

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Pataki and Whitman Forge Port Authority Peace

The stalemate between the Governors of New York and New Jersey over Port Authority spending ended last week. In a deal that holds great potential, but also pitfalls, for improving the movement of people and goods in the region. The deal trades big-ticket items like the Sealand-Maersk 29-year port lease in Newark/Elizabeth for privatization of the World Trade Center and sale of air rights over the PA bus terminal in NYC.

But several other items in the agreement ratified at a special Port Authority board meeting Friday could produce significant transportation developments. The PA approved a \$35 million investment to complete a rail link between the Staten Island Railroad and the NJ Chemical Coast Line, which will finally provide Howland Hook Container Terminal and S.I.'s Arlington Yard with useful rail connections to the mainland and ease trucking over the Goethals Bridge. It was not clear as we went to press whether the PA has struck a local agreement that meets Union County's concerns about the rail connection. The board also approved PA acquisition of the Port Ivory site adjacent to Howland Hook for container terminal expansion, as well as \$5 million to plan and design additional Howland Hook rail connections.

Port "greening" elements in the deal include continuation of container barge service between Red Hook and NJ and the electrification of diesel-powered cranes in Red Hook and, as the Journal of Commerce reported Friday, expansion by Maher and Sealand-Maersk of the Newark/Elizabeth Express Rail Terminal at their terminals.

The Port Authority will also make a \$250 million transportation "development bank" available to New York, though candidate projects for this fund are unclear for now.

The deal also calls for the Port Authority to articulate a 5-year capital program, after six months of study that will also evaluate needs for PATH fare and bridge and tunnel toll increases. A PA 15-year "investment agenda" obtained last fall by the Star-Ledger (MTR #242) called for a new commuter rail tunnel between NJ and Manhattan, a Goethals Bridge "twin," further devel-

opment of the port and a new fleet of PATH cars. It said fare and toll increases would have to be part of the funding mix to accomplish these projects, and that it would be ideal if higher rates were in place by mid-2001.

The Governors' Thursday statement made no mention of the Goethals twin — hopefully, political leaders will keep the PA staff away from the unpopular, unnecessary project and will not make the mistake of linking a toll increase to its construction.

PATH fares have not been increased since the 1980s, and PA bridge and tunnel tolls have been the same since the early 90s. If the agency determines an increase is needed, it should offer smart policy changes to the riding and driving public — a PATH fare system with discounted transfers to and from NYC Transit and the Hudson-Bergen light rail, and value-priced tolls that offer a break to off-peak drivers and congestion relief during rush hour.

NJ Assembly Dems' Smart Transport Bill

The New Jersey State Assembly saw its first action on renewal of the state Transportation Trust Fund last Thursday.

Assembly Minority Leader Joseph Doria (Bayonne) and Anthony Impreveduto of Hudson and Bergen Counties introduced the "Transportation Trust Fund Extension Act" (A251), adopting infrastructure repair, safety, and anti-sprawl proposals crafted by the Tri-State Campaign and unsuccessfully offered by Democrats as amendments to the State Senate's Trust Fund bill in recent weeks (MTR # 269). Doria's bill would — over the next five years — **require NJDOT to direct spending** to repair half of the structurally deficient bridges and roads across the State, the construction of all rail freight projects outlined in the agency's Rail Freight Master Plan, make investments to reduce pedestrian fatalities by one-third, and significantly increase the state's bikeway network.

The bill, co-sponsored by thirteen other Democratic Assemblymembers, would also prohibit NJDOT from building new highways through land designated as rural farmland and environmentally-sensitive habitat by the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. In addition, it would require NJTransit to specifically purchase compressed natural gas fuel buses to operate in cities with population over 33,000 or a population density of

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more than 1,500 per square mile.

In contrast, the five-year goals set by Senate President Donald DiFrancesco's Transportation Trust Fund Renewal Bill that awaits a **floor vote June 8th** are left to NJ DOT to define and could be changed by the agency on a yearly basis. The current Senate bill contains no directive that transportation projects should be compatible with the State Plan, and proposes only that NJTransit create a "strategy" to replace its diesel bus fleet with buses that will reduce "emission of air pollutants."

Assembly Republicans are likely to release their Trust Fund bill next week. While the Republicans hold a majority in the chamber, it is not the **three-fifths** needed to constitutionally dedicate new revenues to the Transportation Trust Fund, a feature of both the Senate and the Assembly Democrats' bills. If Assembly Republicans follow a similar approach to financing the Trust Fund, at least some of the Democrats' goals may have to be satisfied in the **final Assembly bill**.

- Environmentalists Rap NJ Senate Bill -

New Jersey media reported last week that leading environmental groups backed transportation reform advocates in criticizing the current version of the State Senate Transportation Trust Fund renewal bill. The Senate Transportation Committee convened a public hearing on Tuesday afternoon on the section of the bill that constitutionally dedicates a further portion of the state's sales tax on petroleum and new cars to the Trust Fund.

At a press conference that morning, and in testimony at the public hearing, representatives from the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, the Association of NJ Environmental Commissions and the NJ Environmental Lobby made it clear they would oppose any bill that turns over a \$1 billion blank check to the NJDOT. The NJ Environmental Federation, NJPIRG, Clean Ocean Action, Environmental Defense and the American Lung Association also supported the message urging Senators to **hold out for amendments** that would offer clear transportation **spending guidelines**. "DOT has consistently put expensive and environmentally destructive highway projects **before road repair**," explained Janine Bauer, Tri-State Transportation Campaign director.

- State Planning Commission's Two Cents-

The NJ State Planning Commission — the board responsible for oversight of the State Plan — recently passed a motion criticizing the absence of references to the State Plan in the Senate's Trust Fund bill.

The Commission wrote to State Senators, arguing "inclusion of language requiring coordination between transportation investments and the State Plan is critical to maintaining and enhancing the quality of life in NJ."

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

LI Enviro Coalition: Fresh Look at DOT Plan

On Thursday, Long Island environmental and civic organizations issued a statement urging the New York State Dept. of Transportation to re-think its "Long Island Transportation Plan 2000 (LITP)." The plan is DOT's 20-year vision for the Island, and green and civic leaders are concerned that it **heralds big increases in traffic, pollution and sprawl** development.

According to a recent LITP progress update, all of the capital construction scenarios envision a **major highway construction program**. This includes DOT's "mass transit" alternative, which is little more than a network of new HOV lanes plus "selected roadway widenings." (see *MTR #270*)

"A 20-year Long Island transportation strategy is the perfect opportunity to finally break down the barrier between DOT highway work and town planning that fosters car dependent development. But it looks like we're on our way to more of the same — more paving, more cars, more sprawl, more gridlock and more pollution," said Richard Amper, Long Island Pine Barrens Society president.

Highways that have been mentioned as strong candidates for widening in various LITP documents include the Northern State Parkway, Southern State Parkway, the Meadowbrook State Parkway, Route 110, Sagtikos Parkway, the Babylon-Farmingdale Road and Sunrise Highway in Brookhaven. The DOT 5-year program beginning this year already calls for widening NY Routes 347, 25 and 112 in Brookhaven.

The organizations urged DOT to revisit the study with an emphasis on reducing traffic, not accommodating its growth. They called especially for more emphasis on **land use policies** to change car-dependent development patterns. "If people didn't have to drive from store to store for basic errands, it would significantly reduce traffic congestion," said Sustainable Long Island program manager Eric Alexander.

"All over the Island, there is a lot **more interest in reducing traffic impacts** on communities and slowing the traffic that comes through neighborhoods than there is in more pavement," said Neal Lewis, executive director of the Long Island Neighborhood Network. "As it looks now, the LITP study is more of a blueprint for future battles between communities and DOT than a consensus about the future of transportation."

"'Traffic calming' is definitely the watchword in our communities," said Connie Kepert, president of Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Organization. "People want transportation improvements that promote liveable neighborhoods. But it looks like the DOT sees our **Main Streets as future four- and five-lane highways**."

Organizations issuing the statement were the Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Organization, Group for the South Fork, Long Island Neighborhood Network, Long Island Pine Barrens Society, L.I. Progressive Coalition, Sustainable Long Island and the Tri-State Campaign.

Feds Finish NY Planning Review

The Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration issued their triennial review of the downstate New York metropolitan transportation planning process last week. The review is mandated by law and evaluates the **performance of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council** (NYMTC), the “metropolitan planning organization” comprising major transportation departments and the forum for allocating federal transportation funds to projects and agencies in the lower Hudson Valley, NYC and Long Island.

The review is the topic of a public meeting on **June 13** in lower Manhattan (see calendar, next page).

As they did in 1996, the federal agencies have **conditionally re-certified NYMTC**, and will revisit their review in a year to evaluate progress in specific areas.

Technical problems the feds want addressed promptly are inadequate staffing and deficiencies in the transportation demand computer model NYMTC uses for a variety of purposes, including analysis of the transportation sector’s contribution to regional air pollution.

Additionally, the report calls for progress within one year in seven areas:

- Prioritizing projects and strategies in the regional long-range transportation plan.
- Resolving a dispute between NYC Transit and other agencies in NYC over appropriate use of federal Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality funds.
- Better work on transportation justice issues.
- A more pro-active approach to freight problems.
- More attention to pedestrian and bicyclist safety.
- More discussion and debate at NYMTC meetings.
- Forming an advisory committee, evaluating options for better participation by local elected officials and reviewing the efficacy of NYMTC’s unanimous vote rule.

The 80-page federal report contains a wealth of detailed recommendations and valuable insight into topics from freight planning to public involvement. We will try to look at these in more detail in future issues.

The 1996 federal review of NYMTC was broadly critical of the regional planning process, but only required action on a few technical issues. **Little or no institutional change** has been seen in the interim. Thus, it remains unclear whether the federal agencies will try to **exact any real progress** in the areas outlined above or not. History suggests that the NYMTC member agencies will not make such changes without external pressure. Six members of the U.S. House of Representatives from NYC recently wrote to U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater asking that U.S. DOT require changes at NYMTC like those listed above (*MTR #268*).

The Tri-State Campaign and its member organizations have been critical of the NYMTC planning process, contending that it is primarily an exercise in the paperwork needed to obtain federal funds, and urging changes like those backed by the House members.

Transportation and the NJ Primary

This Tuesday, June 6th, New Jersey voters will choose their parties’ nominations for the U.S. House and the Senate seat vacated by Senator Frank Lautenberg. Though largely ignored in newspapers and the candidates themselves, the vote’s implications for state, regional, and Federal transportation policy is great. Maintaining the influence of New Jersey’s delegation on the Senate **Environment and Public Works Committee** and the House **Transportation and Infrastructure Committee** will be especially important in coming years as TEA-21 expires and transit construction projects require big cash infusions.

Most of NJ’s House Transportation Committee members are running in “safe” districts. However, upsets could occur in the future if Rep. **Bill Pascrell**, a leader in finding Federal funds for transit projects, chooses to run for governor next year, or if Representative Bob Franks, now the head of the House rail subcommittee, moves to the Senate. But on the Senate EPW Committee, NJ faces a great loss, with candidates showing varied approaches to and interest in transportation.

Among Democratic Senate candidates, **Jim Florio** has a proven transportation and environmental record, along with plenty of political skills, having won significant battles as the congressman from Camden County. Early on in his primary campaign, he clearly indicated to Senator Dick Gephardt his desire to serve on the EPW committee. **Jon Corzine** is harder to read. He has said little to indicate his positions on the environment and transportation and it is unclear whether his investment business background would lead him to pursue different committee assignments or interests.

For Republicans, Rep. **Bob Franks** has focused attention on the state’s need for more mass transit capacity into Manhattan. He has also managed to gain some measure of respect for the Raritan Valley RR line, which runs through his district. State Senator **Bill Gormley** is known as “Senator Sprawl” in Trenton for his determination to fight off even minor references to the State Plan in any bill or regulation, as well as his protection of development interests in his south Jersey turf, including the \$330 million Atlantic City tunnel. Libertarian **Murray Sabrin** would pursue a “motorists’ rights” agenda and has made extreme statements against the new auto emissions test. Underdog Essex County Executive **Jim Treffinger** has shown leadership in his county’s involvement with the NJTPA and recently pushed to designate an area close to the right-of-way of the controversial and environmentally destructive Eisenhower Parkway extension as a national wildlife refuge.

No matter who wins, Senator **Frank Lautenberg’s** transportation knowledge, budgetary know-how and mass transit/clean air focus will be hard to replace. What NJ will need from its Senators is able political presence on the EPW Committee, one able to stave off the raids on Federal transportation funding that other states will undoubtedly mount.

