

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NJ Legislature Approves Landmark "Fix-it-First" Transportation Bill

Last Thursday, both houses of the New Jersey legislature approved the **Transportation Trust Fund** renewal bill released by the Assembly Appropriations Committee the week before (*MTR #275*). The bill was later returned to both houses after Governor Whitman issued a conditional veto over provisions that would restrict the use of Trust Fund monies to pay agency operating expenses.

The Senate moved quickly to approve a renewal bill updated with language favored by the Governor that impose a far less stringent cap on the percentage of Fund revenue to be used for employee salaries. The Assembly refused to vote on the new language and will meet again in a special July 13th session to reach an agreement on the contentious issue. The results of this meeting are not expected to affect any other aspect of the bill.

Environmental and transportation reform groups immediately **praised passage of the bill**, saying that it puts New Jersey at the forefront of 21st Century transportation policy.

"No other state has tied transportation spending to 'smart growth' so explicitly," said Janine Bauer, executive director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "The Legislature, Governor Whitman, and New Jersey citizens should be proud of this landmark step."

Debate this year over the re-establishing the fund that provides money for transit and highway capital projects has focused not only on how to raise revenue, but also on how to best direct spending to reduce traffic and pollution, increase transit, and rein in sprawl development.

Yearly MetroCard: Toward Insurable Fares ?

The annual "Premium MetroCard" under development as part of NYC's push to extend transit commuting benefits to city workers may be a strong step toward a **fare card that could be insured against loss or theft**. The card's serial number would presumably be assigned to a specific user, who could have the card neutralized and replaced by the MTA in the case of its loss.

TransitCenter, the group set up by the region's transit agencies to market the TransitChek program, has announced it would offer the annual MetroCard to employees of companies other than city government that are participating in the TransitChek program, which reduces the cost of mass transit commuting.

The MTA has not been responsive to previous suggestions that it allow 30-day MetroCards to be insured against theft or loss.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign, leading a coalition of environmental and cycling advocacy groups, won significant concessions in the bill.

Specific provisions in the legislation require:

- NJ DOT to submit a new capital project spending plan that emphasizes repair of existing roads and bridges, and reduction of traffic congestion.
- That new highway construction projects proceed only with explicit approval by the Legislature.
- NJ DOT to submit a yearly "report card" on progress towards specific mandates to fix one-half of the state's structurally deficient roads and to construct 1,000 mile bikeway network over the next five years.
- NJ Transit to purchase buses with reduced particulate emissions or non-diesel engines after 2007.
- Formation of a yearlong task force to study highway congestion across the state with the aim of producing a plan to cap rush hour car trips at 1999 levels.

All communities in New Jersey are expected to benefit from these components of the bill, with **more money available to restore urban roads and bridges** and further safeguards that protect the character of rural communities from unwanted new highways. Governor Whitman's office has not communicated any problems with the provisions described above.

In poll after poll, New Jersey residents have overwhelmingly supported initiatives to fix roads and bridges, revitalize cities, improve public transit, and stop over-development (see story below). These issues have also been successful ballot items. In 1998, two out of every three voters supported spending \$1 billion to purchase or preserve 1 million acres of open space. In 1999, the same margin of voters approved a transportation bond issue that provided money for road repair, expanded bikeways, mass transit, pedestrian safety projects, and rail freight construction. Thus, observers predict that support for dedicating new sales tax monies to a Trust Fund committed to these achieving these goals will be high in November.

New NJ Poll Results: Consistent Support for Transit, Cities, Open Space

In poll data released last week, New Jersey voters showed concern over the loss of open space and the state of cities, and **interest in pedestrian friendly, transit-**

accessible communities. Commissioned by New Jersey Future, a “smart-growth” research group, and conducted by the firm Beldon, Russonello & Stewart, the poll surveyed 1,021 adult residents during the first two weeks of May. The study found:

- 57% of participants want the state to spend more on public transportation than on building new roads.
- 49% strongly agree that New Jersey should have more communities where people can walk from their homes to stores and offices. 23% somewhat agreed.

Port Authority Retains Cloak

- Region's Least Accountable Transportation Agency -

Despite big headlines about the deal struck between Governors Whitman and Pataki to end the political stand-off that had paralyzed many Port Authority projects, the **Port Authority's budget is not available to the public**, and the Port Authority staff is determined to keep in that way.

Extended efforts by public interest advocates to get a copy of the Port Authority annual budget and multi-year capital plan in late May and June resulted in another Catch-22 scenario like the one Campaign staff members encountered several years ago when trying to learn the contents of a PA board meeting agenda (*MTR #163*).

The PA has released a 20-page summary of its annual budget. But requests for a copy of the full budget were met with an extended series of phone calls routed and re-routed between the PA's media and financial offices, then two weeks of inaction and silence. More calls resulted in the PA's budget office declaring that the **20-page summary is the budget**, at least as far as the public is concerned. They say that there are more details in the PA's 2001-2005 capital plan, but that is a “work in progress” and won't be available for months.

Port Authority staffers did volunteer verbally that the PA's current budget contains **no money for investment in cross-harbor rail car float barges** (contradicting constant protestations by PA leadership) and that there is \$1.5 million for “further study” of the Goethals Twin Bridge. This funding, however, cannot be committed without a PA board resolution.

But try getting that in writing.

Goethals Twin Left Out of Air Plan



The NY Metropolitan Transportation Council has removed the Goethals Bridge twin from its list of “projects of regional significance” that is part of the downstate NY region's air pollution reduction plan.

In its August, 1999 determination of transportation “conformity” with the NY state implementation plan for the Clean Air Act, NYMTC declared it had omitted the Goethals twin because the “project has not been authorized for construction by the PA pending further future review.” The highway bridge project had been included in the official air quality analysis for much of the 1990s.

- 95% said revitalizing cities is an important issue, while 64% would favor or somewhat favor a \$1 billion bond to rehabilitate the state's large and small cities.
- 84% agreed or strongly agreed that New Jersey is quickly running out of open space and that what remains should be protected.
- 78% said controlling sprawl was either very important or somewhat important to them personally.

Harnessing Nassau's Chaotic Development

Despite an extended public discussion about bringing more coherence and transportation efficiency to the jumble of large commercial centers, parks, universities and stadiums becoming known as the Nassau Hub, several large new developments have a strong potential to deepen car-dependence in the area.

A massive Nassau Hub building project — three hotels, three office buildings and over 700 apartment units, with no provision for mass transit access at the 91-acre Roosevelt Raceway site — promises big traffic and congestion increases, and lengthy and contentious environmental reviews. The plan was announced March 14 by Manhattan-based developer Andalex Group.

“We need the housing and I'm glad it's not going to be another mall,” Bertram Donley, president of the Garden City Chamber of Commerce, told the *NY Times*. “But is this a responsible development or not? This is the center of the county's hub of economic activity, and **the town has not yet focused on the transportation problems** in the area...unfortunately, municipalities still have not pulled together a transportation plan to alleviate a tremendous amount of congestion.”

“To me, and to all the community groups, the critical question is traffic congestion,” L.I. Neighborhood Network's Neal Lewis said to the *Times*. “How can we approve a massive development like [the Raceway site proposal] ...when our everyday experience tells us traffic is already out of control?” The LI Neighborhood Network and others have called for a **central Nassau development moratorium** so land use proposals can be brought into sync with a Nassau Hub mass transit “major investment study” that Nassau County planning officials are preparing to launch.

The County is also shopping its **Nassau Coliseum** property to large developers, so the arena can be rebuilt without county funds. The payoff for a developer is use of the Coliseum's massive parking area for other development, with parking concentrated into new structures. Development here could dovetail with pedestrian- and transit-friendly planning, or could produce another bad disconnect like the one shaping up at the Raceway.

The Town of Hempstead has zoning control of both the Raceway and the Coliseum site. Proponents of a “new urbanist” vision of the Nassau Hub hope the transit major investment study, and discussions that may take place before its launch, can bring town officials into a process of defining the future of the Hub area.

PA Takes Step Towards Non-Stop Tolls

In a recent interview, Port Authority Director of Tunnels, Bridges, and Terminals Ken Philmus told the *Bergen Record* his agency plans to **remove tollbooths** from the lower level of the **George Washington Bridge** and its Palisades Parkway plaza in preparation for the installment of a high-speed toll collection system.

This gantry system can read E-ZPass sensors at normal highway speeds, allowing a toll booth to process 600 more cars per hour than the E-ZPass equipped booths across the region for which drivers must slow to at least 5 mph. In North America, high-speed toll readers are currently in use on Highway 407 in Toronto and Delaware's Route 1, where it has been so successful in reducing traffic back-ups that managers plan to retrofit toll plazas on other state highways.

Before the gantry can be put in at these Port Authority crossings, the concrete barriers that separate lanes must also be taken out. The agency would not remove the medians until E-ZPass users make up between **70-80% of traffic** during rush hours. In the interim, E-ZPass users must still slow to a crawl to allow the sensor to deduct their toll. He also suggested that the system is also being considered for the Bayonne and Goethals Bridges if E-ZPass use there increases as expected. The Lincoln and Holland Tunnels would be more difficult to engineer due to the lack of space for merging the high-speed E-ZPass customers and cash-paying drivers.

Using this logic, the MTA should be moving quickly to install non-stop toll gantries at many of its bridges and tunnels where E-ZPass usage has surpassed or is approaching 70% (see chart). **In NJ, E-ZPass market share is growing steadily** on the Garden State Parkway, the only toll road where it is currently in use. According to a Parkway spokesperson, almost 50% of drivers use E-ZPass at the Hillsdale Plaza, where the authority began its installation last December. This represents a doubling of users since early March, indicating that the Parkway may reach 70% not long after it completes its EZ Pass reader roll-out at the Cape May Plaza in mid-September (MTR #260).

AGENCY	FACILITY	E-Z PASS Market Share	
Port Authority Crossings	Holland Tunnel	48%	Average Week-day
	Lincoln Tunnel	53%	
	GW Bridge: Upper Level	51%	
	GW Bridge: Lower Level	55%	
	GWB Palisades Toll Plaza	65%	
MTA Bridges & Tunnels	Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel	69.6%	Average Week-day
	Queens Midtown Tunnel	70%	
	Henry Hudson Bridge	73.5%	
	Verrazano Bridge	68.7%	
Garden State Parkway	Hillsdale Toll Plaza	48%	Peak
	Asbury Park Plaza (first month of service)	31%	

Would a Gas Tax Cut Help New York ?

Last week, U.S. Senate candidate Hillary Clinton displayed a deftness on transportation funding issues that eluded her opponent, Congressman Rick Lazio. **Lazio called for suspension of the 18.3-cent federal gasoline tax** because of high gas prices, and suggested permanently eliminating the 4.3-cent increment enacted early in President Bill Clinton's administration. But Ms. Clinton pointed out that the federal gas tax is one of the few federal revenue sources that **pays NY State back more than it contributes**, and that the state would lose millions for transportation construction projects (the Lazio campaign's web site in fact lists LIRR and road projects Rep. Lazio secured federal funding for).

Clinton said NY's federal gas tax surplus was about \$177 million per year. NY State has the lowest per capita driving rate in the country. Fewer than 50% of NYC households own automobiles, and the city relies on constant capital investment in mass transit to keep things moving. That didn't stop Mayor Giuliani from chiming in on Lazio's side in favor of gas tax reduction.

Haverstraw-Ossining Ferry To Start



A ferry connecting Rockland County with Metro North's Hudson Line may provide relief for some commuters stuck in Tappan Zee Bridge traffic this summer. The MTA board gave thumbs up to the project on June 29.

The service, provided by NY Waterway, will meet four morning and four evening Manhattan trains. Travel time from Haverstraw to Grand Central will be about 75 minutes, which, according to Metro-North, is a 30-minute time savings.

Initially, 250 parking spaces will be available at the Haverstraw dock off of Route 9W, with potential to upgrade the lot. The ferry holds 150 passengers. Ticket prices are proposed at \$3 one way or \$193 for a monthly Uni-ticket, including \$163 for rail and \$30 for ferry service. Parking costs are \$3 per day or \$30 per month.

Continuation of federal and state funding for the service will depend upon its success.

The MTA will hold a hearing on proposed fares for the ferry Monday, July 10 (see Calendar).

Bike Planners, Advocates Gather For Global Forum

- Amsterdam conference features big U.S. contingent - Last week, the City of Amsterdam and the Dutch Cyclists Union hosted "Velo Mondiale 2000," a world-wide conference on bicycle transportation.

The conference setting was one of the globe's most bicycle-friendly cities and countries. According to the 1999 *Dutch Bicycle Master Plan*, cycling's share of total trips in the Netherlands is over 25%, a figure significantly exceeded for urban trips. Walking and cycling together come close to total Dutch trips by car.

Though this share has not increased since the 1980s,

neither has it declined. This is due in part to **extensive efforts to accommodate cycling** in infrastructure investment and development. Cycling in Holland brought to mind the following observation from a 1980s analysis of cycling's potential for the FHWA:

"The infrastructure for automobile travel includes not only the street and highway system, but also safe levels of lighting, ubiquitous parking facilities, and a proliferation of signs, signals and controls aimed at ensuring a safer driving environment...it is perhaps this type of commitment to a mode that is needed to insure its acceptability and success."

Few streets in Amsterdam do not feature dedicated space for bikes, whether a path separated from both the street and the sidewalk, or a lane marked off on the pavement. Some smaller streets in the city center are bike-only. The larger the roadway (and the heavier the traffic), the **greater the chance it features a separate bike path.**

Generous provision of bike infrastructure in the city corresponds with **heavy duty traffic calming.** Many major urban arterials have been reduced to one flow lane in each direction, and almost every smaller street had speed humps and other car-slowng measures. City car volumes are low, and **big trucks do not enter the central area.** This environment has led traffic planners to permit bikes to ride in either direction on smaller one-way streets and at roundabouts, and new traffic laws strengthening bikes' priority right of way at intersections are also in the works. Cyclists rarely encounter pavement that even remotely resembles the shambles of craters, trenches and fault lines that are standard street surfaces in NYC and other U.S. cities.

Adequate parking capacity appears to be the biggest bike-transport problem in Dutch cities at the moment. Authorities are deploying new generations of bike racks, and establishing large-scale, staffed parking depots.

A striking feature of presentations at the conference was the difference between **metropolitan areas that have made a serious commitment to cycling** as transportation, and those where public advocacy has carved out a foothold of funding and facilities, but still faces an uphill struggle. Most U.S. cities — certainly all in our region — fall into the latter category. But the former are not just the usual Dutch, German and Danish examples, but also include Perth, Australia, Montreal and a growing number of large and mid-size British cities.

Strong attendance at the Amsterdam gathering by American officials and activists gives some cause for hope closer to home. USDOT Secretary Assistant Eugene Conti and AASHTO executive director John Horsely were the U.S.' main national figures. Our region was represented not only by many bicycle advocates, but also by staff from NJDOT and NY State DOT, and a variety of NY-area consulting firms.

Wrong Side of the Issue

- "Everyone in the city complains the trains are crowded and slow...There is no evidence that there is a need to put more trains on [N and R] lines...You cannot go by what passengers say." —NYC Transit spokesperson Al O'Leary, cited in the 6/27 *Daily News*.
- "Who do you believe, me or your eyes?" —Groucho Marx

CALENDAR

July 10, 6pm MTA Public Hearing for the Proposed Fares for New Ferry Service Linking Haverstraw in Rockland County with MTA Metro-North's Hudson Line in Ossining, MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Ave. 5th fl, Manhattan, 212-878-7483.

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 7, 9:30am CT Dept. of Environmental Protection hearing on Route 66 widening, DEP bldg., Russell Hearing Rm., 79 Elm St., Hartford, ?'s call Kathy Kokoszka, 860-346-5321.

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

September 5-8 11th Pro-Bike/Pro-Walk Conference, Philadelphia : "Smart Choices for Smart Growth." www.bikewalk.org

September 14-15 "Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program Workshop" hosted by FHWA and the EPA. courtney@volpe.dot.gov tcsp-fhwa.volpe.dot.gov/new.html

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