

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 274

June 19, 2000

NEWS

NJ TTF: Rep. Leaders Pull AntiSprawl Ruse

Before the Assembly Transportation Committee reviewed three Transportation Trust Fund renewal bills last Thursday, Chair Alex DeCroce (R-Morris) told those gathered to testify that **Assembly and Senate leaders were crafting a compromise bill** for a Committee vote for today. Later, Assembly Speaker Jack Collins and Senate President Donald DiFrancesco announced their agreement on the funding structure and other key components of the bill, including a provision touted as one that would "restrict the DOT's ability to contribute to sprawl." But after reviewing the measure in depth, **the state environmental coalition cried foul.**

On its face, the new bill language would require all new state highways to be authorized by the legislature, adding a new requirement. However, a clause exempts projects authorized by a section of existing law (Title 27, chapter 6) first drafted in 1927, **providing a loophole for a list of more than 50 new highway projects**, including Route 55 to the Cape May Court House and the Route 15 Freeway extension in Sussex County, both through rural areas of the state. This escape hatch, plus the fact that the "requirement" would not apply to extensions or bypasses of existing state highways, led outraged environmental advocates to call the so-called anti-sprawl measure a pure piece of deception. At this writing, we understand the Legislature is rethinking its options on this provision.

-Enviros Out In Force For Fix-It-First-

The Transportation Committee hearing was the first stop for the 200 people wearing day-glo "anti-sprawl" and "fix-it-first" stickers who descended on the State House for the first, semi-annual New Jersey Environmental Lobby Day. Participating organizations, including the NJ chapter of the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, the American Littoral Society, NJ PIRG Citizens Lobby, and the NJ Environmental Federation, have set amending the TTF renewal bill as a top priority.

At the hearing, Janine Bauer, of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, testified that **DOT will never meet its stated goals** unless the specific 'fix-it-first' benchmarks in the Assemblyman Doria's bill are incorporated into the final version (MTR #272). Explained Marie Curtis of the NJ Environmental Lobby, "too often, special projects like the Atlantic City tunnel have gotten funding at the expense of maintaining the roads and bridges used by many." (see next article). The Doria provision would direct the DOT to work to repair half

the state's aging roads and bridges over the next 5 years.

Environmentalists also requested that the final bill direct NJTransit to reduce the "ultra-fine" particulate emissions from its transit buses and that **the task force the bill would create study how to cap 'vehicle trips', not 'traffic'**, at 1999 peak rush hour levels. Added highway lanes may smooth traffic flow, but also encourage more vehicle trips. Congestion levels and delays then eventually increase.

In the agreement announcement, Senator DiFrancesco said the new bill would "put the 'trust' back in Trust Fund." But its lack of spending directives for transportation agencies does not inspire trust among transportation reformers. DiFrancesco told the *Trenton Times* he opposed specific language because the DOT should be able to set its own priorities, despite the fact that the bridge and road repair goals favored by reformers were taken straight from DOT priority setting documents.

EPA Unearths More AC Tunnel Violations

Last week the EPA officially warned the South Jersey Transportation Authority that it is investigating **17 items of "potential non-compliance"** with permits for the Atlantic City Tunnel and connector. The authority will own the \$330 million project, jointly funded by Mirage Resorts, the SJTA, and the state, \$95 million of it from the Transportation Trust Fund.

The activities suspected by the EPA include improper discharge of surface or ground water from the site into the Penrose Canal and discoloration of the banks of the canal, according to the *Press of Atlantic City*. Over 5 million gallons of water must be pumped out of the Tunnel every day. The EPA has set 30 days for the project contractor to submit a compliance report before the agency will consider penalties or legal action.

This action marks **the third time in just over six months** that the project has run afoul of environmental regulations. In early May, the SJTA settled a suit with the Army Corps of Engineers, paying a fine of \$225,000 for violation of wetlands filling permits (MTR #269). In December of 1999 the NJ DEP cited contractors for failing to perform a daily air quality test. When permit applications were considered in 1998-99, environmentalists from around the state testified that the tunnel/connector project would cause unavoidable harm to water quality and surrounding wetlands.

The Tunnel and expressway extension are intended to link the ACE and the Marina district where Mirage Resorts plans a billion-dollar casino development.

FTA, NYC Reps on East Side Access: Good Project, Bad Financing

At a hearing held this week for its draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), MTA's East Side Access project, the proposal to bring Long Island Railroad into Grand Central Terminal, drew wide-spread praise. However, the majority of speakers (including RPA, the Straphangers Campaign, Representative Carolyn Maloney and Senator Thomas Duane) raised deep concerns that the project would exacerbate already overcrowded conditions on the Lexington Avenue IRT. On this basis, they argued that without the **simultaneous construction of the 2nd Avenue Subway**, East-side Access could impede rather than improve mobility in the City.

The LIRR-GCT proposal also gained ground with the FTA. The **project was given a "recommended" rating** in the recently released Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) fiscal year 2001 "New Starts" report. The rating is a step up from the "not recommended" of last year (MTR #219), but is not the sought "highly recommended". The new status makes the project eligible, but does not guarantee, significant federal funding. MTA is asking for half the project's cost or \$2.175 billion, but was allocated just \$10 million for design work. The drag on the over-all FTA score came from two "medium" ratings for 'project justification' and 'finance'.

Good government groups, straphanger advocates, and editorial boards alike have denounced the MTA's approved 2000-2004 capital plan funding scheme as **too reliant on debt** and likely to draw a massive fare increase (MTR #264-6). The plan's shaky financing also threatens to undermine the 2nd Ave. subway project, dooming NYC East-side riders to an intolerable crush.

- DEIS Offers No Surprises-

The DEIS compares four alternatives – no build, Transportation Systems Management, and two tunnels. The tunnel options differ primarily in depth. The **deeper option has several advantages** over the shallower one and, as expected, was the preferred alternative (MTR #255). The deeper tunnel will not require the underpinning of buildings on Park Avenue or the Park Avenue tunnel through which Metro-North trains pass. Consequently, MNRR should not experience track outages and the cost of the project will be \$400 million less than under the shallow tunnel scenario.

According to the DEIS, the new tunnel will allow the LIRR to run 24 more trains per hour into GCT during the peak period, plus the present service of 37 trains per hour to Penn Station. By 2010, 62,000 people will travel to GCT during the 4-hour weekday AM peak, while 45,700 fewer will ride to Penn Station than do today. Thus, the new tunnel is expected to create **a net gain of 16,300 transit riders**, reducing total daily vehicle miles traveled by about 342,000. Raising the possibility of even greater increases in regional service and ridership, Metro-North Railroad is exploring sending trains into some of the space freed up at Penn Station.

The DEIS also states that a station will be built at

Queens Blvd. and Skillman Ave., which may be used in the future as a connection between Amtrak, NJ Transit and the LIRR. This aspect of the proposal won support from the SE Queens' Greater Jamaica Development Corps. as a way to expand the area's economic base.

Aside from riders facing crushing conditions on the subways, the New York & Atlantic railroad seems to face the greatest inconvenience from the preferred plan. NY&A operations will be displaced from Sunnyside Yards by LIRR's additional cars. According to the DEIS, NY&A will move freight facilities from Sunnyside to Blissville and either Maspeth or Fresh Pond.

Green: More Service, Best Subway Safety Plan



At a press conference last weekend, NYC Public Advocate Mark Green urged NYC Transit to **add more rush hour subway service**.

Green linked concern over

recent subway platform pushing incidents to subway system overcrowding. Investigation by Green found:

- MTA subway car purchase plans will offer minimal service increases between today and 2005.
- The worst rush hour train is the G, which only runs once every 11 minutes.
- Critical subway lines like the 2, 3, D, N, R and others run only every 6-10 minutes at rush hour.

Green called on NYC Transit to add rush hour service on many lines, and on the MTA **to increase subway car purchases**, delay retiring cars slated for the scrapheap and accelerate work on the 2nd Avenue subway.

Green said other world-cities like Tokyo, London, Paris, Moscow and Mexico run rush-hour trains on much tighter headways than New York.

NYMTC Recertification: Feds Wear Kid Gloves

This week, FTA and FHWA held a hearing on their "conditional re-certification" of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council. Although their report made 41 recommendations, the MPO **need only follow two in order to lift its conditional status**: inadequate staffing and deficiencies in the computer modeling of transportation demand (MTR# 272).

Those who attended the hearing, including a representative from Congressman Nadler's office, called the recommendations on target, but asked federal agencies to make more of them conditions for re-certification. The agencies responded that federal statute doesn't allow them to make the other 39 suggestions requirements.

Speakers also pointed out that the feds never limited or rescinded NYMTC's certification after the 1996 review despite the fact that NYMTC, to this date, **has not corrected the technical deficiencies** that led to the "conditional" status. The federal representative replied that if in one year the technical deficiencies aren't corrected, the MPO would face a 'limited certification'.

NY DOT/NYMTC Link Land Use /Transportation - Hudson Valley Studies Underway -

Four collaborative projects seeking to join land use and transportation policy are underway in the Hudson Valley. The projects are a NY Metropolitan Transportation Council initiative that **have brought municipal, county and NY State DOT officials together**. According to NYMTC, input from local participants will be organized into future land use and transportation scenarios.

The scenarios will be tested in the U.S. EPA's "Smart Growth Index Model." The model is a new tool that will enable transportation **computer models to account for development and land use densities** in estimating traffic and emission impacts, and predict land-related outcomes like valuation. The Hudson Valley studies are among the model's first tests. The results of the modeling will then be further evaluated by the study participants.

The studies aim to identify preferred scenarios that will indicate directions for zoning changes, inter-municipal agreements and transportation projects that will support the desired land use plan.

The four corridors under study are:

- Rte 9, Town of Phillipsburg in Putnam County.
- Rte 303, Towns of Orangeburg and Clarkstown in Rockland County (see www.route303.net)
- Rtes 35 and 202 City of Peekskill and Towns of Cortlandt and Yorktown in Westchester (study also encompasses Route 6 and the Bear Mtn Parkway)
- Rtes 9A and 119, Village of Elmsford, Towns of Greenburgh and Mount Pleasant in Westchester.

NYMTC reports strong support and participation in the studies by local officials.

Opponents Dominate New Haven Mall Hearing - Warn of Traffic Back-ups, Health Risks -

On Monday, June 5th, almost 300 people crowded into the first of two public hearings to discuss a proposal for a 1.2 million sq. ft., \$500 million luxury mall near the intersection of I-95 and I-91 in New Haven. Thirty speakers out of fifty argued against the Galleria Mall, citing increased traffic, particularly the environmental and public health costs of **emissions from idling cars and diesel trucks on the interstates** (MTR #259).

The public hearings were ruled necessary by a Hartford judge in response to a lawsuit brought against the State of Connecticut by coalition of local businesses and citizens. The suit charged that similar complaints aired at a public hearing in 1999 had not been sufficiently addressed in a study commissioned by the Department of Economic and Community Development which found that the addition of the mall would have "no significant impact" (FONSI).

The DECD study reports that the Galleria Mall is likely to draw 2,261 vehicle trips per hour at peak traffic hours. The majority of these added trips would be expected to pass through the I-91/ I-95 inter-change. But the study does not consider the congestion and air



New Funds for Traffic Calming on Long Island

In the first week of June, NY State DOT LI officials unveiled a new local traffic calming grant program. At workshops for municipal governments, NY DOT said they would make **\$2.7 million in federal "hazard elimination" funds available** to municipalities that submit good proposals for traffic calming projects.

The workshops were well-attended, with representatives of roughly 20 villages and six towns participating. Most of the municipalities appeared to have concrete project pedestrian safety ideas already in mind.

Project eligibility is oriented much more toward traffic calming capital projects than to public education efforts designed to reduce pedestrian injuries and fatalities.



DOT said it would likely issue a **request for expressions of interest in September or October**, with a 2-3 month deadline for submission of municipal proposals. Interested local governments should contact David Glass at NYS DOT, 631-952-6128. The Tri-State Campaign will assist civic groups who would like to contact their municipal leaders about participating in the program. Call 516-719-9330 or 212-268-7474.

In recent "LITP 2000" study meetings (MTR #273), DOT officials said a Nassau-Suffolk bike-pedestrian master plan would begin in the next year.

quality effects of this added traffic on the inter-states, concerning itself only with the local roads adjacent to the project area.

Critics point out that the south-bound inter-change already sees large-scale back-ups. Its one lane currently handles 1,000 more vehicles per hour than the 2,000 it was designed to allow. Adding possibly another 1,000 vehicles in 2001 - the mall's projected opening date - would only **exacerbate congestion levels** that won't improve until planned corrective construction is completed in 2012.

Nancy Alderman of the group, Environment and Human Health, Inc., told the Campaign that more hours of idling trucks could **substantially increase the amount of diesel particulates in the air** for New Haven neighborhoods near the inter-change, leading to increased risks for respiratory diseases and lung cancer. She also warned that the mall is "not just a local problem, but is going to be New England's problem if it happens", threatening to delay goods delivery via truck from Maine to Washington DC.

Mall opponents are in for a difficult fight as both Governor Rowland and Mayor John DeStefano of New Haven have backed the mall, earmarking \$32 million and \$25 million in subsidies for it respectively. The state Office of Policy and Management must approve the DECD's findings in order to release an additional \$28 million in state financing aid granted to the developer by the state legislature. The second public hearing is scheduled for July 6th.

First Tickets Issued Under NJ Truck Ban

After two weeks of enforcing the ban of 102"-wide, through-traveling, out-of-state bound trucks from local New Jersey roads, state troopers operating in Mercer, Hunterdon, and Somerset Counties **passed out 67 tickets** carrying fines of \$400 each, reported the *Trenton Times* on June 8th. State police began implementing the ban on May 20th, just days after a *Times* article revealed that no violators had been charged since the New Jersey legislature added monetary penalties to the crime last January (MTR #270, 253).

John Hagerty, spokesperson for the state police, told the *Times*, that interstate truckers were ticketed on routes 29, 31, 206, and 202. Prior to the ban, these roads were **commonly used by south-bound truckers** who wanted to avoid paying tolls on the NJ Turnpike as a conduit between I-287/78 and interstates near and Philadelphia. Two other units of troopers bird-dog trucks in the rest of the state, but no information was made available on their activities. Hagerty told the *Times* that numbers on all units would from then on be available to the public every two weeks.

NJ DOT informed the Campaign in mid-December that, based on preliminary data, Route 31 in Hunterdon County had experienced a roughly 5% drop in total truck traffic over the then almost six months of the ban. Prior to the ban, DOT estimated that 500 out of the 2,000 trucks using Route 31 every day were through-traveling trucks that did not stop for pick-up or delivery in NJ. Of these, roughly half or 12.5% of all trucks were over 102"wide. If consistent and vigilant, ticketing and increasingly large fines could deter the 140 trucks (7%) that are likely to still be traveling this sample road.

Companion bills that would extend the ban to include 96" vehicles **still await committee hearings**, an opportunity that is becoming increasingly unlikely as the legislative session nears close. This legislation, sponsored by State Senator Schluter (S49) and Assemblypersons Lance and Myers (A2384) respectively, would have an even greater impact and should be reintroduced and supported next session.

NJ Route 92

EIS Scoping Comment Period Extended
To July 7th

Send Written Comments to
Regulatory Branch
US Army Corps of Engineers
Room 1937, 26 Federal Plaza
New York, NY 10278-0090

Extended calendar listings at
www.tstc.org

CALENDAR

June 19, 4:30pm MTA 2000-2001 federal aid public hearing, 347 Madison Ave, Manhattan, 5th floor. 212-878-7483.

June 20, 8am-3pm "Future of Aviation in the NY/NJ Metro Region." NYU Center for Transp. Policy and Management. NYU Bobst Library. \$ 212-998-7545.

June 20, 1 pm "What's changed in the 30 Years since 2nd Ave. subway tunnels were dug?" Frank McArdle, Gen'l Contractor Assn. Women's City Club, 35 E. 21st St., Manhattan. 212-353-8070.

June 21, 4:30-7:30pm DVRPC Public Meeting on the PA/New Jersey Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), Upper Moreland Township Building, 117 Park Ave., Willow Grove, PA, ?, 215 238-2875

June 22, 7:45 am Regional Planning Partnership breakfast: "Infrastructure — Facts & Choices" Louis Gambaccini and others. Bloustein School, New Brunswick. \$, 609-452-1717.

June 22, 1pm NYC Transit Riders Council, monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 5th Fl. Manhattan, ?, 212-878-7087

June 26-27 "Rail is Real" conference, Washington, D.C. National Corridors Initiative. w/ Governor Tommy Thompson (Amtrak board chair), APTA pres. Bill Millar. www.nationalcorridors.org 617-269-5478

June 26-27, 7:30am-5:00pm "Moving People, Goods, and Information in the 21st Century. NY Academy of Sciences Conference. MetroTech Center, Brooklyn \$ 212-838-0230, conference@nyas.org, www.nyas.org

June 27, 7:30-9:30pm Mid-Hudson South Region Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan Public Meeting, Town of Orangetown Planning Board meeting Room, 21 Greenbush Rd., Orangeburg, NY, ?, 914-285-5180 or www.bikemap.com

June 27, 6-9pm Auto-Free NY Walking Tour, "Hudson Bergen Light Rail Transit Line", meet Exchange Place LRT station, Jersey City, ?, call George Haikalis, 212-475-3394

July 12, 10am NJ Transit Board Meeting, One Penn Plaza, Newark, ?, 973-491-7000

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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