

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Rowland Wants Transit Tax Benefits for State Workers

Connecticut Governor John Rowland told the Stamford Chamber of Commerce in early October he plans to offer the "Deduct-A-Ride" (CT's term for a program known in NY as "TransitChek") **federal transit tax benefit program to all state employees.**

Giving Connecticut's 51,000 employees the option to pay transit costs with pre-tax income would offer a big boost to "Deduct-a-Ride," kicked-off by MetroPool, the Stamford-based transportation management association, in Fall, 1999. The TMA reports that the concept has been positively received by many companies, but Pitney Bowes Credit, with 130 CT-based employees, seems to be one of the largest employers offering the benefit.

A spokesman confirmed this week that Governor Rowland is committed to creating a Deduct-A-Ride program for state employees, though his administration is trying to determine whether **authorizing legislation** or **negotiations with unions** will be necessary. Transit riding employees could save up to \$300 per year, and, if administrative costs are kept low, the state will pay less in Federal taxes for every employee enrolled.

If it moves swiftly to implement Rowland's goal, CT could become the first state to offer the Federal transit benefit to its employees. President Clinton issued an executive order in April requiring all Federal agencies to provide the pre-tax transit option to their Washington, D.C. region workforces by the beginning of this month (and to several agency workforces country-wide) and New York City began offering the benefit to City employees this summer (MTR #267, #262). But no state has yet taken up the challenge (Also in our region, Westchester County offers TransitChek benefits to its public employees). Legislation that would allow the benefit to be offered to **New Jersey's 76,000 state employees** have been stalled since spring in the Assembly and Senate Appropriations Committees.

### EPA: Thumbs Down on Meadowlands Mall

Last Wednesday, the US EPA sent a letter to the Army Corps of Engineers indicating that it would veto any wetlands filling permits granted to the Mills Corps. for at least three of five proposals to construct a 2.5 million square foot mega-mall and office complex in the Meadowlands. In part, the agency cited the absence of alternatives analyses for the proposed four-lane extension of Route 120 that would bisect a large tract of undeveloped wetlands (MTR #280).

### Enviros Question Fast-Track I-95 Widening

The Connecticut Fund for the Environment, Environmental Defense and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign have written to CT Transportation Commissioner James Sullivan, asking about his agency's intentions to conduct an environmental review for the plan announced by Governor Rowland on October 2 to open I-95 shoulders to general rush hour traffic between Westport and Stamford (MTR #289). Sullivan told the Stamford *Advocate* that the project would take about a year, and would involve widening sections of the shoulder and clearances under bridges.

Additionally, the groups asked how ConnDOT will square the highway expansion with its legal mandate to reduce traffic in Southwest Connecticut (see MTR #134), how many additional car and truck trips the move was likely to encourage, and inquired about the safety implications of taking the shoulder.

### Critical Mass Seems to Elude New York's Transportation Bond Act

Last week, NY State's transportation bond act continued its lurch toward November, attracting a variety of positions from top New York City officials. The reactions — positive and negative — seemed to underscore the pitfalls of seeking direct voter approval to raise revenue for a massive, complex statewide capital program in the **absence of strong official and stakeholder consensus** about transportation priorities.

The \$3.8 billion bond act was cobbled together in Albany this year after Governor Pataki proposed a 5-year capital program that increased transit spending more than highway spending. The State Senate would only go along with a transportation funding deal that maintained highway-transit "parity." The bond act was hatched as the way to lift all transportation spending without raising taxes.

On Thursday, **Staten Island Borough President Guy Molinari** urged voters to reject the bond measure, citing "no clear understanding as to how the bond act will benefit Staten Island, and no certain commitments for residents to rely on." In a statement, Molinari said, "I can't recall [a bond referendum] that has created the confusion and exhibited the vagueness of [this year's] transportation bond act." He cited concerns over full funding for Staten Island's third bus depot and new express buses. "My belief is that voters are better off rejecting the bond act and **have framers of the act go back to the drawing boards,**" Molinari concluded.

Earlier in the week, **Mayor Giuliani**, through a spokesperson at a City Council meeting, announced his support for the bond act. However, the Mayor's backing was leavened with skeptical comments on whether the city would see all the funds promised in the act. The spokesperson criticized what he called shortfalls in city receipts from the 1996 environmental bond act, and raised the possibility that transportation bond act funds would simply substitute for other funding NY State has already committed to city projects.

On Tuesday, **Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden** issued a statement supporting the bond act, citing improvements for city buses and subways. The statement also referred to the Borough President's "serious reservations" about the act. Indeed, popular Brooklyn City Council member and likely 2001 Borough President candidate **Ken Fisher** stated opposition to the bond in a Sept. *Daily News* op-ed, citing the absence of

### Bergen Debates Cross-County Rail



Last month, a large group of Passaic and Bergen County local, county, and state officials toured the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line with local press to promote a future light rail project that would connect Paterson with the Hudson-Bergen line in Hoboken. Now dubbed the "Bergen-Passaic" light rail, also known as the Cross-County line and the New York & Susquehanna light rail, the route is in competition for federal transit capital funds with two other Northern Jersey "New Start" alignments: the Northern Branch and the West Shore Line.

While the Bergen-Passaic line unsurprisingly has the support of Paterson-based Congressman Bill Pascrell, a member of the House Transportation Committee, it has also earned the scorn of two Bergen County legislators. Freeholders Douglas Bern and Dennis McNerney criticized the Bergen-Passaic line just days after the press conference, arguing that the West Shore or Northern Branch would better serve the far eastern part of Bergen County currently lacking commuter rail. McNerney called the line "ill-advised" and said it was "ludicrous" to expect a strong commuter demand between Paterson and Hackensack or Hoboken. Thus far, Bergen County Executive William Schuber has remained non-committal, refusing to support one route over another.

The Bergen-Passaic line did not fare as well in a study of the three projects prepared for NJTransit. A route that did not then include an extension from Maywood to Paterson was projected to draw only 4,500 riders, while the Northern Branch to Tenafly would serve 11,350 and over 15,000 would ride the West Shore Line between Hoboken and West Nyack, with a likely transfer to the Northeast Corridor and other lines at the Secaucus Transfer. Although the *Bergen Record* recently reported that the extended Cross-County could transport up to 18,000 passengers, it is unclear how this much larger number was estimated.

Brooklyn-specific projects.

**Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields** has been a vocal supporter of the bond act all fall, citing the importance of a fully-funded MTA capital program to the momentum of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Subway project and other city transit repair and upgrade priorities.

Last week, Governor Pataki's office called the bond act a "**linchpin**" of the MTA capital program. Other state officials seem to be keeping quiet for now. **State Comptroller Carl McCall** backed the measure several weeks ago, grumbling about poor fiscal policy and lack of clear project lists. **Michael Bragman**, upstate rival to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, has announced opposition to the act. Republican candidate for U.S. Senate **Rick Lazio** continues to criticize the measure.

Editorial comment on the bond act has so far been skeptical, and to some degree, locally-focused. A Sept. Staten Island *Advance* editorial raised issues of state debt and legislative cowardice. Also in Sept., the *Daily News* begged for more information about programs the bond act would support, while the Hudson Valley *Journal-News* raised a variety of questions about freight rail funding slated for CSX' West Shore Line ("the total transportation package offers too few details").

NYPIRG's **Straphangers Campaign** supports the bond act, for reasons much like those cited by Borough Presidents Golden and Fields (see *MTR* #288). The Tri-State Transportation Campaign has taken the opportunity of bond act news stories to criticize the NY State DOT's highway widening plans on Long Island. Other advocacy groups have so far been quiet.

The *NY Times* noted on Wednesday the absence of any concerted promotional campaign to whip up voter support for the act. However, a group of **construction industry groups** are reportedly raising money for an advertising campaign on its behalf. The effort would target upstate voters, who are historically more begrudging of state bond referendums than their downstate counterparts.

### Suffolk Candidates Battle: Who Opposes Widening NY 347 More?

*Newsday* reported last Tuesday that NY State DOT plans to widen Route 347 in Smithtown and Brookhaven have entered into the NY State Assembly race between incumbent **Steven Englebright** and challenger **Anthony Moncayo**. Moncayo charged that Englebright has tended excessively to issues outside of the 4th district, and cited Route 347 widening plans as a local problem demanding more attention. "**I don't want 347 to look like the Sunrise Highway** or the LIE. I would never support the DOT's plans," he said, arguing further that Englebright should have prevented the DOT from even "wasting time" with its road expansion proposal.

Englebright, however, has been very active on Route 347 issues, both in 1996, when NY State DOT proposed turning the 16-mile road into a limited access highway, and at present, regarding the DOT's new plan to simply

add new traffic and turning lanes for most of the highway's length.

In August, **Englebright joined Brookhaven civic leaders** in a press conference urging a 347 corridor plan that combined mass transit, smart growth land use policies and other measures able to keep traffic growth to a minimum (MTR #280). Englebright has endorsed the "5-point Plan for a Better Route 347," which calls for this approach. The 5-point plan is also supported by over a dozen Brookhaven civic and Long Island environmental groups, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, three village governments and Suffolk County legislators Ginny Fields and Vivian Fisher.

### PA Proceeds With Northeast Freight Plan

Port Authority officials say they have finished their feasibility study for a system of **inland distribution centers** for the Port of NY/NJ. The idea is to move big numbers of containers from the port area for more specific processing and routing at freight centers closer to final destinations. NY State recently committed funds to upgrading the Port of Albany to receive container-laden river barges (MTR #286). The Port Authority also says it hopes to have a **new rail service to Buffalo** by the end of the year, though operational and volume details for the service are unclear. A PA spokesperson told the *Journal of Commerce* that rail service to inland freight centers is best for destinations at distances like Buffalo's. A number of European ports run **shuttle trains over shorter routes**. It's not clear how the PA intends to serve medium-distance landlocked sites like Harrisburg, PA and Brockton, MA.

### Attention Deficit: NY's Suburban Transit

Unless Nassau County legislators are able to nip in the bud County Executive Thomas Gulotta's proposal to **end county support for Long Island Bus** by 2002, the move could raise some thorny state and regional mass transit funding issues.

For instance, would a state/MTA Long Island Bus bail-out be fair to **Suffolk County**, which picks up the tab for 34% of Suffolk Transit's operating budget? How would **Westchester** view such a development? The northern suburb has also shown signs of interest in getting out of the bus business, contributing a smaller share (about 11.5%) to its bus operations than its Long Island counterparts. What about state-local transit relationships elsewhere?

Growth of suburban job markets and traffic congestion call for a stronger role for local suburban transit. Suffolk Transit, although smaller than Long Island Bus, could probably find more riders now with more frequent service, and could well see steadily increasing rider demand in coming years. And **NY State DOT** is calling for development of a much more robust **intra-Island bus system** than exists presently. There is no clear forum for addressing these issues, but with suburban counties headed south on bus funding, the time is ripe for state and regional officials to create one.

*Newsday* also reported last Thursday on the Assembly race in the adjoining 6<sup>th</sup> District, where challenger Jonathan Hark cites his activist record with the Smithtown Pine Civic Association fighting the Rte. 347 limited-access proposal in 1996. The incumbent is Assemblymember Robert Wertz.

### Should Traffic Engineers Design Communities ?

In September, the New York City DOT declared its **rush-hour parking ban along Hylan Boulevard** in Staten Island a success and began to discuss other Staten Island streets that may meet with a similar fate. An *Advance* article on the ban did not cite any data defining "success" but rather repeated agency officials' anecdotal observations that traffic is flowing more easily.

Unfortunately, banning parking to create more travel lanes will over time relegate Hylan Boulevard to the role of "traffic sewer" and begin to **kill off pedestrian activity** and other non-motoring uses of the street. One merchant contacted by the *Advance* said his business is down 20% since the parking ban started, and others are complaining.

The move will also encourage more driving during the rush hour. While congestion relief may last for a time, what will the city do **once the new rush hour lane fills up** and traffic bogs down again (and Hylan has become a much nastier place for pedestrians and businesses in the meantime) ? And in the short term, since most motorists on Staten Island are headed for one of a handful of major arteries, such an approach may simply squeeze the bottleneck to a new spot.

A longer view by the City DOT would encourage bus travel on Staten Island by figuring out how to move buses more rapidly on arterial streets, while taking care to preserve the streets' community character. Hylan Boulevard carries four local and nine express bus lines, with up to 70 buses per hour using the street. For now, NYC DOT is considering parking bans for Victory Boulevard, Clove Road, Forest Avenue and Richmond Terrace. Each of these streets carries between four and ten bus lines.

### Ferry Fruition

Metro-North Railroad says the new Haverstraw-Ossining commuter ferry — about a month old — is drawing rider levels it had not expected until next year. The *Journal-News* reported last week that daily ridership in the beginning of October was about 80 riders each way. 250 daily riders are need to allow the service to break even. NY Waterway and Haverstraw officials say they are considering direct weekend runs between Haverstraw and Manhattan.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

[www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

## Looking To London: Truck Ban in Transition

In addition to roadway pricing, the question of how to strengthen and improve the fifteen year-old **night-time and weekend ban of large trucks** from Greater London area roads was a central issue in London's first mayoral campaign last May. As then leader of the now-defunct Greater London Council, Independent mayoral candidate Ken Livingstone pushed through a traffic order in 1985 that prohibited all vehicles weighing over 16.5 tons from entering an area that includes the City of London as well as the Outer London boroughs between 9pm and 7am on weekdays and between noon on Saturday and 7 am on Monday. (Local authorities were given the right to regulate truck traffic by Parliament in 1984.) Under the ban, firms can petition to pay for a special permit to enter the City during prohibited hours.

While originally conceived as a measure to reduce night-time noise and truck traffic in residential areas, the ban has increasingly come **under fire for contributing to congestion** during the **peak week-day hours**. Conservative mayoral candidate, Steve Norris, who eventually lost to Livingstone, campaigned to radically reform the ban, allowing trucks to deliver and pick-up goods during restricted night-time hours, but banning them from most Greater London roads the weekday peak hours. The Mayor now has wide-ranging regulatory power over traffic within the city limits, but little has been heard from Livingstone since his election on what he might do to solve the truck ban's inadequacies.

### Kiley for London

Robert Kiley, president of the New York Partnership and Chamber of Commerce, NYC's leading business association, and former chair of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has been named chief executive officer of Transport for London. While media reports have generally reported on Kiley's role as reviving the London Underground, Transport for London's purview is considerably wider. The new agency is an amalgam of mass transit, roadway and taxi regulatory agencies that will seek to clean up the British capital's transportation mess with a new, integrated strategy that will include better transit and motor vehicle entry fees for the city's central area. At the NYC Partnership, Kiley had been researching an integrated capital investment strategy for the NY metro area's mass transit and highway systems. His commitment to better transportation will be missed in New York.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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## CALENDAR

**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](http://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

**Oct. 25, 4-8pm** Public workshop on NJ DOT proposal to widen NJ Rte 15. Meeting House, Old Lafayette Village (Rtes 15 and 94). 609-530-5329.

**October 26, Noon** NYC Transit Riders Council monthly meeting, w/ Millard Seay, NYCT Division of Buses. 347 Madison Ave., 5th floor. 212-878-7087. [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**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](mailto: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](http://www.thunderheadalliance.org)

**November 1, 8-10am** Regional Business Partnership symposium on "Managing the Growth of Global Trade in the Newark Region." NJTPA, 1 Newark Center, 17th floor. RSVP 973-242-4203, [rbp@rbp.org](mailto:rbp@rbp.org)

**November 7, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum luncheon: "Consensus Building for Enhanced Rail Freight Volumes East-of-Hudson." William Galligan. 100 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-435-4086, [pgessner@panynj.gov](mailto:pgessner@panynj.gov)

**November 13-15** NY Public Transit Association conference and expo, Saratoga Springs, NY 518-434-9060. [www.nytransit.org](http://www.nytransit.org)

**North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority long range plan** open house presentations — 10/17 Monmouth County: 10:23 Passaic County: 10/24 Middlesex County: 10/25 Bergen County: 10/26 Sussex County: 11/2 Essex County. Workshops generally 6-9pm. Call 973-639-8423 or see [www.njtpa.org](http://www.njtpa.org) for locations.