

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 315

April 30, 2001

NEWS

More Mayoral Meditations

At a Sierra Club forum in Manhattan last weekend, Bronx Borough President and NYC mayoral candidate Fernando Ferrer was asked if his plan to eliminate Verrazano Bridge tolls for Staten Islanders (*MTR* #305) would encourage more car travel or endanger MTA projects such as the Second Avenue subway.

He said, “**there won’t be an increase in cars** because [the toll elimination] would be coded in EZPass,” and went on to say “we dare not not build the Second Avenue Subway,” but that building it “doesn’t depend on tolls.” He was not specific about replacing toll revenue lost to the MTA.

While a questioner pointed out that **most New Yorkers** traveling in the city **pay subway and bus fares**, he justified toll elimination by saying that Verrazano tolls “artificially divided” the city. He ignored audience members who pointed out that only Staten Islanders have free transit options (the S.I. Ferry and partly fare-free Staten Island Railway).

The Sierra Club has interviewed Alan Hevesi, Peter Vallone and Fernando Ferrer so far. Each has said he would support a three-month trial of **ridding the Prospect and Central Parks loop roads of cars**.

S.I. Hopefuls Pummel Goethals Twin

Democratic candidates for Staten Island’s north shore City Council seat agree that “twinning” the Goethals Bridge, as the Port Authority proposes, will mean **more traffic for the Island**.

“I oppose the twinning. It would only increase the capacity, which means an increase in traffic volume. The Port Authority should invest in a light rail that goes over the bridge for a quicker commute through New Jersey,” candidate Debi Rose said at a March forum.

“A twin bridge would only put **more cars on the Staten Island Expressway**. I adamantly oppose that bridge,” Michael McMahon, another candidate, said in comments reported by the *S.I. Advance*. Candidate Jon DelGiorno also said he opposed the twinning, but wanted the existing bridge upgraded.

The candidates also united in calling for more MTA attention to Staten Island, including north shore rail transit and better bus service. They were skeptical that a harbor freight tunnel would ever be built

The north shore seat is held by Jerome O’Donovan, Democratic candidate for Borough President. (For recent Goethals Twin coverage: *MTR* #'s 300, 310).

Groups Call on Governor, Lawmakers: Hold NJ DOT to Repair Promises

At a press conference last Friday at the rusting, decrepit Alexander Road Bridge in West Windsor, seven environmental and transportation reform groups called on Acting Governor DiFrancesco and the NJ Legislature to direct the NJ Dept. of Transportation to meet legislative goals for bridge and road repair. The 2000 Transportation Trust Fund Law directs the Department to create a capital investment plan that meets the goal of reducing the backlog of “structurally deficient” bridge and pavement projects by half within five years. The DOT has called the repair goal “not feasible” and the plan submitted to the legislature does not even attempt to meet it.

“Last year elected officials and the public agreed that bridge and road repair was the **#1 spending priority**,” said Tri-State Transportation Campaign’s Jennifer Jaroski. “**DOT is breaking the law** and acting against that consensus by spending so little on repair.”

“The Alexander Road Bridge is the DOT poster child when the agency needs money, but isn’t scheduled for repair in the next five years.” said Sandy Batty of the Association of NJ Environmental Commissions. NJ Transportation Commissioner Weinstein stumped for more repair funds at a press conference **at the bridge in 1999**, but no work on it is in DOT’s program.

DOT officials have twice in recent years campaigned for additional public funds on the premise that the new money would be used to fix the state’s aging roads and bridges. The Department gained \$250 million to fix bridges when voters supported the 1999 Bridge Bond Act (*MTR* #244).

In 2000, voters dedicated additional portions of gas and sales taxes to the Trust Fund, assuring DOT a windfall of \$2.5 billion for capital projects through 2004 (*MTR* #294). A major **selling point for voters** was Trust Fund Law that authorized requires DOT to meet the goal of reducing the backlog of bridge and pavement repair projects by half.

“Voters believed they would be speeding up repair of local roads and bridges when they came out in 1999 and 2000,” said John Guinan of NJPIRG Citizen’s Lobby. “The Governor and Legislature need to restore public trust by telling the DOT to spend more this year to meet the repair goals.”

In the 2002 capital program alone, DOT plans to invest \$66 million from the Transportation Trust Fund

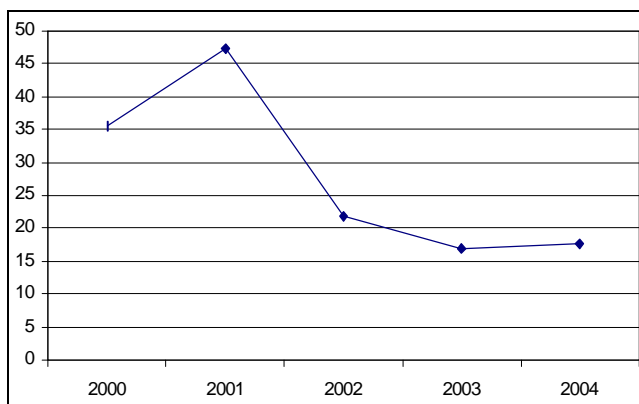
on new highways and highway widening, three times more than the \$22 million it plans to spend on bridge repair. In fact, unless DOT plans change, investment of **Transportation Trust Fund money** in road and bridge repair **will actually be lower** in the years after the legislature made repair a priority in the Trust Fund Law than before the Law was approved (see graph).

Acting Governor DiFrancesco and the legislature will be reviewing the DOT's 2002 capital program and budget over the next month. DiFrancesco himself drafted the Transportation Trust Fund law that included the road and bridge repair goals and the full legislature approved it by a large margin last summer.

"It is a dark day when citizens have to **hold public officials accountable to a law they wrote**," said Dave Pringle of the New Jersey Environmental Federation.

The Dept. of Transportation was criticized for inattention to road and bridge repair goals during legislative budget and capital program hearings last week (MTR #314). Another controversial revelation during hearings was the fact that the 2002 budget would redirect \$90 million of Trust Fund money to the general fund, while the Trust Fund takes on \$30 million more in debt.

"There is enough Trust Fund money to start fixing the roads and bridges most motorists drive over," said Ms. Jaroski." The DOT 2002 capital program and budget must be approved before June 30, 2001 — the end of the fiscal year. The seven groups at the press conference urged elected officials to take immediate action by redirecting \$40 million towards meeting the road and bridge repair goals this year. The groups conference were the Association of NJ Environmental Commissions, the NJ Environmental Federation, the NJ Environmental Lobby, NJPIRG Citizen Lobby, the BJ Chapter of the Sierra Club, and the Sensible Transportation Options Partnership, a local civic group.



NJ DOT capital program documents show Trust Fund spending (figures in millions of dollars) on bridge repair projects plummets after 2001, even though the Trust Fund law says fixing roads and bridges should be the top priority for coming years.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

Fit to Re-Print

*During the past week, newspapers across the region weighed in with **sharp, on-the-money commentary** on critical transportation issues. In our view, each of the pieces is worth reproducing here in part.*

*The Asbury Park Press bluntly labeled NJ DOT's **flouting of the Transportation Trust Fund Law** followed here in recent months as a "broken pledge" and "betrayal of voters' trust.*

*The Daily News, reflecting on a report projecting high NYC **Transit budget deficits**, came out with a piece one activist said was worth "keeping in the files as we move into next year's race for Governor."*

*Finally, the Trenton Times echoed critics of NJ politicians who have waged a pandering campaign this year for **elimination of highway tolls**.*

APP: "Repair Work Pledge Broken"

"When the Legislature approved a plan to renew the transportation trust fund last year, it asked voters to dedicate all of the gasoline tax and part of the sales tax for transportation projects ... voters said yes.

"Now, the state Department of Transportation is reneging on the deal and the promise that the state would repair within five years half of all New Jersey bridges with structure problems..."

"The trust fund was hotly debated. Those concerned with the deterioration of the state's roads and bridges reluctantly supported the bill after being assured such work would be a priority. Now the state's transportation commissioner says the compromise 'fix-it-first' agreement is 'not feasible.'

"This is betrayal of voters' trust. If the bridge repair schedule wasn't worth the paper it was printed on, the ballot question deserved to be defeated."

Daily News: "Subway Fare Must Be Fair"

"Facing annual budget gaps of up to \$406 million over the next three years, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority may soon be pressured to hike subway fares. That should be avoided. The agency must find a way to keep its finances on track.

"The first remedy to cover the reported shortfall is for the state to make its transit aid formula fair and equitable. The current system has been long out of whack, leaving it ripe for repair.

"While the city system moves 83% of mass transit riders in the state, it gets only 64% of Albany transit aid. That's unacceptable.

"No matter how you look at it, city riders get a raw deal. While straphangers pay nearly two-thirds of the cost of their service, LIRR commuters, for example, pay less than half.

"Add to this the unfair distribution of the \$800 million surplus from the MTA's bridge and tunnel tolls. This money is split about 50-50 between the TA and the commuter railroads. Yet the TA carries many more people, and the bulk of the tolls are paid by New York City residents. Why should the city subsidize the wealthier suburbs? Answer: It shouldn't. Toll receipts must be divided fairly.

"...if deficit estimates of \$318 million in 2003 and \$406 million in 2004 pan out, the state has a responsibility to help find the money to avoid a subway fare increase."

Trenton Times: "The No-Toll Pipe Dream"

"It's folly for political candidates to talk of tearing down the toll plazas on the Garden State Parkway and giving everybody a free ride...

"The candidates are holding out false hopes. No matter how the numbers are crunched, they won't add up to anything that makes practical sense.

"...Without tolls [the state] would have to shell out \$56 million for annual payments on a Parkway debt that exceeds \$600 million. (The debt would have to be refinanced; it couldn't just be shifted to state government.) The road also has some \$200 million in E-ZPass obligations to be dealt with. It has major construction needs, such as rebuilding the Raritan River bridge. Police patrols on the Parkway cost \$23 million a year. Routine repairs add another \$25 million; snowplowing, weed cutting and other seasonal requirements amount to millions of dollars more. Simply demolishing the toll booths could cost \$50 million.

"...The Legislature has demonstrated time and again that it doesn't have the stomach to enact even a modest gasoline tax increase to meet compelling highway, bridge and mass transit needs. Why would it want to try to find money to replace a system that's self-funding?"

"...motorists dislike the Parkway's pay-by-the-trip arrangement, but probably less for the out-of-pocket expenses it imposes than for the awful traffic jams it generates at the toll plazas at rush hour. The potential solution to that problem is an expanded use of E-ZPass, which allows subscribers to roll through the toll lanes without stopping. Where possible, lanes should be upgraded to enable E-ZPass traffic to clear them at highway speeds."

Despite "Fix Transportation" Consensus CT Lawmakers Squabble Over Nickels, Dimes

Earlier this month, the Democratically-controlled CT General Assembly Appropriations Committee approved a two-year state spending plan that **reduced funding for new transportation initiatives** by more than one-third of the amount dedicated in Governor Rowland's budget.

In his February budget presentation, Rowland set aside \$10 million of the FY2001 budget surplus for the operating costs of an independent permanent transportation oversight board, and \$40 million for short-term transit and highway projects and studies. In addition, Rowland proposed spending 50% of all budget surplus funds that exceeded \$531 million on transportation improvements (*MTR* #304). Current projections peg the surplus at \$600 million, yielding **\$35 million more for transportation** under the Governor's formula. For comparison, note that \$35 million added by the legislature last year paid for new New Haven Line locomotives and rail cars (*MTR* #270). However, Democrats in the legislature are trying to nix transportation-related use of the state surplus.

Observers note that CT's transit capital and operating budget increases that will be required to make serious inroads in reducing the state's congestion and car dependence **dwarfs the current sum in contention**. The Transportation Choices Coalition policy "green paper" recommends that state leaders create a new dedicated mass transit operating fund similar to the New York Mass Transport Operating Assistance Fund created in 1981. More sustainable, predictable revenue will allow transit planners to offer service at frequencies that will attract new riders, and put capital dollars to better use building new transit rather than new highway capacity.

House Speaker Moira Lyons acknowledged as much in February when she told business leaders in Fairfield County, **"we're going to have to raise a lot of money"** and asked for their political support (*MTR* #305). Rather than put off this tough job, lawmakers should grapple with it now, and develop more ambitious mass transit capital and operating programs in the process.

Rail Station Shuttles for LI Get a Start in Islip

Last week, Suffolk Transportation Inc. announced the launch of a new rush hour station shuttle service for Long Island Railroad commuters in Central Islip. The door-to-door service will **deliver train commuters to the station** in the morning and from the station to home at night. Established by the Town of Islip and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, the Central Islip Railroad Jitney Service is funded by a grant from the NY State Department of Transportation. The service is intended as a pilot project that will promote shuttles for other Long Island towns and villages.

"The institution of jitney service will make it easier for the people of Central Islip to get around," said Islip Town Supervisor Pete McGowan. "It gives commuters

another option and an example of how different levels of government can cooperate with the private sector.”

“By signing up for the jitney, Central Islip commuters can do something better with their morning than looking for a parking space. At the same time, they will be reducing pollution and congestion,” said Tri-State Campaign Long Island coordinator Chris Hewitt.

According to LIRR data, **1,200 rail commuters now vie for 650 Central Islip parking spaces.** Although a significant portion of LIRR commuters live within 1½ miles of the station, 60-75% drive and park. For more about the shuttle, visit www.suffolkbus.com/jitney.html

In early 1998, the Campaign helped to launch a rail station shuttle in Maplewood, NJ. Today, the Maplewood jitney picks up 200 NJTransit passengers — 12%

of the town’s ridership — along two full routes. A survey found that 45% of jitney customers previously drove to the station and that half had moved to the Maplewood area in the last two years, citing the jitney as a factor.

The success of the Maplewood program led congressmen from NJ to obtain a \$6 million in earmarks to fund station jitanies and other NJ Transit station improvements. This allowed NJTransit to begin a **state-wide Community Shuttle Program** in Fall, 1999. Under the Program, rail station communities can apply for grants of \$70,000 to purchase mini-buses and up to \$30,000 annually in operating assistance. NJTransit has already awarded twenty grants to sixteen towns and expects to award twenty more grants this year.

CALENDAR

April 30, 4-8pm NY State Thruway/MTA open house for Tappan Zee Bridge replacement study. Palisades Mall — Raso Community Room, West Nyack. 518-436-3190.

May 2, 4-8pm NY State Thruway/MTA open house for Tappan Zee Bridge replacement study. SUNY Purchase — Humanities Bldg. 735 Anderson Hill road, Purchase. 518-436-3190

May 3, 11:45 Transportation Research Forum, “US Commuter Rail Services-Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow,” Charles H. Banks, Giovannis’s Atrium, 100 Washington St., 212-435-4086

May 3, 7pm: Dan Burden, Walkable Communities presents, “Redesigning Rte 25 and our Communities,” Longwood Jr. High, Longwood, LI, Longwood Alliance and Sustainable L.I. 631-924-1427

May 4, 9am-1pm Alternative fuels vehicle workshop. City College, West Harlem Environmental Action. Steinman Hall at 140th Street and Convent Ave., Manhattan. 212-961-1000 x304

May 4, 1:30-7pm “The Future of Planning in NYC.” Panels, Mayoral candidates, more. Planning programs of Columbia U., Hunter College and Pratt Institute. Hunter College Auditorium, 129 E. 79th St. www.nyu.edu/wagner/urban.planning

May 10, 8-10am Regional Business Partnership transportation awards breakfast. 1 Newark Center, 22nd floor. \$ 973-242-4219 or rbp@rbp.org.

May 12, 10-12am Jersey City Landmarks Conservancy National Historic Preservation Week Walking Tour of the Bergen Arches and Erie Cut, dlevin@jclandmarks.org

May 16, 7pm Monthly meeting of the CT Metro-

North/Shore Line East Rail Commuter Council. ConnDOT, New Haven RR station. www.trainweb.org/ct, 203-655-0138.

May 21, “Taking Back What is Rightfully Yours” NY/NJ Baykeeper conference on the Public Trust Doctrine, helipad site McCarter Highway, Newark ?’s 732.291.0176 and www.nynjbaykeeper.org

May 22, 6-8pm Auto Free New York Meeting, “Transit Riders’ Bill of Rights,” William R. Wright, Secretary NJ Association of Rail Passengers, 104 Washington St., near Rector St., Lower Manhattan, ?’s George Haikalis 212-475-3394

May 23, 1-5pm NYC Bar Association/Transportation Research Forum conference, “Traffic Congestion in the Region: From Standstill to Smooth Sailing,” 42 W. 44th Street, www.abcnyc.org

May 24 2nd Annual New Jersey Environmental Lobby Day, Statehouse, Trenton, NJ, 732-291-0055 (American Littoral Society)

May 24, 11am-2pm New Jersey Dept. Law and Public Safety “Walk Safe NJ” campaign kick-off, Riverfront Stadium, Newark, 609-633-9022

May 29, 1pm NJTPA Board Meeting, NJTPA Headquarters, One Newark Center, 17th Fl., Newark, NJ 973-639-8406

June 7-10 9th Annual Congress for New Urbanism. New York City. Registration info, 800-788-7077, www.cnu.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

MTR#315 Contributing: Lisa Schreibman Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kristen Fountain Executive Director, Janine Bauer

240 West 35th Street #801 , New York, NY 10001 tel. (212) 268-7474 fax (212) 268-7333 tstc@tstc.org