

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 313

April 16, 2001

NEWS

Long Island's Traffic Still NY State's Deadliest

Reportedly, NY State DOT is close to announcing the first project selections for its Long Island "Local Safe Streets and Traffic Calming" program (MTR #302).

The news comes none too soon. 1999 data compiled by the Dept. of Motor Vehicles show that among NY counties, **Suffolk and Nassau rank one and two for total traffic deaths**. Suffolk's 153 fatalities accounted for over 14 percent of NY State's 1,088 vehicle-related deaths. The kill rate is almost twice Suffolk's 7.6% share of the state population.

Nassau County was close behind, accounting for over 11 percent of the state's traffic deaths. Nassau has about 7.2% of the state's population.

A detailed transportation safety statistical report for 1998 recently issued by the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council showed that the rates are almost as bad when it comes to **pedestrian fatalities**. In that category, Suffolk's 43 1998 deaths were outpaced only in Brooklyn and Queens (70 and 48, respectively).

NY Rolls on with Big Long Island Road Plan

NY State DOT officials are stumping across Long Island, trying to sell the agency's "Long Island Transportation Plan 2000 (LITP)." The overall scheme calls for widening most major highways in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, leading critics to dub it the "**Long Island Total Paving**" plan. DOT says the road widenings will promote development of an express bus network, but is exceedingly weak on financing, institutional and ridership details (see MTR #'s 263, 273, 278).

Long Island environmentalists and community activists have already declared the plan in its present form dead on arrival. DOT may be sticking to its guns, but considering the bad public reaction to its recent Long Island road expansion plans, like along Route 347, have received lately, it seems that DOT's Long Island office is **operating on auto-pilot** rather than taking serious political stock of where its proposals stand. Opposition along Rte 347 in Brookhaven is likely a dim shadow of what the DOT would face if it seriously proposed widening a highway like the **Southern State Parkway** through densely settled portions of Nassau County.

A plan as radical and contradiction-laced as LITP will probably remain under the radar screen for some time. Its official adoption and release would create a noisy controversy that **Governor Pataki doesn't need** as his administration prepares for next year's re-election race.

Suffolk had more than twice as many pedestrian deaths as the Bronx, and also beat out Manhattan. Suffolk has slightly more population than the Bronx, and slightly less than Manhattan. Its total accounted for 11.5% of the state's pedestrian fatalities. Nassau's 34 pedestrian deaths represented 9 percent of the state total.

Among downstate suburban counties, LI tallied **75% of 1998 pedestrian deaths**, though it has 58% of the combined population of Suffolk, Nassau, Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Rockland and Orange Counties.

NJ Commissioner Claims "Fix It First" Mandate Will be Followed

About 20 transit, labor, smart growth, environmental and public interest groups wrote to Acting Gov. DiFrancesco last Tuesday pointing out that DOT's proposed capital program and longer-term capital investment strategy do not comport with the Transportation Trust Fund mandate to **reduce the backlog of structurally deficient bridges** and road surfaces by half in five years. DOT claims the goals are "not feasible."

In a forum of state transportation leaders at last week's Atlantic City "TransAction" conference, state Transportation Commissioner Jim Weinstein reassured the Tri-State Campaign that the fix-it-first mandate would be complied with. But this statement stood in stark contrast to the capital budget presentations DOT staff gave earlier in the conference.

DOT's capital program managers Mark Stout and Bob Harris ignored the Trust Fund goals, and referred back to the **less ambitious internal DOT goals** set in 1998. They claimed the number of bridges being declared deficient would prevent DOT from "paddling any faster" to fix them. For instance, the 3-mile long elevated Pulaski Skyway is scheduled to be rated as deficient in the next year or two. It was clear from the presentation that DOT is pursuing its bridge repair program as **incidental to its road-building** and reconstruction program, and is not serious about fixing half the structurally deficient bridges in five years.

But NJDOT Plans To Add Another 500 Highway Miles

In a preview of its long range plan, NJDOT staff told the audience that the agency plans to add 20 new lane miles of **highway capacity** per year until 2025. The agency has identified a \$85.8 billion capital program, from

which DOT would receive 53.2% of the funds and NJTransit 46.8% over time. However, NJDOT staff excluded from that capital program the \$3-5 billion cost of the “Access to the Region’s Core” passenger tunnel needed to accommodate **NJ-NY commuter rail growth**.

While DOT staff and consultants claimed the 20 lane-miles per year would tally only 1-2% of the total highway capital budget, DOT’s freeway-type projects in recent years have run much higher. At an estimated \$30 million per mile, the tally would be more than \$14 billion, or **15% of the total highway capital program**.

The cheapest new freeway DOT has built is the Hightstown Bypass, at about \$15 million per mile. The new Rt 21 Freeway in Passaic and Nutley cost \$35 million/mile.

Port Authority Steps Towards Non-Stop Tolls

For the first time, starting March 16th, the Port Authority will allow drivers with E-ZPass to travel through a completely unmanned toll plaza. The Palisades Interstate Parkway toll plaza at the George Washington Bridge approach — previously closed during weekday nights — will be open for **electronic toll collection only** from 11pm-5am Monday through Friday and 11pm-7am on weekends. Cash-payers must continue to follow the detour through Fort Lee to the bridge.

According to the PA, **skyrocketing E-ZPass usage** following the agency’s March 25th toll increase made the move possible. The Port Authority told the *Bergen Record* that on the Friday after the toll schedule change, 80% of all drivers using the Palisades Parkway plaza paid electronically between 6am-9am, when drivers with E-ZPass receive \$1 peak-hour discount. 70% of all payments at that plaza are made with E-ZPass.

Accustoming drivers to unmanned plazas is an important step towards replacing traditional toll booths with overhead gantries that read E-ZPass transponders at normal highway speeds. But overnight Palisades drivers will still be required to slow down to the day-time limit of 5 mph for at least three more years. A Port Authority spokesman said that removing the cash booths and building low- to high-speed merging lanes are the central challenges facing non-stop toll project designers. Commuters are likely to be clamoring for the upgrade sooner as more and more begin using E-ZPass.



At a meeting earlier this month, the Port Authority Board approved the appointment of Neil Levin, a former investment banker and New York insurance commissioner, as Port Authority executive director.

The Board also approved the first of \$1 billion worth of PATH system capital improvements funded by the recent toll and fare increase. The PA will buy **245 new PATH cars**, rehab another 95 cars and install a new **state-of-the-art subway signal system**. With 260,000 average weekday riders, up 24% since 1996, PATH is close to capacity. Better signals and more cars will permit faster rush-hour headways and more trains.

Ferrer, Vallone Beat Toll-Removal Drums

Mayoral candidates visited Staten Island last Tuesday evening. The forum provided Bronx Borough President **Fernando Ferrer** and City Council Speaker **Peter Vallone** with another chance to decry the tolls on the Verrazano Bridge (see *MTR #'s* 305, 306, 308), and for Comptroller Alan Hevesi to state support for a cross-harbor rail freight tunnel. Ferrer also called for sprucing up the **Staten Island Ferry** and its terminals, and increasing its service frequency, garnering front-page S.I. Advance coverage. Ferrer’s early interest in favor of eliminating Verrazano tolls became clearer with the news that the Staten Island Democratic organization has thrown its lot in with his candidacy.

Even the most fervent toll-hating Staten Islander should note that **the Mayor cannot simply lift MTA tolls**, though toll policy is an area where he could bargain with the Governor and transit officials. Reducing MTA revenue also flies in the face of Ferrer’s lofty goal of seeing a new Second Avenue subway run from the northern Bronx to downtown Manhattan.

A more cogent position for candidates interested in Staten Island transportation would be to call on the Port Authority to scuttle its proposal to **“twin” the Goethals Bridge**, a project that would open the way to Staten Island for more cars and trucks. Some of the money saved by ditching the project should be used instead for the mass transit improvements Staten Island has clamored for for decades.

Revised CT Transport Strategy Bill Released

Last week, the CT legislature’s Transportation Committee released a revised version of HB 6985, the bill to create a new Transportation Strategy Board and to fund \$40 million in quick-fix transportation projects

Important change to the bill are the following:

A section would now create a Board of Directors to operate and develop Bradley Airport. A member of the Board of Directors would also be a member of the Transportation Strategy Board.

The criteria that the new Transportation Strategy Board must follow in building its ten-year transportation development plan now includes Connecticut’s Conservation and Development Plan, the state document that guides land use. The **Transportation Choices Coalition**, a 14-group alliance that includes CT Fund for the Environment and the Tri-State Campaign, has called for a moratorium on highway expansion and construction in Plan-defined conservation and preservation areas.

The bill directs **\$50 million** to be spent on **twenty-plus projects or initiatives across the state**, ranging from highway and transit studies to more bus service in Hartford and the coastal corridor. However, unlike the original bill, how much money will be allocated to specific projects is not identified.

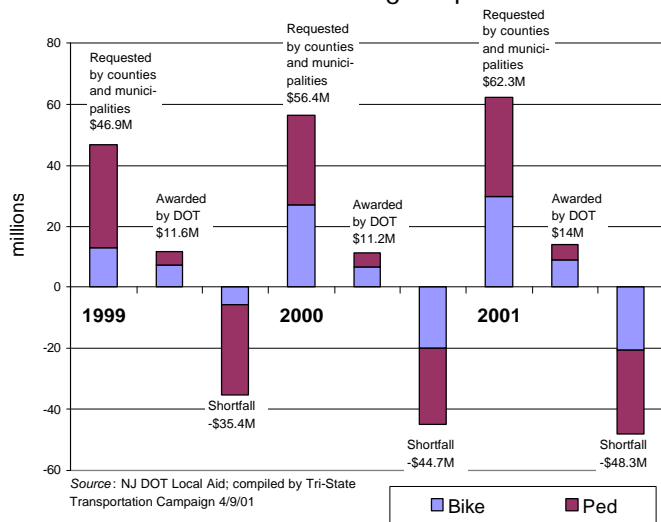
Transportation Choices Coalition groups joined other constituencies in expressing dismay that the revision still

does not give the Board a substantive role in reviewing the Department of Transportation budget or approving appointment of the Transportation Commissioner. The new bill also continues to deny the Board independent funds and staff, leading many to wonder what it will be able to accomplish.

NJ Bike-Ped Funds Still Fall Short of Growing Demand

Janine Bauer, Tri-State Campaign director, presented the data on NJ DOT Local Aid funding represented below to the bicycle and pedestrian advocates assembled at last week's TransAction conference. She urged that advocates **demand more state and federal funding**. The chart does not include federal "Enhancements" funds, which do not significantly change the overall picture. Other speakers indicated that local funds were a less complicated and perhaps more fruitful source of funding, especially for planing, in the first instance. Many local officials still exhibit confusion about whether new bike lanes and paths have to comply with NJ environmental review procedures, or are exempt, as they are from federal laws. **In fact, they are exempt.** The Campaign will try to get this word out to county planners and regional DOT managers.

Local Bicycle and Pedestrian Project Awards Fall Far Short of Funding Requests



CT Business Coalition Wants Action

A state-wide Connecticut business association has launched a major public relations and organizing campaign to back legislative creation of a long-term transportation strategy board (see story at left). With transportation reform at the top of its political agenda, the **Connecticut Business and Industry Association** (CBIA) has led the development of the 80-plus member "Coalition to Improve Transportation."

Coalition members include forty city Chambers of Commerce, prominent business associations like the South Area Commerce and Industry Association (SACIA) and the Bridgeport Regional Business Council as well as AAA-Hartford, the Associated General Contractors of CT, the Association of Commuter Rail Employees, and the Regional Plan Association. The coalition is advertising its agenda with radio spots, displays in train stations and stores and **I-95 billboard advertisements** that exhort "Improve Transportation Now!"

CBIA backs the Strategy Board bill in its current form, which limits representation on board to **agency heads, private sector representatives, and municipal representatives** from newly-defined "Transportation Investment Areas." Groups including Environmental Defense, the Sierra Club, the Connecticut Rail Commuter Council, the Connecticut Bicycle Coalition, and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign support the notion of an oversight board, but argue that it must include groups representing environmental, smart growth and transit commuter points of view.

Key NYC Greenway Link In Place

Last Tuesday, the ribbon fell on Riverside Park South, opening a new park path between 59th and 72nd Streets along the Hudson River for walkers and cyclists.

Although the path is not long, it is important. The thirteen-block route is adjacent to the old Penn Central rail yard, on land owned by developer Donald Trump and represents many years of negotiation between Trump, West Side civic groups, and New York City. The segment from 59th to 68th Street is an interim trail that will be incorporated into Riverside South Park as the adjacent Trump housing development proceeds southward. North of 68th, the Trump property abuts the Riverside Park South. Trump is building the new Park for the City in exchange for construction permits (MTR #287).

Even more significantly, the Riverside South path will soon act as a much-needed connector between the hugely popular state-owned premier waterfront bicycle and pedestrian path in construction to the south and the City's Riverside Park promenade and paths. Though a joint project of NYC Parks and Trump, the NYS DOT, which is working on nearby Route 9A (West Side Highway) actually built the Riverside South path to speed its completion.

The state-owned path can currently be cycled and

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walked to 59th Street, but will be cosmetically completed and officially opened in its entirety this summer. Together the two improvements will provide a car-free corridor between the City's densely residential Upper West Side and Midtown and downtown business and entertainment districts, a development many expect to significantly boost Manhattan cycling trips.

The long-term goal of the City and advocates is a continuous Hudson River Greenway and pedestrian/cycling path from Manhattan's southern tip to the George Washington Bridge at 181st Street and beyond through the Bronx or further into the Hudson Valley. Manhattan sections still unfinished include a 12 foot extension over the Hudson's rocky shore between between 83-91st Streets and a continuation of the path between 125th and 145th Streets to connect Riverside and Fort Washington Parks. Both projects are on schedule for completion within five years.

Planning documents suggest that the Manhattan portion alone will attract over 1,000 cycling trips per hour during the three morning and evening peak hours, making it the nation's busiest cycling path.

Fairfield County Activists Criticize ConnDOT Capital Plans

Speakers at a public hearing on the CT State Transportation Improvement Program — an inter-agency capital program planning document — were outspoken in their opposition to the document's focus on car travel and highways, the *Stanford Advocate* reported last Friday:

"We are concerned that this reflects a pattern of investing in road construction rather than transit options. There is a preponderance of funding for highways and roads here," a representative of the Greenwich League of Women Voters was quoted saying in the *Advocate*.

A ConnDOT planner replied that without more funds, the capital program must focus on "maintaining existing resources."

However, Jim Cameron, vice chairman of the Connecticut Commuter Council pointed out the transit system's greatest state-of-repair need — new train cars to replace the ConnDOT aging fleet — is not addressed in the State TIP.

ELECTRONIC MTR
Mobilizing the Region can be received as e-mail and read on-line at www.tstc.org.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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CALENDAR

April 16, 2pm NJ Transit Board of Directors meeting, Camden, NJ, 973-491-8800

April 17, 10:30am Ferry Coalition Meeting, Bridgeport City Hall, Chase Manhattan, 999 Broad St., Bridgeport, ?'s Ashley Tyrell 212-938-3353

April 18, 1-4pm NYC City Council hearing on preventing further demolition of the High Line rail structure, City Hall Council Chambers, ?'s, Friends of the High Line, highline@yahoogroups.com

April 18, 3:30pm NYC Transit Riders Council annual Bus Forum, Queens Borough Hall, Rm. 213.120-55 Queens Boulevard, 212 878-7087

April 18, 7:30pm Monthly meeting of the CT Metro-North/Shore Line East Rail Commuter Council. SACIA, 1 Landmark Square, Stamford. www.trainweb.org/ct, 203-655-0138.

April 19, noon Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org

April 19, 9am Central Jersey Transportation Forum, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Building 3A.005, 311 Pennington-Rocky Hill Road, Pennington, NJ. Linda Haskins, DVRPC 215-238-2872

April 19, Noon. Metro North Commuter Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 10th floor. Manhattan, 212-878-7087.

April 19, 6pm Full Length Second Avenue subway project kick-off/public meeting. MTA/NYC Transit are beginning a supplemental environmental impact statement to extend the earlier 2nd Ave. study. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 5th floor. www.mta.nyc.ny.us 718-694-5164.

April 21, 9am-3pm Route 303 Sustainable Development Study Public Meeting, Orangetown Town Hall, 26 Orangeburge Rd., 212-938-3376

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

April 24, 8:30am-2pm Gallivan Conference on Real Property Law, "Sprawl and Its Enemies," University of Connecticut School of Law, Starr Hall Main Reading Room, Hartford, CT, ?'s and reservations, 860.570.513 or ahoben@law.uconn.edu

April 24, 6pm Auto-Free NY meeting. "Using carrots and sticks to cut traffic in NYC." George Haikalis, Inst. for Rational Urban Mobility. 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394.

— More calendar items at www.tstc.org —