

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Goethals Twin a Bad Fit for Pricing Plan

In a presentation to reporters last week, the Port Authority maintained its long-standing position that "twinning" the Goethals Bridge is necessary to ensure economic growth in Central NJ and Staten Island. At last week's North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority meeting, a Port Authority representative said construction would begin on the second bridge by next year.

In actuality, the only future growth that Goethals Twin is sure to encourage is an explosion of truck traffic traveling Staten Island and Brooklyn roadways. Port Authority and NYMTC documents describe the Goethals twin, together with a **widened Staten Island Expressway**, as an essential component of a major new truck priority route from New Jersey and the port areas to east-of-Hudson markets. But freight planners have only just begun to envision what a more aggressive rail freight strategy for the NJ ports and the metropolitan region might be able to achieve (see story, next page).

Moreover, the Port Authority seems caught between its contention that its road pricing plan will help to **manage and ease peak traffic**, and its message to Staten Island that the toll plan's chief benefit will be construction of the new bridge to **accommodate more cars and trucks**. Staten Islanders, long opposed to the Goethals Bridge project, may not buy it. The Staten Island *Register* wrote this week that the toll increase is simply a sideshow designed to **distract attention** from the PA push for the unwanted bridge.

The Goethals twin budget would be better spent on long-needed upgrades to the rail freight network on both sides of the Hudson River. Aggressive investment in new rail- and barge-based intermodal distribution centers would allow growth in port business without flooding the region with additional truck trips. The \$345 million plus in the agency's capital program ear-marked for the misbegotten Goethals twin could, for instance, fully fund the needs documented in the New Jersey Rail Freight Master Plan, with some left over for the laundry list of rail freight needs in New York State. This shift in investment would be a strong complement to the Port Authority's adoption of congestion pricing, further increasing rail freight's competitiveness.

Inside

- Port Authority hearing schedule
- Alternatives to truck traffic explosion

NJ Environmental, Business Leaders Back PA Toll Plan

Last Thursday, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, the New Jersey Alliance for Action, and the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club convened a joint press conference in Newark to support the toll fee changes proposed by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey for the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, George Washington Bridge, and the Staten Island Bridges. The groups praised the "value pricing" component of the proposed toll structure and said that the PA needs new revenues to advance the projects in their capital program that are vital to the metro region's economy and environment.

"Variable pricing is essential to ease congestion in the metropolitan region," said Janine Bauer, Executive Director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "Agencies are finally realizing that **road capacity is a scarce resource**."

Under the Port Authority's proposal, off-peak drivers with E-ZPass see only a modest increase and all drivers with E-ZPass receive a discount. Cash-payers would pay the highest rates. The plan charges higher E-ZPass rates at rush hour. It also features different rates at different facilities, to account for demand variations and the presence of **parallel mass transit routes** (rates are higher where transit is more frequent and convenient).

Citing a report by his group last year, Phil Beachem, President of the NJ Alliance for Action, a prominent business association, said the average NJ motorist loses \$800 a year to congestion. "Anything that's going to be designed to relieve some congestion translates into a monetary value for people," he told the *Bergen Record*. At the same time, Jeff Tittel of the NJ chapter of the Sierra Club stressed environmental benefits: "All these hours stuck in traffic means more pollution," he said. "These backups and delays increase fuel consumption."

The participants told reporters that their organizations plan to testify on behalf of the Port Authority plan at public hearings scheduled next week in New Jersey and New York City. The groups urged New Jersey residents and their representatives to support the proposal at the hearings or by submitting comments to the Port Authority via a form on their website.

The participants' comments and support of the Port Authority proposal was reported in the *Star-Ledger*, *Bergen Record*, *Associated Press*, *Courier Post*, the *Asbury Park Press*, *Home News Tribune*, and various NJ and NYC cable and radio stations.

Port Authority Toll/ Fare Hearings This Week

Manhattan — Tuesday, Jan. 16 10 a.m., One World Trade Center

Jersey City — Tuesday, Jan. 16 5 p.m., Hudson County Administration Building

Staten Island — Wednesday, Jan. 17 5 p.m., College of Staten Island

Bergen County — Thursday, Jan 18, 5 p.m. Route 17 Holiday Inn, Hasbrouck Heights
Call 212-435-3424 or 201-216-2888 to register to speak at the hearings, or visit www.panynj.gov

Son of 2000 Bond Act ?

Although there's been little word from Albany about addressing the transportation construction budget hole opened by failure of November's NY State transportation bond act, one theory in circulation foresees the Legislature **reviving a similar bond act** this year.

The theory sees little to no transportation capital funding restoration in Governor's Pataki's budget proposal. The Governor did not mention transit or transportation in his state of the state address earlier this month, and the "teaser" elements of the Governor's budget released this week were about tax credits for affordable housing and child support, and funding for environmental programs like Superfund.

The Legislative response to the abiding transportation gap would be a new bond act proposal. This year, the balance would supposedly tip in favor of such an initiative because the **NYC mayoral and other city-wide elections** — versus relatively low-profile contests elsewhere in the state — will bring out a disproportionately large city vote.

Unfinished Repairs, Too Few Subway Cars Chop Brooklyn V-Train

NYC Transit officials told an irritated Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden last week that they could not extend pending V-train service along unused F-line express tracks because they **don't have enough subway cars** and were not done with **station repairs** at the Bergen Street station. A fire at Bergen Street almost two years ago has required extensive work at the station.

V service will begin once the new 63rd Street tunnel/Queens Boulevard connection and renovations of the E/F 53rd Street tunnel are done. The V will run on the old F tracks from Queens to Manhattan, but only as far south as Houston Street, adding no service to Brooklyn. The F will run on most of its old Manhattan route, but will cross between Queens and Manhattan in the 63rd Street tunnel.

Brooklyn officials also criticized NYC Transit's plan to truncate G-train service two stops into Queens to make way for the V.

Port Inland Network Would Curb Truck Traffic - But Investment, Commitment Lag -

A recent study conducted for the Port Authority shows that, despite the rapid growth projected in the volume of goods passing through the Port of New York and New Jersey, **port-related truck trips could be capped at current levels through the year 2020.**

Through creation of a "port inland distribution network," goods would be transported to smaller, "feeder" ports and terminals. The Port Authority discovered that such a network could allow alternatives to trucks, namely barge and rail, to capture 40% or more of all container traffic passing through the NY/NJ port. While the cost of such a network has not yet been determined, the PA does not envision the need for major projects such as new rail lines, but rather improvements like roll-on, roll-off loading facilities and cranes at network nodes. Viability of the concept does, however, have as a prerequisite the main line rail capacity improvements sketched by CSX and Norfolk Southern for the region (MTR #230).

Unfortunately, the Port Authority views development of the distribution network as a largely private enterprise and has not allocated funding to it in its 5-year capital plan (MTR # 242, 289). However, the agency does acknowledge the need for unspecified start-up incentives to launch shuttle services on the network. If the agencies directing the multi-year Comprehensive Port Improvement Plan now underway embrace, rather than ignore, the findings of the PA's study, the region will have taken a huge step towards a sustainable plan for expanding the NY/NJ Port (MTR #291).

Another Ruling Against ConnDOT's Route 6 Expressway

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ruled last week that Connecticut DOT's proposed route for an expressway from Hartford to Rhode Island — the many-lived Route 6 project — would do **serious ecological damage** to wetlands and core forest areas. The Corps said another route to the south of ConnDOT's favored right-of-way would be less damaging.

However, many municipalities along the route favored by the Corps oppose highway expansion there. Transportation reformers urged the state to stop pushing the **thrice-defeated project** and fix safety problems along the existing road instead. "The fastest way to fix Route 6 is to respect local concerns, abide by federal environmental laws, and improve the safety of the existing Route 6," said Dana Young, an attorney at the CT Fund for the Environment.

Rhode Island long ago abandoned the original expressway proposal. But ConnDOT has doggedly pursued it. "Three times since 1987 ConnDOT sought permits for slight variations on a northern route. **Three times the Corps and EPA rejected** the northern routes because the new highway would destroy wetlands, pollute waterways and hurt wildlife," said CFE's Curt

Johnson. In 1999, the state applied for the fourth time. "It's time for ConnDOT to stop wasting time and start

NY, NJ Keep Seats on Key Senate Panel

Senators Hillary Clinton and Jon Corzine have both been named to the **Senate Environment and Public Works Committee**. The EPW Committee is the panel that will do much of the Senate's legwork on reauthorization of federal transportation spending in 2003. The metropolitan region and the northeastern U.S. had potentially lost critical representation on the committee with the simultaneous retirement of Senators Moynihan and Lautenberg. Clinton's and Corzine's appointments restore that representation, though at a less senior level. CT Senator Joseph Lieberman will continue as a member of that committee

Corzine was also installed on the **Senate Banking and Urban Affairs Committee**, which oversees the mass transit part of federal authorizations. Corzine joins NY's Senator Charles Schumer on that panel.

Metropolitan area groups, including the General Contractors Association and Tri-State Transportation Campaign, had urged Clinton and Corzine to seek committee postings that would serve their states' needs for significant federal transportation funding.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project hailed the Bush Administration's selection of Norman Mineta as its nominee for **U.S. Secretary of Transportation**. "In Congress, Mineta helped restructure transportation funding to give states and localities more choices in spending federal money. Now this is bearing fruit, with major upsurges in transit ridership and demand for everything from new rail systems to more walkable communities," said STPP director Roy Kienitz.

Mineta, a California Democrat, chaired the House Transportation Committee for a short time. He is currently Secretary of Commerce in the Clinton Administration. Airline, port and railroad industry figures also gave high marks to Bush's naming of Mineta.

Job Announcement: Straphangers Campaign



Half-time Web Organizer/Administrator

The administrator/organizer will work with other staff to devise and implement web strategies, including volunteer recruitment, managing "service diversion" e-mailings, moderating "rider diary" bulletin boards, site promotion and site traffic analysis. Candidates should be enthusiastic about Internet organizing and advocacy. Experience w/ web sites important, organizing experience a plus, attention to detail a must.

Send resume to Neysa Pranger, NYPIRG, 9 Murray St., 3rd fl, NYC 10007. fax 212-349-1366,

working with the towns to to upgrade and fix the safety problems along Route 6," said Johnson.

Fast-Track Slows for I-95 Shoulder Widening

Connecticut Governor John Rowland's push to open the I-95 shoulder to traffic between Stamford and Westport during rush hours by this summer was stopped short last month, due in part to scrutiny of the plan by municipal and MPO officials.

At a late November Southwestern Region MPO meeting, Connecticut Department of Transportation planners requested permission to speed the three-year schedule for a programmed reconstruction of the I-95 median in Norwalk and Darien to eighteen months. Because cars must be diverted onto the right shoulder during median reconstruction, preparation for that project would simultaneously complete the work needed to ready the shoulder lanes for peak hour traffic. Although ConnDOT said the **two projects are separate** and the timing simply fortuitous, Fairfield County municipal leaders and state representatives maintained some suspicion, tabling the fast-track request.

Municipal representatives to the MPO wondered publicly whether ConnDOT was using a "back door" approach to the shoulder opening, possibly attempting to avoid performing the **environmental impact assessment** called for by groups like CT Fund for the Environment, and the Tri-State Campaign. Selectwoman Diane Farrell (D-Westport) told the *Advocate* she wanted assurance that ConnDOT is not "backing into the concept of a fourth permanent traffic lane on I-95."

In late December, a ConnDOT representative announced at a special MPO meeting that the agency was dropping its request, citing massive projected traffic back-ups due to construction and concerns that the contractors could not complete the median project within the shorter time frame. The agency said that an environmental assessment of the shoulder opening has been initiated. Since then, local MPO representatives have sent a statement to Commissioner Sullivan requesting that **public transit be considered** as an alternative within the analysis and that they be kept abreast of all aspects of the environmental review process.

Poll Reveals Transportation a Top NJ Problem

As the departure of Governor Whitman to join the Bush administration and the 2001 gubernatorial election loom over New Jersey's political landscape, a poll shows that transportation problems continue to be strong contenders on citizens' lists of concerns.

In response to an open-ended question in a December Quinnipiac University poll, 8% of the 1,261 respondents cited transportation issues as the most important problem facing the state today. In particular, 5% said that traffic is the most important, while 1% each listed lack of quality public transit, aging roads and infrastructure, and highways and tolls as most important. As broad categories, only taxes, education, and the environment gar-

nered greater concern. The poll also found that 69% of all respondents are "very concerned" about traffic in New Jersey, while an additional 23% acknowledged they are "somewhat concerned."

Auto insurance costs, which have featured prominently in NJ politics in recent elections, has dropped out of the main issues of concern for Garden State citizens.

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An annual survey of Staten Island Chamber of Commerce members ranked traffic congestion as the number one threat to business, according to the S.I. *Register*. 32% of respondents said congestion was their primary concern.

City Truck Route Re-do Reborn

Last week, the New York City DOT revealed that the agency has revised the Request for Proposals (RFP) for reconfiguring the NYC **truck route network** successfully opposed by a coalition of citizen groups and elected officials in 1999. The original RFP did not require the contractor to consider pedestrian safety, noise pollution or property damage when recommending new truck routes. Further, there were considerable questions raised about enforcement of the truck routes and public participation in the decision-making process.

The rerouting study was to be funded through Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) money that had been earmarked but not used for other programs by the City DOT. Due to the outcry of Council Members and community groups, the agency was not permitted to switch the funding.

An NYC DOT representative stated that neither Council Members nor community groups could review the new RFP prior to its release because it would violate the contract process. However, the agency said the four main sections of the new RFP address truck route selection and design, signs for the routes, enforcement and education. The agency expects the document to be released by the end of January.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

CALENDAR

January 16, 10:00am-2pm Port Authority toll/fare increase/congestion pricing hearing, One World Trade Center, 43rd floor. Manhattan. Call 212-435-3424 or 201-216-2888 to register to speak at the hearing or visit www.panynj.gov

January 16, 5:00pm-9pm Port Authority toll/fare increase/congestion pricing hearing, Hudson County Administration Building Annex, Freeholders Chamber, 567 Pavonia Avenue, 3rd floor, Jersey City. Call 212-435-3424 or 201-216-2888 to register to speak at the hearing or visit www.panynj.gov

January 17, 5:00pm-9:00pm Port Authority toll/fare increase/congestion pricing hearing College of Staten Island, Williamson Theater, 2800 Victory Boulevard, Staten Island. Call 212-435-3424 or 201-216-2888 to register to speak at the hearing or visit www.panynj.gov

January 17, 7pm Connecticut Rail Commuter Council meeting, New Haven Railroad Station, 203-655-0138 or www.trainweb.org/ct

Jan. 18, 1pm NYC Transportation Iris Weinshall: "Economic Gains Bring Traffic Pains." Women's City Club forum, 35 East 21st St., Manhattan. \$ 212-353-8070.

January 18, 5:00pm-9:00pm Port Authority toll/fare increase/congestion pricing hearing at the Holiday Inn, 283 Route 17 South, Hasbrouck Heights, NJ. Call 212-435-3424 or 201-216-2888 to register to speak at the hearing or visit www.panynj.gov

January 18, 7:30pm Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Association forum on combined land use/highway planning. Gerry Bogacz of NYMTC on sustainable development studies. Longwood Library, Route 25. 516-719-9330.

January 22, 8am U.S. Senator Jon Corzine addresses Raritan Valley Rail Coalition. Westfield municipal building.

January 23, 10:30am RESCHEDULED NYMTC Pedestrian-Bicycle Working Group One World Trade Center #82 East, Manhattan. 212-938-3443

Jan. 23rd, 6-8pm Auto-Free NY meeting: "Liveable Transport — Amsterdam vs. NYC." Carter Craft, Metro Waterfront Alliance. 104 Washington St. 212-475-3394.

January 23rd, 7pm NJ Office of State Planning hearing on the NJ State Plan, at NJTPA, 1 Newark Center, 17th floor. 973-639-8400.

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