

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

PA Considers Toll Increase, Goethals Twin

The *Star-Ledger* reported last weekend that draft Port Authority documents it obtained call for fare and toll increases by 2003. The hikes would support a multi-year **capital program of up to \$9 billion**. The PA's list of big projects includes new cars and signals for the PATH system, parking and terminal expansion at Newark airport, terminal renovations at LaGuardia and JFK airports, expanding Howland Hook and Port Reading marine terminals and a Howland Hook-NJ rail connection.

Unfortunately, the list still includes **twinning the I-278 Goethals Bridge**, a highway expansion project that has faced strong opposition in both Staten Island and the Elizabeth area since the early 1990s, and stands little political chance of proceeding.

The plan also reportedly calls on Port Authority commissioners to consider contributing \$1 billion toward several large potential multi-agency projects, including the "Access to the Region's Core" rail passenger rail tunnel proposals that would add tunnel capacity between NJ and Penn Station NY, and possibly connect Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal. Other projects in the list are a cross-harbor rail freight tunnel and extending the Hudson-Bergen light rail project to Staten Island.

The *Star-Ledger* suggested the PA may try to get toll and fare hikes behind it before **Governor Whitman's final term** ends next year.

The new capital program and financing plan were ordered by Governors Whitman and Pataki in May when they ended months of deadlock over PA priorities (MTR #272). The final plan is due before the end of 2000.

One Click to a Better Commute

Last week, NYPIRG's Straphangers Campaign launched a new web site that will help NYC transit commuters save money and time. Visitors to **www.straphangers.org** can use an interactive subway map to plan their routes. Commuters can sign up for alerts about scheduled construction or repair that will cause delays or rerouting on their lines.

The site provides information on how riders can reduce fares by pressing employers to adopt the Transit-Chek tax benefit program. And it offers interactive forums where riders share complaints and ideas with MTA officials and each other. A visit to the site reveals discussions already heating up on topics from getting a seat on the L to bus bunching in Bensonhurst.

www.straphangers.org

High Praise for Variable Tolls At EZ Party

Though newspapers missed the story at the official celebration of the arrival of EZ-Pass in New Jersey last Tuesday, chief executives from both the NJ Turnpike Authority and the Port Authority of NY/NJ identified the toll road's implementation of variable toll pricing as the "milestone" and "benchmark" which would be remembered into the 21st century, long after the buzz over electronic toll collection fades away.

Turnpike Executive Director Ed Gross predicted that "ten years from now, **we will be celebrating value pricing**" and "will recognize that it will overshadow electronic tolls." He said, "We are charged with with creatively managing the transportation system to efficiently move people and goods through and around the state. It is virtually impossible to build new highways and very difficult to add lanes." He noted that despite the Turnpike's volume, it is now underutilized in the off-peak period and promised to publicly report on the effects of the new toll program as soon as possible.

Besting even Gross' favorable comments, Ron Shifatan, Port Authority deputy executive director, said:

"The early members (of the E-ZPass family) including the Port Authority have pussy-footed around in the challenge to obtain increased productivity from our transportation infrastructure. The Turnpike Authority has taken a major step forward in giving us value pricing and it can only lead to great things in the future. I call on **all the agencies in the region** to convene and try to develop a regional approach to implementing strategies to **reduce traffic and increase productivity** well beyond the strategies implemented this week."

Returning to the podium, Ed Gross responded, "I certainly second Ron's suggestion. Value pricing will only be better if it is done regionally." NJ Assembly member and transportation chairman Alex DeCroce, also called the value pricing program a "model."

The ceremony also marked the NJ Highway Authority's completion of EZPass on the Garden State Parkway. NJDOT, Delaware DOT and various toll road authority commissioners, legislators and members of the 16-member Regional Consortium were on hand.

Turnpike Pricing Program is World's Largest

A preliminary comparison of available information by Campaign staff has found that not only is the New Jersey Turnpike's new time-sensitive toll structure the largest experiment in "value pricing" in the country, but

also tops other comparable examples world-wide.

The only examples we are aware of where entire highways have adopted a peak/off-peak toll variation — as opposed to opening one or two lanes to driver “buy-in” — are Canada’s 407 ETR, a private east-west toll road north of Toronto, and the French A1 autoroute between Paris and Lille. Car drivers on 407 ETR pay 10.5 cents (Can) per kilometer to travel the road between 6am and 11pm, but just 5 cents per kilometer at night. Variable tolls on the A1 are targeted at weekend traffic with peak prices on Sundays set 50-100% higher than off-peak rates. Neither matches the Turnpike in highway miles or vehicles affected.

	Highway Miles	Vehicles per day
A1	90	50,000 (Sunday)
407 ETR	43	240,000
NJ Turnpike	148	560,000

NJ Non-Stop Tolls: Turnpike Innovates, GSP Procrastinates

Two news items from last Thursday highlighted difference over technological innovation and customer satisfaction at NJ’s two largest toll authorities.

The *Bergen Record* reported that the NJ Turnpike Authority has decided that four lanes at its new Exit 1 toll plaza in Carney’s Point have capability to collect E-ZPass tolls at normal highway speeds. When the new plaza opens in 2003, drivers with E-ZPass will have the choice of driving unimpeded under an E-ZPass reader at speeds of at least 45 mph. The Turnpike already operates successful non-stop toll lanes at the Exit 6 junction with the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Florence. Turnpike Executive Director Ed Gross told the *Record* that he convinced the Authority’s board to take the step because he “was influenced by the media and by public officials, and the public’s interest [in non-stop lanes].”

Meanwhile, the *Asbury Park Press* announced that Ocean County freeholders have approved the NJ Highway Authority’s plan for a new Parkway exit in Berkeley. There has been no sign the Authority plans to build anything but traditional toll plazas at this or any of the eight new exits it hopes to build in Ocean and Cape May Counties. More than ever, it seems that the Parkway will not heed the public’s wishes for speedier, more efficient toll collection without state intervention. The Assembly Appropriations Committee will soon hear a bill sponsored by Assembly Transportation Committee Chair Alex DeCroce that would require the GSP to replace its cross-the-highway old-style booths with non-stop tolls once E-ZPass share reaches 2/3 at rush hour.



Non-stop toll collection in Orange County, Calif.

CT Summit Follow-Up off on Wrong Foot

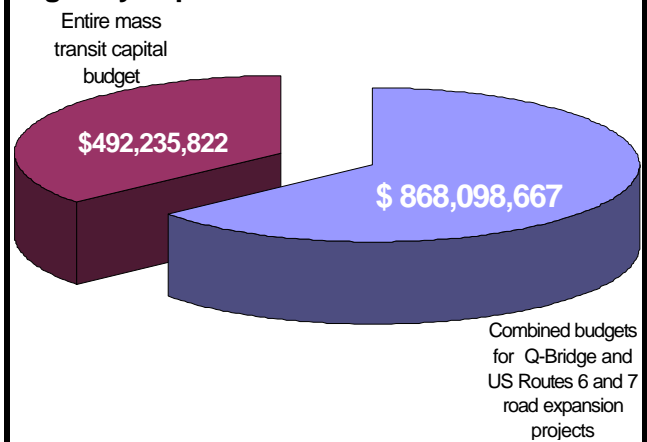
Working groups convened as part of September’s Connecticut Transportation Summit recommended far-reaching transportation policy changes. However, a fast-track I-95 widening proposal made last week by Governor John Rowland threw state government’s commitment to a new policy direction into serious question. And a new “Transportation Strategies Board” announced by Rowland and House Speaker Moira Lyons suggested that environmental, mass transit and community concerns may take a back seat to economic interests seeking quick-fix traffic flow improvements.

Working groups at the transportation summit discussed measures ranging from increased rail service and better rail station feeder bus and jitney service, rail freight development, road pricing on I-95 and the Merritt Parkway, closing redundant I-95 entrances and exits, better traffic law enforcement and employer-based programs like flex-time and “cashing out” free parking.

However, the first state action proposed since Connecticut’s new momentum for transportation improvements has developed is a plan by Governor Rowland and ConnDOT to develop the shoulder of I-95 from Westport to Stamford into a general traffic lane. Rowland announced the plan at a recent Stamford Chamber of Commerce meeting. CT Transportation Commissioner James Sullivan told the *Advocate* that the project would take about a year, and would involve widening sections of the shoulder and clearances under bridges.

Environmentalists and transit advocates, while optimistic about many of the summit recommendations, expressed concern last week that summit recommendations may not survive the translation from think-tank discussion to state leadership commitments. Environmental groups said Rowland’s I-95 move looked like a throwback rather than a step toward the future. ConnDOT’s attitude toward environmental review, safety issues and the legal mandate that it reduce vehicle miles

Connecticut Transportation Priorities: Highway expansion dwarfs mass transit



Source: CT 2000 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

Continuing or accelerating ConnDOT’s existing program will not break gridlock’s worsening hold on Connecticut. Together, three ConnDOT roadway expansion projects will cost nearly double the state’s entire 5-year transit capital budget.

of travel in southwestern CT regarding the plan to add the peak-hour lane to I-95 are unclear.

Also last week, Rowland and CT House Speaker Moira Lyons announced formation of a "Transportation Strategy Board" consisting entirely of agency heads, legislators and business leaders. Their job will be to recommend new transportation policies to the Governor and Legislature by February. Some of the legislators, like State Senator William Aniskovich from the area east of New Haven, have solid pro-transit records (see MTR #66), but it remains to be seen how summit recommendations representing a sharp break with past practices will fare with the group.

Traffic Same with or Without Sheridan

At the request of elected officials and community groups, the NYS DOT undertook a study of the **traffic impacts of removing the Sheridan Expressway (MTR #237)**. On the first page of the study, the study states: "overall vehicle miles traveled (VMT) within the study area remains **essentially unchanged** with the demapping." The finding suggests Bronx vehicle-related pollution will stay the same with or without the highway.

The report itself raises no red flags — the Sheridan's removal would have little impact because it carries a mere **37,000 vehicles/day** compared to 172,000 on the most crowded segment of the Cross Bronx Expressway and 129,000 on the Bruckner. Several streets in the Bronx, including Fordham Road, carry more traffic. In fact, given the quantity of traffic the highway handles, the *New York Post* ran a story this week referring to rebuilding Sheridan interchanges as a "Boondoggle." A *Post* photographer caught staff of the Tri-State Campaign, NYC Environmental Justice Alliance and several community groups **sitting on the Sheridan during rush hour** to show how few vehicles use it.

However, instead of agreeing that the Sheridan-to-park idea merits inclusion in its upcoming EIS, the State DOT chose to obfuscate the issue in several newspaper and television articles. In a Good Day NY story last Tuesday, agency officials said that the proposal to replace two of the highway's three interchanges would cost only one-tenth that published in its own reports.

Then, in a Friday *Daily News* article, the State DOT accused the Campaign of misinterpreting the data stating that traffic will increase on other roadways and hence pollution will not remain the same. Yet the report entitled "Investigation of Demapping the Sheridan Expressway," **does not look at traffic on other highways**. In fact, in a meeting last spring, agency officials told community groups and elected officials that a different model would be needed to determine the effects on neighboring roadways.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

Nassau Pro-Transit Coalition Mobilizes Again

Over twenty pro-transit, civic and environmental organizations, plus the Village of Hempstead and City of Glen Cove sent a joint letter last week urging Nassau County legislative leaders Judith Jacobs and Peter Schmitt to defeat County Executive Thomas Gulotta's attempts to **slash county support for Long Island Bus service**. The letter urges the county legislature to maintain a strong level of county support for LI Bus operations.

Gulotta's proposed 2001 budget repeat's last year county bus cuts of \$7 million, and his multi-year plan would **completely eliminate** county funds for the bus system by 2002. The breadth of support the new letter presents a strong reminder to the legislature of last year's **public outcry** against the proposed cuts, and the painful public hearing where scores testified on the need for more, not less public transit service in Nassau.

"We intend to work hard to ensure a strong and increased level of state support for LI Bus this year," the letter states. "An increased state role will be far more likely, however, if state legislators and Governor Pataki see **evidence of a serious County commitment** to Long Island Bus." The letter was submitted into the record at a recent Nassau County budget hearing, as well as mailed to the entire county legislature. Copies of the letter can be obtained on-line at www.tstc.org.

More Villages Question Rte 347 Widening

Last week, governing officials of the Village of the Branch and the Village of Port Jefferson in central Suffolk County agreed to endorse the "5-Point Plan for a Better Route 347 Project," a set of guidelines that civic, municipal and environmental constituencies want NY State DOT to abide by in planning any work along Route 347. DOT's plan is to **add new lanes** and significantly expand a number of intersections along the highway's entire length. The Village of Lake Grove voted to back the 5-Point Plan in early September. The villages join a strong list of **civic associations, transit advocates and Suffolk County and NY State legislators** in raising serious questions and concerns about the highway widening plan to widen Route 347 in the Towns of Brookhaven and Smithtown.

The 5-Point Plan call on NYSDOT to work with towns to combine roadway and land use plans, pursue non-paving strategies more vigorously, and work harder to meet the concerns of affected citizens (MTR #278).

It is now **411 days** since TSTC first requested DOT's post-widening **traffic estimates** for the Route 347 expansion project, but DOT still refuses to let affected communities know what it has in store for them.

Looking to London:

New Mayor Pushes Congestion Pricing

Independent candidate Ken Livingstone rode to a definitive majority victory in London's first ever mayoral elections last May, in part due to a promise to begin **charging fees to vehicles entering central London**

during the day. Parliament gave the Mayor power to levy "congestion charges" in the 1999 Greater London Authority Act that created the position to unify the city's splintered district-based government.

Livingstone is currently holding meetings across London to receive public comments on the details of his pricing program, first spelled out in July. Under his initial proposal, drivers wishing to travel into the region bounded by the city's large Inner Ring Road on weekdays between 7am and 7pm will be required to purchase and display a daily or weekly permit at a cost of **£5 per day**. **Truck charges** of £15 daily will be handled similarly. Central London residents will receive reduced rates and emergency vehicles and disabled motorists are exempt. Motorists found in central London without a permit will face fines of up to £100.

According to a preparatory study, the central London region now sees roughly 900,000 vehicle trips per week-day, of which 80% are destined for the cordoned area and 20% are through-travelers. Average traffic speed in Central London during the working day is 10 mph. The charges are expected to **reduce the number of vehicles by 10-12%** and increase speeds by 20% or more.

The administration chose a paper permit system, rather than the electronic toll collection used successfully for similar purposes in Singapore and Trondheim, Norway, so that the program can begin by the end of 2002. The charges should raise £200 million per year, all of which will be spent on improving the city's transportation system. The Mayor wants these funds available as soon as possible to invest in **mass transit initiatives** before the end of his four-year term.

However, Conservative critics have called planned the distribution of permits at gas stations, post offices, news stands, by phone, and over the internet where vehicle

license plate numbers and other details will be recorded has been called unworkable. Also, **enforcement costs** will be high, requiring intensive police time and construction of stopping bays throughout the cordoned area. By 2003 Livingstone hopes to have a extensive digital camera system in place that should facilitate enforcement monitoring.

Like London, Manhattan sees an influx of roughly 1 million vehicles per day. While tolls at the MTA tunnels and Port Authority river crossings effectively charge many drivers to enter Manhattan, **free East River bridges** remain a major gap in the cordon. Also varying tolls by charging more during rush hour, or during the day, is likely to make the current de facto charge more effective in managing demand and reducing congestion.

CALENDAR

October 10, 2pm-4pm NJDOT workshop on proposed amendments to truck regulations, NJDOT Headquarters, 1035 Parkway Avenue, 609-530-2124. Written comments due Oct. 18.

October 11 Comments due to Army Corps for Mills Meadowlands Mall DEIS. 212-264-0183

October 11, 6pm-8pm NJDOT informational workshop on proposed amendments to the truck regulations, NJDOT Headquarters, 1035 Parkway Avenue, 609-530-2124

October 12, Noon Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council Meeting, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 212-878-7087

October 19, Noon Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council Meeting, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 212-878-7087

October 20, 9:30am-4:30pm, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) Annual Environmental Congress, "We All Live Downstream" 973-539-7547 www.anjec.org

October 24, 6-8pm Auto-Free NY: "Pedestrian Planning for Lower Manhattan," Michael O'Connor, Senior V.P. for Downtown NY, Inc., 104 Washington St., Manhattan, 212-475-3394

October 26 7:30pm, Regional Planning Partnership Smart Talk Seminar Series, "Governance: Making Growth Happen the Way We Want", Panel discussion w/ U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (invited) and challenger Dick Zimmer (confirmed), McDonnell Hall, Princeton Univ., \$. Rpp2050@aol.com.

October 28, Thunderhead Alliance Northeast Region Bicycle Advocate's Training Day hosted by the Connecticut Bicycle Coalition, Hartford, CT. www.thunderheadalliance.org

In coming weeks, *MTR* will spotlight transportation policies for central London with relevance to Manhattan, many first promoted by Mayor Livingstone. These initiatives include:

- Congestion pricing
- Limiting day-time truck access
- Universal parking fees
- Bus-only lanes, guided bus-way network
- Ending driving subsidies for city officials

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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