

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 309

March 19, 2001

NEWS

New CT Transport Coalition Presents Agenda

At a state capitol press conference last Thursday, transportation reform advocates launched the Connecticut Transportation Choices Coalition. The coalition, founded by the CT Fund for the Environment and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, **released a 20-page "green paper"** outlining a comprehensive transportation reform program for state agencies, municipalities and metropolitan planning organizations.

"Transportation reform is clearly on the table in Connecticut," said Connecticut Fund for the Environment Senior Attorney Curt Johnson. **"The Transportation Choices Coalition will be a major presence** in the state-wide discussion about where to take the transportation system."

"The Green Paper is the first comprehensive transportation policy reform package to emerge since September's transportation summit," said Jon Orcutt,

Associate Director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "Its recommendations encompass public concern about traffic congestion, municipalities' arguments about funding, safety and local infrastructure and business groups' calls for better mass transit."

The position paper urges fresh thinking about transportation policy. Its recommendations are built around the arguments that **road expansion will never solve traffic congestion**, and that re-oriented public investment and better local planning can make mass transit work for many more people.

The paper's 30-plus policy recommendations are grouped into five sections:

- Making mass transit work for more people.
- Making highway expansion a last resort.
- Smart growth, smart transportation.
- Better options for short trips.
- Space on highways is a scarce resource.
- Relieving ever-increasing truck impacts.

Among other measures, the paper calls specifically for development of a commuter, light rail and dedicated busway transit network in the Hartford region, more investment in the New Haven Line and Shore Line East and for the state to build on strong bus ridership with more and cleaner-fueled service. It recommends a moratorium on highway expansion in state preservation and conservation areas, more local aid for infrastructure repair, joint municipal-state planning in congested corridors, incentive programs for traffic calming and transit-oriented development, more bike-friendly planning and design guidelines. It also calls on ConnDOT to obtain FHWA congestion pricing study funds in order to investigate strong highway demand management policies, and for CT's state and congressional leaders to back plans for a NY cross-harbor rail tunnel.

The Transportation Choices Coalition is made up of 14 pro-transit, environmental and other public interest groups **representing over 50,000 residents** across Connecticut, including the Connecticut chapter of the Sierra Club, the CT Transportation Institute, the Association of Commuter Rail Employees, the CT Bicycle Coalition and the CT Coalition for Environmental Justice. Full text of the "green paper" and a full list of coalition members are available at the CT Fund for the Environment's and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign's web sites: www.cfenv.org, www.tstc.org

Campaign Releases Parking Solutions Pub

Suburban New York City region, employers, merchants, municipalities and transit operators spend billions of dollars on the construction and upkeep of parking lots and garages, yet employees and customers often still can't find a space to park. **A new 6-page color brochure** written and published by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign addresses the region's parking crunch. *Parking Management* describes innovative strategies to reduce demand for parking that are far less expensive than widening or decking a lot.

"Parking problems have gotten worse, rather than better, as businesses and municipalities have poured money into bigger structures," explains Adelma Lilliston, parking specialist at the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. **"Leveling the playing field between solo driving and other travel modes** is the best way to get the most for your parking buck." See this issue's last article for successful examples from Minneapolis.

Last week, *Parking Management* was mailed to over 1,500 municipal officials, planners and business leaders in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. If you or someone you know is interested in receiving copies of the brochure free of charge, contact the Campaign at 212-268-7474 or e-mail your request and mailing address to tstc@tstc.org. The new brochure can also be viewed on the Campaign website at

<http://www.tstc.org/pricing/parkman/>

CT Transport Strategy Board Bill Released

Last Thursday the Connecticut Legislature's Transportation Committee introduced HB 6985, a bill that would implement the recommendations of the Transportation Strategy Board established by Governor Rowland and other state leaders after a statewide transportation summit last September (MTR #302).

The bill legislates the creation of a permanent Board that would develop a ten-year statewide transportation strategy as its first task by January 2002. In addition, the bill defines five Transportation Investment Areas and **appropriates roughly \$40 million** for a variety of transit and highway studies, as well as bus service expansions in the I-95 corridor and Hartford area.

However, unless amended, the bill runs the risk of promoting yet another toothless advisory committee. The bill does not assign the Strategy Board any substantive role in review of ConnDOT's annual operating and capital budget or in the appointment of a Commissioner of Transportation. Neither does it provide the Board with the \$10 million budget for staffing and operations requested by the current Strategy Board. Equally as important, the bill **does not require representation of environmental community**, commuter advocates, and labor organizations on the Board. These concerns will be aired by members of the Transportation Choices Coalition and others at a public hearing scheduled for Monday, March 19th (see calendar).

Nassau Warned State Bus Funds Can't Last

On March 8th, *Newsday* published a letter to the editor by State Senator Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre). The letter warns that Nassau County cannot continue to depend on emergency state funding to maintain existing service for the Long Island Bus system. He writes: "With an \$8 million subsidy saving Long Island Bus and the \$105 million bailout, New York State's taxpayers have made a tremendous commitment to Nassau. But **the county must kick its addiction to state money.**"

Nassau County has cut its contribution to Long Island Bus down to \$7 million in 2001, 1/3 of its previous annual commitment. Riders are asking the County for secure and increased funding so service can be added on crowded routes (MTR #307)

National VMT Declines in 2000

According to end-of-year data recently released by the Federal Highway Administration, **national vehicle miles traveled dropped last year** for the first time in twenty years. Although the decrease was a mere .1%, the negative percentage is remarkable given the average 2-5% annual increase that has persisted since 1980. Following a three year trend of slowing VMT growth, the downturn is particularly of interest in that, unlike declines of the 1970's, it did not accompany a recession or oil shortage. Instead, 1997-2000 were marked by a healthy economy and sustained, rapid growth in transit ridership (MTR #303).

Kalikow Offers Hope for 2nd Ave Line, Opening for Pricing and the G

New Metropolitan Transportation Authority chair Peter Kalikow told the *Daily News* last week he was committed to constructing a full-length Second Avenue Subway. Kalikow presented the issue mainly as one of mounting a successful lobbying campaign for funds from Washington, rather discussing how Albany can foot its likely share of the bill.

Kalikow also said **the MTA would begin to look into congestion pricing** at its bridges and tunnels. This would be a welcome development, since the MTA under its previous leadership remained aloof from growing regional agency and public interest in anti-congestion incentive toll policies (MTR #247). Although no MTA toll increase is in the offing, it's important that the agency's staff be prepared with a policy proposal when a change in toll rates does eventually occur. By several accounts, Kalikow was an important source of support for congestion pricing in his recent position on the Port Authority board.

In another signal that Kalikow's management of the MTA may be characterized by a more open, responsive style, Governor Pataki and the MTA announced March 9 that it would slow implementation and **review NYC Transit's plan to stop most G-train service in Queens**. The service change is part of Transit's plan to re-route lines and begin V-train service to use the newly-connected 63rd Street subway tunnel (MTR #303, 306). The G plan has been lambasted by a coalition of Brooklyn neighborhoods who want to maintain convenient access to Queens Plaza transfer points and other Queens destinations.

Safety Advances on Queens Boulevard

The New York City Department of Transportation announced another improvement for pedestrians who cross Queens Boulevard last week: longer walk times during peak traffic hours. Coupled with the Department's recent announcement of additional red light cameras and an ongoing increase in police presence, the agency seems to be **moving away from its previous policy of blaming pedestrians** for being hit by cars (MTR 208).

The lights will now be timed so that pedestrians have 60 seconds instead of 40 seconds to cross the Boulevard. The elderly—who live alongside the boulevard at a higher rate than the city's average—walk at 3.6 feet per second according to City DOT studies. The timing change will allow them to make it across Queens Boulevard in one light cycle at every intersection except at Yellowstone Boulevard.

According to a City DOT report released in the summer of 2000, speeding and lack of adequate time to cross the avenue were the two largest causes of accidents. So, the next short-term goal for the agency is clear: slow cars down. In the longer term, the agency should widen medians (some of which are only 4 feet) and install mid-block crossings.

Thruway Takes Wrong Path For Bridge Study

The NY State Thruway Authority got off on the wrong foot last week with the public participation process for a study that will determine whether the current Tappan Zee Bridge is replaced by a wider span (MTR #296). The Authority **segregated environmental groups**—proponents of near-term travel reduction strategies — into a separate meeting from the engineers and auto and truck trade groups who will undoubtedly advocate for more auto and truck capacity in a larger bridge.

The Hudson River and greenway protection groups that attended this meeting told Thruway representatives that only a single discussion involving all stakeholders would be acceptable. They also said that the Thruway should increase bus and vanpool transit services across the Bridge and implement congestion pricing before a decision is made about whether new capacity is needed.

Prior to the meetings, the Thruway Authority failed to explain to groups what they were being invited to attend. After inquiries, the Campaign discovered that **these are pre-scoping informational meetings**. The public “scoping” hearing — where input is given on the alternatives to be studied — is scheduled for Fall 2001. The study will proceed as a combined Major Investment Study and Environmental Impact Study expected to conclude in 2003. A final document will follow by March 2004 with a Federal record of decision expected by September 2004.

The combined MIS/EIS has never been tried in this region for many good reasons. Well-conducted Major Investment Studies result in a thorough cost-benefit analysis, with a mode-neutral focus and an objective that can be met by a number of alternatives including building nothing. Significant impacts to the environment and human health should be studied separately and avoided, minimized and mitigated. Impacts on the Hudson River will likely be short shifted under the combined approach chosen by the Thruway, the purpose of which is **to streamline the process and move quickly to permitting and construction**. This approach will also cheat the proposal to put commuter rail transit on any new bridge, an addition that would greatly increase the project cost.

Transit was rejected out of hand in the Port Authority Goethals Bridge twin study for failing to meet Federal Transit Administration cost-benefit and ridership criteria. The proposed **Tappan Zee Bridge transit would fare even worse under FTA criteria** for federal funding as the Staten Island-Union/Essex County corridor is much denser than the Rockland-Westchester County corridor. In fact, according to the 2000 census figures

reported in the *New York Times*, Staten Island is 4.6 times as dense as Rockland County.

In the case of the Goethals twin, the Port Authority was left to claim that extra lane space would be set aside on the proposed new bridge to be utilized for rail transit once the money is found. The Thruway may promise the same. However, many will remember that **transit never materialized on the George Washington Bridge** although the lower level was set aside for an A-train connection. The level was later paved over, solidifying Bergen County as a sprawling bedroom community with few transit options and wasting the Bronx with Cross-Bronx Expressway traffic and pollution.

Port Growth, Expansion Continues Apace

The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey announced last week that by various measures port traffic expanded rapidly last year and **has reached record size**. Total general cargo volumes increased 12% over 1999. Standardized container volumes grew by 6% to over 3 million and over 7% more ships made calls at the New Jersey, Staten Island, and Brooklyn ports. The most dramatic growth — a 73% increase in container throughput over 1999 — was seen at the port's newest terminal on Staten Island. The Howland Hook Marine Terminal now handles roughly 20% of all port business, according to the *Staten Island Advance*.

Simultaneously, the Port Authority publicly marked the kick-off of its massive \$3.7 billion port expansion effort which includes the deeper dredging of port channels to attract the industry's largest ships. The authority expects this investment to sustain or increase last year's growth levels, fueling projections that **container trade will quadruple or quintuple by 2020**. Currently, 85% of all port cargo is now moved by truck. Without a dramatic modal shift, the planned expansion will bring further traffic problems by drawing tens of thousands more trucks per day onto the region's roads.

Port Authority officials' comments last week suggest that projects now underway could help. Port Commerce Director Richard Larrabee told the *Journal of Commerce* that improvements to Port Elizabeth's Expressrail facility, including a recently opened railcar storage facility, should **increase on-dock rail capacity to 1 million containers per year**. In 2000, Expressrail served a record 178,000 containers and is nearing capacity. Also, Chris Ragucci, manager of the Howland Hook Terminal told the *Advance* that the Port Authority's recent purchase of 124 acres of adjacent property and railyard refurbishment funded by the NYC Economic Development Corporation should allow a **20% shift to rail transport** after mainland rail links are completed in Union County.

Linked with a barge and rail inland distribution network, these projects could hold truck trips to today's levels as port traffic grows (MTR #300). However, truck capacity expansions like Portway's second phase and the Goethals twin bridge would negate their advances.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

- ⇒ CT Transportation Choices Green Paper
- ⇒ TSTC's Parking Management brochure

1996 Olympics Show Asthma-Traffic Link

A study showing a clear relationship between traffic reduction and reduced incidents of asthma was published in the February 21st issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. During the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, the city virtually banned single occupant cars in downtown Atlanta in order to prevent gridlock. Morning rush hour traffic volumes decreased by more than 22%. This decreased the peak amount of ozone by 28% during the 17 days of the Olympics.

The scientists who conducted the study compared respiratory acute care events hospitalizations and emergency room visits during the Olympics to the four weeks before and after the games. They found that **asthma related acute care events decreased by 41.6% during the games**. However, other respiratory ailments did not show a relationship to the improved air quality.

In 1999, New York City had approximately 46.26 asthma-related hospitalizations for every 10,000 people (any age.) In the worst pockets, the rates of hospitalization for children was as high as 200 per 10,000. The Atlanta study provides a clear mandate to transportation agencies around the region to reduce the vehicle miles traveled in the region.

Parking Management Works in Minneapolis

A recent report to the US EPA by transportation management professionals describes seven Minneapolis-St. Paul employers including American Express who implemented parking management strategies discussed in the Tri-State Transportation Campaign brochure. As a group, these businesses and government offices **increased the number of employees commuting to work via transit by 47%**. A few examples are described below:

The University of St. Thomas began offering its staff a \$100 monthly payment to forego parking (subsidized at \$137.50 per month). Twenty three percent of eligible employees gave up their parking space and took a shuttle, bus, or carpool or biked or walked, to work.

American Express Financial Advisors gave employees discounted "Metropass" bus passes for \$25 a month. Aggressive promotion of the program to existing and new employees increased bus ridership from 47% of employees to 68%.

Hennepin County offered employees an additional 40% discount on bus passes, using money from payroll tax savings from their federal pre-tax transit (TransitChek or Deduct-A-Ride) and parking benefits program. The total cost for bus passes fell from \$50/month to \$18, inducing 650 of 11,000 eligible employees to switch to riding the bus. Read the full report at www.mplstmo.org.

CALENDAR

March 19, 10:00am Public Hearing on the Transportation Strategy Board legislation (HB 6985), Rm. 2B, Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT

March 19, 9:30am NYC Transit Committee of MTA Board will hear citizen testimony on Manhattan Bridge diversion/"W" train plan. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 718-243-4321.

March 22, noon NYC Transit Riders Council meeting, MTA building, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Fl. Boardroom, Manhattan, ?'s 212-878-7087,

March 23, 1 pm (UPDATED) "The Green Port Path to Recapture Market Share" City Club of NY forum, with Frank McArdle, General Contractors Assn, Chris Ward, Port Authority, others. National Arts Club, Gramercy Park South, Manhattan. \$?'s 718-789-7692 or ALP140@aol.com.

March 27, 6pm Auto-Free NY meeting. "Remembering John Lindsay - Champion for Auto-Free Space." Donald Elliot, former chair, NYC Planning Commission. 104 Washington Street, Manhattan. 212-475-3394.

March 29, 1:15pm NYMTC Annual Council Meeting, NY Quality Communities, sustainable development study discussed, One Bowling Green, U.S. Custom House, Auditorium, Basement Level, Manhattan, ?'s 212-938-3300

April Conferences

April 10,11,&12 Transaction 2001, Tropicana Resort Hotel, Casino and Conference Center, Atlantic City, NJ, \$, 908-903-1077

April 23 NY Smart Growth Conference, Albany. Program in formation. Contact National Audubon Society of NY, 518-869-9731 or aheadphy@audubon.org

April 26, 6pm "Thinking Big Again: How to Implement Large Transportation Projects", multiple speakers, Cooper Union, Wolman Auditorium, 21E, 51 Astor Place, Manhattan, 845-634-7178.

April 27, 7:30am-1pm Regional Plan Association Regional Assembly: "Re-Engineering the Region's Centers." Grand Hyatt, Manhattan. 212-253-2727, www.rpa.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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