefit by the end of the summer (MTR #262). The three federal agencies are also charged with analyzing the program’s impacts on the use of single occupancy vehicles and on local area congestion.

### Correction: Hudson-Bergen Rail Funding

Last week’s MTR mistakenly reported that funding is still needed **to extend the Hudson Bergen Light Rail line to Hoboken Terminal**. In fact, the segment from Exchange Place to Hoboken Terminal is part of the fully funded Phase One of the project, delayed due to alignment changes. Phase Two of the light rail, to be laid between Hoboken Terminal and Tonnelle Avenue in North Bergen and between 34th St. and 22nd St. in Bayonne, **remains in need of significant funding**. At least 40% of NJ’s Transpiration Trust Fund should be used to ensure that important projects like future phases of the Hudson-Bergen rail move swiftly to completion.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

[www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

### Calendar

**May 2, 6:30pm** Public information session on findings of Governor Pataki’s I-287 Task Force. Westchester County Center, 198 Central Ave., White Plains. 914-285-4050.

**May 3, 7:30am-2:30pm** Regional Plan Association’s 10th annual regional assembly: “The Tri-State Region: World Capital for a New Millennium.” [www.rpa.org](http://www.rpa.org), 212-253-2727.

**May 4, 7:30am-4:15pm** 2nd Annual NY Smart Growth conference. Audubon Soc. of NY State. Empire State Plz, Albany. 518-869-9731.

**May 4, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum luncheon. “L.I. Rail Freight: an Update,” w/ Bruce Lieberman, NY & Atlantic Railway. 100 Washington St. \$ 212-435-4086. [pgessner@panynj.gov](mailto:pgessner@panynj.gov)

**May 4, 6:30pm** Public information session on findings of Governor Pataki’s I-287 Task Force. Palisades Center Mall, Adler Room. 1000 Palisades Center Drive, West Nyack. 914-348-1000.

**May 6, 9:00am-2:30pm** Route 303 Sustainable Development Study “Visioning Charrette”, St. Thomas Aquinas Student-Alumni Center, Route 340, Sparkill, 212-938-6951, [www.route303.net](http://www.route303.net)

**May 9, 12:30 pm** “Boston’s Central Artery ‘Big Dig’ Project.” NYC Dept. of City Planning brown bag lunch w/ Parsons Brinckerhoff’s Louis Silano. 22 Reade Street, Manhattan. 212-442-4630

**May 9, 6:30pm** Public info session on findings of Governor Pataki’s I-287 Task Force. Holiday Inn, 3 Executive Blvd., Suffern. 914-357-4800.

**May 10-13.** High Speed Ground Transportation Association Conference, Philadelphia Marriot

**May 11, 6:30pm** Public info session on findings of Governor Pataki’s I-287 Task Force. Ramada Inn, 1298 Rte 300, Newburgh. 914-564-4500.

**May 12, 9am** “Alternative Fuel Vehicle Success Stories for Private and Municipal Fleet Operators.” Environmental Business Assn of NY State, others. NY Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., Flushing Meadows Park, Queens. 518-432-6400.

**May 17, 8am** Regional Business Partnership annual transportation awards breakfast. Co-sponsors, AAA NJ, Booz, Allen & Hamilton, Maher Terminals, others. Newark Club. 973-242-4219.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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