

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NJ Leg Supports Progressive TTF Bill

The NJ Assembly Appropriations Committee amended, then released, the Transportation Trust Fund reauthorization bills and resolutions dedicating more existing sales and gas taxes for the TTF. **Chairman Richard Bagger led the cause for a "fix it first" amendment** that will direct a large chunk of the Fund over the next five years to repairing existing roads and bridges. But the measure was unanimously supported by Democrats and Republicans alike, with Transportation Chairman Alex DeCroce's and Senate President Don DiFrancesco's consent. The Tri-State Transportation Campaign, NJ Environmental Lobby and other anti-sprawl groups championed the "fix it first" agenda as their top priority. Action is expected in the Senate and Assembly next week, without further revision.

What was won:

- Next March 1st, DOT must submit to the Legislature a Capital Investment Strategy with five year goals, targets and performance measures for reducing vehicular and pedestrian crashes, **reducing by half the backlog** of structurally deficient bridge repair projects and pavement deficiencies, and building 1,000 lane miles of bike paths. Each subsequent March 1st DOT must report on its progress toward meeting those goals;
- By 2007, NJTransit may only buy **buses with reduced particulate emissions** or that are powered by fuels other than diesel.
- **No new highways** may be built without a joint resolution of the legislature, but DOT may extend, modify or widen *existing* state highways.
- A year-long Congestion Buster Task Force will study highway congestion and develop a commuter options plan that would result in peak hour vehicle trips being capped at 1999 levels.

The fix-it-first, reduce traffic, anti-sprawl focus of the debate in the Legislature was a heartening sign of real reform to come. Had State Senator William Schluter (R-Hunterdon) not refused to vote to fund the original measure in the Senate, environmental and transportation watchdog groups would have had neither the time nor the leverage to gain the revisions that made this bill a solid first step toward a responsible spending plan. Democratic leaders deserving credit include Sens. Kenny and Sacco (Hudson), Adler (Camden) and minority Leader Dick Codey (Essex). Republicans who didn't support the original lackluster measures included Connors, Singer, Sinagra, and Allen. Many others were influential behind-the-scenes including Hudson Co Executive Bob Janiszewski.

Pressure Up in Albany for South Shore Buses

A bill that would require the MTA to begin running at least four new express bus routes into Manhattan from Staten Island's South Shore neighborhoods by September 30th scored an important victory on June 13th when it **passed the NY state Assembly**, shepherded by departing long-time Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly. Sponsored by State Senator John Marchi, its companion bill in the Senate was approved in early May. The bill will be forwarded soon to Governor Pataki who has thirty days to sign or reject it.

Currently the Island's growing South Shore commuter population is served only by privately operated express buses that many riders and officials have charged shortchange regular customers in favor of more lucrative charter bus business.

In a City Council meeting last week, Staten Island's three Councilmembers Oddo, O'Donovan, and Fiala forcefully urged the Governor to approve the bill. Both Republican Borough President Guy Molinari and NYC Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, plus Island Community Board 3, have recently written letters to the Governor with the same message. In an *Advance* articles reporting recent developments, spokespersons for the Governor have said he has yet to take a hard and fast position.

While counsel to Assemblywoman Connelly remains optimistic, Larry Hanley, president of the SI Transit Workers Union expressed surprise that the bill passed both houses and predicted a veto. As head of the MTA, **the Governor has the power to install new South Shore express routes at any time**, but thus far has chosen not to do so, though local reps have relayed the need for years. In fact, the MTA lobbied against the bill before its Assembly passage.

The South Shore has been left out of **Staten Island's express bus renaissance**. Its approximately 80,000 residents should not be excluded from a service that will only become more central to Island transportation once plans for bus only lanes on Hylan Blvd. and the Staten Island Expressway come to fruition.

MTA Debt Bomb Still Ticking

- Capital Needs Doc Shows \$1.2 billion Gap -

At a 2000-2019 MTA capital needs assessment hearing this week, advocacy groups raised red flags about the agency's short and long-term financial health as well as the meager funding for NYCTransit projects.

The 2000-2004 Capital Program, approved this spring by the New York State legislature, is **\$1.503**

billion or 13% shy of the projected needs for NYCT, whereas it over-funds both the Long Island Railroad and Metro-North Railroad by \$222 million or 6 percent. The MTA did not address how it intends to make up the \$1.28 billion gap in its budget or whether all the pain would fall on New York City services.

The MTA document also fails to explain how it will finance both the year-to-year capital expenses and capacity expansion projects in the two capital programs following the 2000-2004 Program. The assessment predicts \$16.6 billion of capital needs in 2005-2009 period. If additionally, MTA forwards the \$1.2 billion deficit from the current capital plan period, spends \$2.2 billion on East Side Access, \$5 billion on the Second Avenue Subway and another billion for projects such as LaGuardia Airport Access, the 2005-2009 Capital Program will be \$26 billion. Yet according to analysis by the Regional Plan Association, by that time, MTA will have already **bonded against all of its existing resources** to finance the current capital program with potentially dire consequences – an incomplete LIRR tunnel to GCT and no Second Avenue Subway.

The capital needs assessment falls short on at least three goals of the Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA) coalition, a group which includes business interests, unions and advocacy organizations. The document does not describe the number of CNG bus depots that NYCT intends to build. It calls for the purchase of 5,600 buses while ESTA suggested 7,500 buses. It also recommends obtaining 1,130 subway cars instead of the 1,587 cars that would be needed in order to attain **4-minute rush-hour headways** or the no-standing during off-peak hour, also ESTA priorities.

Given the hemorrhaging of state and local funds from the last Capital Program, much of **the blame must be laid at the feet of the legislature**. Funding from New York State dropped from 19% in the first two MTA capital programs to 9% in this one. State and City officials must take the lead in providing funds as well as lists of projects so that subway commuter-rail and bus riders can look forward to reliable service without huge fare increases.

TZ II Rail Scrutinized At Citizen Forum

At a forum held in Nyack this week, Rockland and Westchester County residents and elected officials again expressed doubt that a proposal by the Governor's I-287 Task Force for commuter rail across a wider Tappan Zee Bridge would ever get off the ground.

The panel of speakers convened by Concerned Citizens for Responsible Development included Jeff Zupan of the Regional Plan Association and Town Supervisor Thom Kliener with State Assemblyman Alex Gromack, State Senator Thomas Morahan, Rockland County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef, Greenburgh supervisor Paul Feiner, and representatives of Congressman Ben Gilman and Assemblyman Sam Coleman attending.

Advocates and residents agreed that the **federal dollars needed** for the Stewart to Port Chester railway would be unlikely to materialize. Competition is fierce nation-wide for Federal Transit Authority TEA-21 'New Starts' money, for which cost-effectiveness and the existence of local matching funds are primary criteria.

Although no ridership figures are provided for the current proposal, a 1999 analysis of a similar alignment for MNRR projected a daily ridership of roughly 13,200 people. At a cost of \$3 billion, the TZ Rail is estimated to be five times more expensive per rider than the most promising transit alternative, restoring passenger service to the West Shore Line (see chart). The project would **cost over six times more per rider than NJ Transit's Hudson-Bergen Light Rail** that successfully won FTA funds for 65% of the cost of its first operating segment. New Jersey did not even submit an application for Federal money for the recently begun Camden-Trenton Light Rail, a project still less than 2/3 the cost per rider projected for the TZ rail line.

MTA matching funds for the rail line also seem unlikely given the agency's current commitment to spending at least \$10 billion over the next fifteen years on the LIRR-Grand Central Eastside Access and the 2nd Ave. Subway and the over-all uncertain nature of its funding base (see previous article).

Participants in the forum also discussed van-pools

and variable pricing in the corridor, methods to relieve congestion that the Thruway Authority and the MTA, participants in the I-287 Task Force study, have been slow to initiate. **Distrust of these agencies** has led many to request an independent analysis of the bridge/commuter rail proposal. Representative Gilman's spokesperson at the forum announced that the Congressman has asked the Army Corps of Engineers to analyze the need to repair or replace the TZ Bridge. An equally important study of Stewart to Port Chester commuter rail feasibility and avenues for funding in comparison with transit alternatives, particularly the West Shore Rail Line, should also be initiated.

PROJECT NAME	PROJECTED COST (millions)	% FUNDED BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	PROJECTED DAILY RIDERSHIP	COST PER RIDER
Stewart to Port Chester (TZ II) Commuter Rail	\$3,000	?	13,230*	\$226,757
NJ Camden to Trenton Light Rail	\$603**	0	4,150**	\$145,312
NJ Hudson Bergen Light Rail/ MOS 1	(actual) \$1,113***	65%***	31,300	\$35,559
West Shore Commuter Rail	\$643**	?	15,300**	\$42,026

*Feasibility, Benefit Cost Study of Trans-Hudson, Cross Westchester and Stewart Airport Rail Links, MNRR 2/99. **NJ Transit *** New Starts Funding Report FY01

Solving Co-Op City Traffic Woes: Highway Expansion or Transport Alternatives in the Bronx?

Originally planned solely around the automobile, Co-Op City is a community now strangled by congestion. Traveling by car, the 27,000 residents of the high-rise complex must use one of two local streets, or the Hutchinson River Parkway and New England Thruway ramps to access the rest of the Bronx. As a consequence, traffic on the two highways and in the complex has become **gridlocked** around surrounding on-off ramps.

The New York State DOT has been designated the lead agency in solving this problem. Two recent public meetings suggest that their strategy will centrally rely on **accommodating increased traffic** rather than ameliorating land use problems and increasing transit and pedestrian alternatives to reduce car trips.

- Not So Stealth Expansion On the Hutch -

In early May, NYS DOT unveiled its preferred alternative for the proposal to reconstruct the Hutchinson River Parkway between its interchange with the Bruckner Expressway and the city line. Their proposal includes construction of a well thought-out Class 1 bicycle and pedestrian path from Lafayette Ave. to Westchester County. However, its centerpiece is an **added car lane** for over 80% of the highway in each direction.

Within the project area, only two stretches, one between East Tremont Avenue and Wilkinson Avenue, the other between the Einstein Loop and City Island Road, escapes an additional entrance, exit or auxiliary lane. The project would take place within the existing right-of-way, but would also eliminate much of the natural area on either side of the parkway, technically a city park.

This plan must go through an environmental review process due to be completed by fall 2001.

- DOT Warned Against Auto Only Mall -

An advisory committee meeting this week launched the NYS DOT study of the New England Thruway at Co-Op City. Funded by an \$800,000 grant secured by State Assemblyman Stephen Kaufman, the study is charged with identifying a host of short-term and long-term solutions to traffic in Co-Op City. The work, expected to be completed within the next five months, will "supplement" the MIS on the Cross-Bronx and Major Deegan Expressways. (Both the Cross-Bronx and NE Thruway are part of I-95.)

At the hearing, a DOT project manager explained that \$1 million secured by Congressman Eliot Engel in TEA-21 was available to implement short-term suggestions like adjusting stoplight timing and re-striping streets. He went on to say that funds for longer term projects - projected to be additional on/off ramps or a more dramatic widening the Thruway - might be found by the agency. But a Metropolitan Transit Authority representative promoted a different tact.

The MTA rep argued that the main cause of traffic back-ups on the highways around Co-Op City is the almost complete **auto-dependence** of the 800,000 square foot Bay Plaza Shopping Center within the complex, built in the 1990's. The developer **did not provide**

sidewalks in the shopping center, forcing residents to cross busy streets and parking lots, and **refused to let NYCTransit buses stop** there until JC Penny - one of the anchor stores - made it a provision of their lease. Other Co-Op City public transit, such as New York Bus express buses, has not been allowed in the center at all.

Vital and growing commercial districts such as 6th Avenue in Chelsea show the potential for highly successful transit-based shopping where frequent, reliable service is available. As the Co-op city traffic grid-lock is a result of poor commercial and transit planning, the last agency that should be charged with finding a solution is one with highway widening on the brain.

Clearing the Air

As summer 2000 proceeds, sunlight will continue to react with car and truck emissions to create unsafe levels of smog around the country. A national report by the Clean Air Network released last week shows over **half of all monitored counties** nation-wide above the legal limit for ozone exposure, with New Jersey and Connecticut in the designated "dirty dozen" states where over 75% of its counties are in violation of ozone health standards. A flurry of new rules and incentive programs will partially address the pollution crisis.

- CA Leads With Alternative Fuel Regs -

Last week, the South Coast Air Quality Management District Board in California unanimously adopted new rules that would force the use of **cleaner-burning alternative fuels** in public vehicles in the Los Angeles Metropolitan area. This rule is distinct from and even stricter than the measure passed by the California Air Resources Board in late February which gives agencies ten years to comply with tighter emissions standards (MTR #258).

The air quality board's action immediately bans the purchase of diesel buses by transit operators in Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties that operate more than 100 buses. **They will be allowed to purchase buses that run on natural gas, methanol, electricity or fuel cells** instead. Operators with 15 to 99 buses were given until July 1, 2001, before being required to buy alternative fuel vehicles. The lone exception is for articulated buses, which can still be diesel powered. Low sulfur diesel is currently being considered by the Board and will be permitted if it can be proven to be as clean as the other fuels.

The air quality district also required public and private refuse haulers operating more than 50 garbage trucks buy alternative fuel vehicles when they add or replace vehicles in their fleets. A third rule mandates that new cars, light and medium duty trucks added to government fleets of 15 or more vehicles to meet new state low-emission standards.

The mandate emerges from the AQMD's conclusion last year that diesel emissions are responsible for most of the cancer risk in the region, which includes River-

side, San Bernardino and Orange counties. The *Sacramento Bee* reported that urban areas hard hit by ozone such as Houston and Dallas are looking to the California board's measure as a model for similar measures.

- Bronx Conference Spotlights Clean Fuels -

Complementing the regulatory approach to reducing emissions, a forum sponsored by community and economic development groups in the Bronx on June 15th brought over 30 fleet operators together to hear about fuels and vehicles that can help reduce emissions. The New York City DOT and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority gave presentations on the **myriad tax credits and grants** that are available to offset any capital costs in converting fleets to cleaner fuel. Fuel providers discussed designs and operations for on and off-site fuel stations and a professor from Bronx Community College described their unique CNG training program.

Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer used his

Cyclists Bus It With New NJ Transit Program

Two-cycle **bike racks** are now in place on all NJ Transit urban and suburban transit buses in southern New Jersey. The **262 buses** involved represent a little over 20% of the agency's total transit bus fleet. The larger "Cruiser" buses that make up roughly 45% of the total fleet already offer space for bike storage in the under-floor carrying bay.

Governor Christie Whitman inaugurated NJ Transit's pilot "Rack & Roll" program on Thursday with a bus to bike ride down the Burlington City Promenade Trail. In 1998, the Governor pledged to build 2,000 bike over the following twelve years. She announced at last week's event that 500 miles should be completed by the end of her tenure in 2001, while 300 more by then will be in the works. The Legislature also included a commitment to building 1,000 miles of bicycle lanes over the upcoming five years as a DOT directive in the TTF renewal bill (see front page).

An NJ Transit spokesperson told the Campaign that the southern-based pilot program would run until September at which time the agency will review its success. If the **needed capital funding** is made available, NJ Transit will put racks on all transit buses across the state. According to NJT, more than 1,000 bus riders have already used the bicycle racks which were tested this Spring along selected routes in the Delaware Valley with no accidents or negative reports (MTR #261). Bicycle advocates and users are encouraged to send comments about the program.

Pilot program routes include Rt. 409 between Trenton and Philadelphia, Rt. 600 between Trenton and Plainsboro, and Rt. 603 between the Mercer and Quaker Bridge Malls in Mercer County.

keynote address at the event to delineate a ten-point plan to **reduce emissions in the city**. Included in his plan are mandates to convert all school buses, MTA buses, and franchise buses, medallion taxis, paratransit vehicles, and other city fleets to clean fuels. These steps would also encourage alternative fuel equipment manufacturers to develop new technologies in one of the city's economic development zones.

- EPA Encouraged on Cleaner Diesel Push -

Meanwhile, NYC hosted the first of five nationwide hearings on the U.S. EPA proposed rule to slash the sulfur content in diesel fuel from 500 parts per million to 15 ppm last week. Speakers from elected officials' offices including NY State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, Representative Jerrold Nadler, NYC Comptroller Alan Hevesi, agency representatives from around the country, and transportation, environmental and community groups swamped the EPA with **over ten hours of overwhelmingly supportive testimony**.

CALENDAR

June 26-27 "Rail is Real" conference, Washington, D.C. National Corridors Initiative. w/ Governor Tommy Thompson, 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 Rm. 21 Greenbush Rd., Orangeburg, NY, ? call Arlene Miller, 914-364-3448, 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

July 25, 6-9pm Auto-Free NY Walking Tour, "Harlem Transport Issues", Meet SE corner of 125th St. and Lexington Ave.

August 22, 6-9pm Auto-Free NY Walking Tour, "42nd St. Light Rail & Pedestrian Boulevard", Meet Grand Central upper level info booth. ?, call George Haikalis, 212-475-3394

Extended calendar listings at

www.tstc.org

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