

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Shaky NY Transit Capital Plan Approved

— Fare Hike on the Horizon? —



On Thursday, the New York State Legislature passed bills cementing the \$17.1 billion mass transit capital program the financing of which has been criticized by the region's major newspapers and prominent NYC public interest and business groups. The MTA plan improves on its vetoed predecessor in providing enough funds to plan a full-length 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. Subway and reduce the number of diesel buses in the MTA future fleet. But critics argue that the plan will be **financed primarily on the backs of NYC subway and bus riders**.

The 2000-2004 MTA capital program as it stands will be paid for through the sale of \$22 billion of municipal bonds, \$7 billion of which are completely fare-backed. Support from direct **NY State tax revenues** has plunged by 12% from the previous MTA plan. Substantial **NYC funds** for the program have also been **withdrawn**, leaving more of it to be paid for by riders through what could be a system-wide fare increase in the near future.

The Straphangers Campaign estimates that **subway and bus fares** may be forced up by as much as a quarter next year because, even after massive borrowing, the MTA program has a \$1.2 billion funding gap. The Citizen's Budget Commission says the cost of serving the added debt will ultimately incur a 39-cent fare hike.

The plan also **reduces NYC's share** of the capital program from 77% to 70% in favor of suburban projects, a **net loss of \$1.14 billion** in capital investment in the city subways and buses that serve 90% of MTA ridership. Also, the plan's refinancing of existing debt back-loads payments, increasing debt service by \$5.5 billion over 30 years. Sacrificing the future for the present in this manner may make completion of projects like the Second Avenue Subway much more difficult than if the capital plan and each expansion project had clear funding sources assigned to them up front.

In editorials, op-eds, and public statements, the plan's critics have asked for the immediate creation of a panel that would search for new sources of long-term financial support for mass transit. They also suggest that a **limit** be placed on the percentage of **revenues from fares that can be used for debt service**.

### NJ Trust Fund Reauthorization: Spending Accountability Hangs in Balance

Despite extensive efforts by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign to educate NJ State Senators of the importance of building clear policy and spending goals into the pending reauthorization of the New Jersey Transportation Trust Fund, the Senate Transportation Committee approved a bill Thursday that would permit expenditure of \$4 billion over four years, but has **little significant policy content**. So far, the Senate has bowed to NJ DOT's position that it should be the prime decision-maker regarding transportation priorities. However, the Senate has said it will continue to consider the Campaign's recommendations.

The Senate's Trust Fund reauthorization measure would have to go **before voters in the fall** because it dedicates additional general fund revenue to transportation capital spending.

The revenue measure was backed by road industry and road labor organizations, and groups like the AAA and the NJ Motor Truck Association.

However, environmental and transportation reform groups and local elected officials backed the Campaign's approach. The American Lung Association called on Legislators to force NJ Transit to **stop buying diesel buses**. Officials from Hopewell and Leonia asked for tighter **regulation of trucks** and greater investment in **pedestrian safety**. The New Jersey Environmental Lobby said Trust Fund spending had become less accountable since its creation in the 1980s, and now amounted to a blank check to NJ DOT and NJ Transit.

The League of American Bicyclists pointed out that **NJ DOT** had so far **failed to deliver** on Governor Whitman's 1998 pledge to construct 200 miles of bike-ways per year — a clear case in point on the need to present legislated transportation spending and policy targets to NJDOT.

New Jersey Future, a smart growth group, opposed the legislation because even the relatively weak language referring to transportation policy consistency with the **NJ State Plan** had been removed from the bill before it reached committee.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign's approach to Trust Fund reauthorization — embodied in proposed amendments to the Senate Trust Fund legislation — would tie Trust Fund spending to goals that would prioritize investment in highway maintenance and mass

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

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

transit, constrain sprawl-inducing road projects and direct more funding to rail freight, clean buses, traffic calming and a state-wide bikeway network (MTR #267).

This agenda was laid out in testimony Thursday by Tri-State Campaign director Janine Bauer. Democrats on the Senate panel in fact proposed the Campaign goals as amendments to the draft bill. They were out-voted 3-2 by committee Republicans who backed the bill as presented by Senate President Donald DiFrancesco.

An element in the bill that passed requires NJ DOT annual capital programs to conform to a 5-year "capital investment strategy" that the DOT would establish next March. But the strategy's **goals would be set by NJ-DOT** and could also be changed by the agency annually.

The Senate legislation still must be heard by the budget committee before moving to the Senate floor. The State Assembly has yet to be heard from on Trust Fund reauthorization, but action on the Trust Fund is reportedly needed before the end of June.

In press comments this week, Governor Whitman expressed continuing unease with the financing aspects of the Senate proposal, since they would hike transportation spending without any new revenue, reducing availability of general funds.

**Trust Fund Alert**  
We urge concerned organizations and individuals to contact **NJ Senate President Donald DiFrancesco** and ask him to adopt the Tri-State Transportation Campaign accountability in transportation spending amendments.  
**609-292-5199**  
**908-322-5500**  
**sendifrancesco@njleg.state.nj.us**

### Trust Fund Should Promise Transit Projects



On Tuesday, representatives of transit groups called for NJ Trust Fund renewal legislation that would ensure transportation spending is directed towards advancing NJTransit capital projects. Members of the **NJ Association of Rail Passengers** and the **Raritan Valley Rail Coalition**, along with representatives from the **United Transportation Union** and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, asked for bill language that would prioritize funding for designated "Circle of Mobility" projects and upgrades to the Raritan Valley and Pascack Valley lines, as well as work towards a new Hudson River rail tunnel.

"NJTransit has at least 20 projects lined up over the next 20 years," said Janine Bauer, Executive Director of the Campaign. "To build them requires **more Trust Fund money dedicated to transit**, at least 40%."

These expansions are needed to meet growing demand for rail transit across the state. NJTransit rail ridership increased by a record 7% last year, and by more than 36% over the last eight years. 35% more passengers are expected on lines in north Jersey by 2005.

### CT Budget: No Traffic Relief in Sight

The Connecticut Legislature on Tuesday approved a \$12.3 billion annual budget that included a **7-cent per gallon reduction in the state gas tax**. Other adjustments to last year's biennial budget were an additional appropriation of \$35 million for new passenger rail cars and greater funding for municipalities.

The gas tax reduction may erode the state's ability to make necessary capital investments in mass transit, while simultaneously reducing the cost of driving.

This year's cut to the 32-cent/gallon tax will remove at least \$94 million annually from the Transportation Fund. The transfer of DMV and petroleum sales tax revenue from the General Fund brings this loss down to roughly **\$40 million**. But over time, this amount will substantially shrink the monies available to support both bus and railroad operations, as well as for highway and bridge repair. Roughly 1/3 of CT's Transportation Fund was directed to mass transit last year.

1997 legislation directs ConnDOT to reduce morning rush hour traffic by 8,600 cars on I-95, US 1 and Route 15 in the southwestern corner of the state before 2003 (MTR # 261, 134). A series of *Stamford Advocate* articles this spring revealed corridor-wide deficiencies in bus and rail systems that discourage commuters from using transit.

Commuter rail managers are unable to increase morning intra-state trips to business hubs like Stamford and Greenwich due to fleet size and age limitations. The **average age** of the 300 car ConnDOT/Metro-North **New Haven Line fleet is 30 years** — every day 50-60 cars are out of service for repairs. Again, because of a lack of resources for adequate bus service, city bus and train schedules are not adequately coordinated.

Some estimates of the necessary funds to solve these problems offered up by transit administrators interviewed for the *Advocate* articles include: \$16 million for 4 new locomotives, \$26 million for station parking improvements in Stamford, Fairfield, and New Haven, and \$10 million to allow a bus to meet every train arriving at the Stamford station. Democratic leaders in Hartford initially seemed open to considering using some of this year's state surplus to meet these needs.

However, ConnDOT head James Sullivan denied new funds were required to meet the legislated congestion reduction goals. Observers noted Governor Rowland **demanding flat or reduced budgets** from his agencies this year in order to ensure passage of the gas tax cut that a spokesman called his highest fiscal priority.

### Tappan Zee II a Villain at Public Meetings

At public information meetings convened by the NY State Thruway Authority and the MTA in White Plains and Nyack this week, those opposed to or very wary of the proposal to **replace the Tappan Zee Bridge** and build a big new Hudson Valley commuter rail system vastly outnumbered the scheme's supporters. At the Westchester session, a construction industry spokesper-

son, who was booed by the audience, was the sole outspoken proponent of the plan. In Nyack, a handful of supportive members of the construction trades and citizens were again severely outweighed by citizens and local officials deeply concerned about construction and traffic impacts of a bigger bridge, and **mistrustful of promises of a huge investment in mass transit.**

Elected officials, perhaps sensing a difficult issue, largely kept their distance. A number of Tarrytown municipal leaders expressed concern about the plan at the Westchester session. A representative of **Congressman Ben Gilman** spoke at one meeting, but only in favor of additional community consultation and input. Gilman's challenger this year, **Greenburgh supervisor Paul Feiner**, has in contrast taken a strong position favoring investigation and real-world tests of policies like time-variable tolls and West Shore passenger rail before any major cross-Hudson capital project takes place.

Numerous speakers pointed to the **financial straits** many expect the **Metropolitan Transportation Authority** to be entering as the source of their skepticism that any new Tappan Zee Bridge could serve as a mass transit conduit in any reasonable time-frame. A frequent demand connected to this theme was for an independent **transit feasibility** and financing study to double-check the "no problem" presentation the MTA and Thruway have offered to date of the general concept of an Orange/Rockland/Westchester commuter rail system.

Although Thruway officials say a decision about whether to repair or replace the Tappan Zee needs to be made soon, there seems **no reason that the MTA cannot explain its ideas** about transit right-of-way, ridership, financing and implementation schedule in more detail to elected officials and citizens, before beginning a formal environmental impact statement for the project.

### Rockland Considers Divorce from MTA

This week, the Rockland County legislature unanimously approved a resolution asking the state to give the county authority to withdraw from the MTA.

Rocklanders have long felt short-changed by their participation in the MTA compact, and have taken steps to leave the MTA before (see *MTR* #184). County legislators said MTA studies show Rockland contributes \$61 million in taxes and fees annually to the MTA, but gets only \$29 million in transit services. They talked about **directly contracting with NJ Transit** to run the NY portions of the Port Jervis and Pascack Valley lines.

Apparently, recent talk of a new Hudson Valley commuter rail line, that would cross a new Tappan Zee Bridge, has not impressed Rockland's legislature.

Still, County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef said it's still possible for Rockland to negotiate a better deal with the MTA, and has asked Rockland's Albany delegation to hold off on any legislation until he has more time to pursue his talks. Vanderhoef is a proponent of **West Shore line** passenger service, though it is unknown whether this is an issue in his discussions with the MTA.

### Nadler, NYC Reps Urge Change at NYMTC

A recent letter from a delegation of NYC Congressional Representatives to U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater calls on US DOT to direct the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) to:

- Situate NYMTC staff in an institutional setting independent of NYMTC member agencies.
- Review rules and voting membership to accommodate local elected officials.
- Examine the wisdom and implications of its rule that all votes be unanimous.

The initiative was headed up by Congressman Jerrold Nadler. Nadler is joined on the letter by Representatives Jose Serrano, Nydia Velazquez, Carolyn Maloney, Nita Lowey and Major Owens.

NYMTC is currently under a regular review that US DOT agencies make of all major metropolitan planning organizations every three years. The **1996 review** of NYMTC was **sharply critical** (*MTR* #104), but **recommended only technical changes** at the agency. NYMTC is comprised of the major transportation agencies in the region, and has a central staff of about 70. Overall, it is supposed to plan and oversee effective use of federal transportation funding in downstate NY.

Now, the Congresspeople want "significant reform" of NYMTC's institutional structure. Their letter points to NYMTC's 1999 long range plan as a case study in the failure of NY regional transportation planning: "The document amounts to little more than a list of every potential project conceived by every agency in the region. It offers **no perspective on...salient transportation debates...**and suggests **no clear course of action** or criteria for evaluating and comparing the myriad proposals it contains."

### Small Strides Toward Smart Growth in NJ

With a bow toward the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, Governor Christie Whitman suspended construction of a new Division of Revenue building in suburban Hamilton Township last Thursday, and asked Dept. of Treasury officials to work with Trenton planners on **appropriate city locations**. An 855-space parking lot was planned for the Hamilton site, which is not accessible by transit. 500 full-time and 400 part-time employees would have had to drive to work. In contrast, Trenton's down-town business and government buildings are easily reached on foot or by bus from a rail station that is a hub for both the NJ Transit and SEPTA.

In a May 4th editorial, the *Bergen Record* hailed the Governor's decision as "a win for the cities," asking "if the state isn't willing to follow its own master development plan, why should anyone else?"

### Sewer Policy a Model for Highways

During a speech to a Princeton University audience on NJ DEP's new, tighter sewer construction regulations, Governor Whitman remarked that the controversial 3.5

million square-foot Merrill Lynch office park in Hopewell Township is “a prime example of the kind of thing that probably **would not have happened** with the new rules.” The 450-acre development on former farmland launched rural Hopewell to the top of the list for office space construction state-wide last year.

Governor Whitman announced that all new sewer line and septic expansions would be held to more rigorous land use and pollution standards in her January State of the State speech (*MTR* #262). The Governor’s office, members of the State Planning Commission, and environmentalists all have stated that the new regulations should be explicitly linked to the objectives identified in the State Plan, but how remains unclear. NJ DEP is scheduled to release the rewritten strictures in June.

The Whitman Administration could put even more force behind its goal of protecting open space and redeveloping its cities by developing guidelines in the pending Transportation Trust Fund reauthorization similar to the new sewer rules for **road construction** (front page).

### Giuliani Moves to Reduce Trash Trucking

This week, Mayor Giuliani proposed and many City Council members have supported a new solid waste export plan that will **rely on rail and barges** to move garbage out of the city. Many advocates who had urged the city to base trash export on the existing system of **marine transfer stations**, hailed the news as a victory.

In 1998, prior to the announced closure of Fresh Kills, the 13,000 tons of residential waste generated every day in NYC was brought to the landfill by barges that were filled from garbage trucks at the marine transfer stations. Since then, the city’s Department of Sanitation has phased-in interim contracts to truck trash out of the city, adding an estimated 187,000 trucks to the roads in 1999 and up to 360,000 this year. The new long-term proposal calls for reconstructing the marine transfer stations and barging trash to railheads in NJ (Bronx trash is largely being exported from South Bronx railyards).

Thus, the plan in fact offers little change from the old days of Fresh Kills. But significant improvements could be made. In addition to the residential waste stream, New York City businesses produce 13,000 tons/day of commercial waste, and this waste is removed from NYC by truck. The city should investigate the potential for **consolidating commercial and residential waste streams** — eliminating trash export by truck — as it moves to renovate the marine transfer stations.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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## Calendar

**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 9, 6:30pm** Public information and project scoping meeting for NYS DOT plan for future of NY 347. Hauppauge High School. 631-952-6149.

**May 10, 6:30pm** Public information and project scoping meeting for NYS DOT plan for future of NY 347. JFK Middle School, Port Jefferson Station. 631-952-6149. [www.ny347.com](http://www.ny347.com)

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

**May 11, Noon.** LIRR Commuter Council, monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 10th floor. 212-878-7087

**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, 10am** Regional Business Partnership annual transportation awards breakfast. Co-sponsors, AAA NJ, Booz, Allen & Hamilton, Maher Terminals, others. Newark Club. 973-242-4219.

**May 20, 8:30am** Huntington Bike Day rally. Vision Huntington, Huntington Bike Club. 631-424-1956.

**May 24, 7:45am-2:30pm** Transportation Patterns’ Mid-Hudson Pattern for Progress Conference 2000: Building a Transportation Network in the Hudson Valley, Marist College, Stewart Air National Guard Base, Route 17K, Newburgh. \$, 914-565-4900, [www.transportationpatterns.org](http://www.transportationpatterns.org)

### Correction: Apple Tours Still Spewing Soot in a Neighborhood Near You

Last week, based on an April 26th *Daily News* item, we reported that the City’s Department of Consumer Affairs had “moved to revoke” Apple Tours’ sightseeing license in response to evidence that the company had lied about the age of their diesel vehicles. But another article appeared Monday stating that hearings continue in order to determine the fate of the company whose buses violate both state and federal clean air laws.