

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Campaign Presses for NJ Compliance with "Fix-it-First" Law

Last week, representatives of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign met with staff for Acting Governor DiFrancesco to discuss the New Jersey Department of Transportation's **defiance of legislated bridge and road repair goals**.

NJ DOT has called the 2000 Transportation Trust Fund Law's directive to reduce the backlog of structurally deficient bridge and pavement repair projects by half within five years "not feasible." However, analysis of the DOT budget shows sufficient state funding has not been allocated to even attempt to meet the goal. In fact, the Department cut its annual spending of Transportation Trust Fund money on bridge repair by half in the 2002 capital program over the 2000 and 2001 program which was submitted to the legislature before repair was designated a central spending goal in Trust Fund Law (MTR #316)

Discussion with the Governor's office is ongoing, but Campaign representatives said little progress was made in the meeting. Reform advocates are seeking at least an **additional \$45 million** for structurally deficient bridge and road pavement projects in the DOT 2002 capital program. The money could be shifted from new highway projects or be carved out of the \$90 million siphoned off the Transportation Trust Fund for the state's general fund.

After the meeting, the Campaign released a statement warning that it is **prepared to go to court** to enforce the repair priorities if a budget deal is not worked out soon.

The Campaign has repeatedly urged Acting Governor DiFrancesco to direct the Department of Transportation to rewrite its capital program. The group was joined last month by dozens of environmental, civic, and transit rider groups who wrote to Governor DiFrancesco, calling on him to hold the Department to bridge and road repair priorities. Concerned legislators like **Assembly Appropriations Chair Richard Bagger** have also written urging the Governor to take action on this issue.

"Acting Governor DiFrancesco drafted the Trust Fund law as State Senate President, so he knows what it says

and requires," said Jennifer Jaroski, Campaign spokesperson. "To comply with the law and to uphold voter trust, he should direct the DOT to spend more money on bridge and road repair in 2002 and the years to come."

### NJDOT Budget "An Issue of Trust"

New Jersey's editorial boards, which strongly backed inclusion of NJDOT spending goals like the **"fix-it-first"** provision in the state's transportation funding authorization last year, are taking note of this year's fight over DOT's defiance of the law.

The *Home News Tribune*, the paper of record for Middlesex County, came out May 6th in support of a **revised NJDOT capital program**. In an editorial, the paper wrote:

"Environmentalists are right to suggest that this is an issue of trust; the DOT should not be allowed to ignore the goals of the trust-fund legislation simply by declaring them unreasonable. When the Legislature considers DOT's budget later this spring, it should work to remake the balance of the budget, including adding money for the planning and carrying out of additional bridge repair."

The *Asbury Park Press* recently called NJDOT's stance "a betrayal of voters' trust" (see MTR #315).

### Hudson Valley Execs on Hot Seat Before T-Z Study Vote

The Village of Nyack last Thursday adopted a resolution calling on **Rockland County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef** to attach conditions to his approval of the "Tappan Zee Bridge Alternatives Analysis."

On Thursday, May 17, the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council will vote to approve the Tappan Zee "major investment study." The Council's voting rules, which **require unanimous approval**, put the Rockland and Westchester County Executives in strong positions to influence the Tappan Zee study.

Nyack's resolution urges Vanderhoef to obtain the following agreement in writing from the Thruway Authority and the MTA:

1. That any project will not include the widening of the Thruway in Rockland County
2. No new bridge will be built without a concurrent, funded rail transit project.

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3. A new bridge will not have any more than eight lanes of vehicular traffic.
3. Independent structural and transit feasibility analyses will occur.
4. Restoration of West Shore Rail passenger rail service will be supported and funded by the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

The resolution resembles an April letter sent to Vanderhoef by the Tri-State Campaign. Because the Tappan Zee study is unlikely to come before the Metropolitan Transportation Council again, it is timely for the Hudson Valley county executives to use their strong bargaining position to get what they can out of the process.

So far, however, Vanderhoef's office has said it is **not inclined to use this power**. This is unfortunate, since the opportunity gives the county executive a real opportunity to implement in concrete terms a set of demands he articulated last year. At a public meeting in May, 2000, Vanderhoef called for a **guarantee** that any new bridge would **include transit**, and said he would fight against addition of new highway lanes. He has also been a long-time supporter of restoring passenger service on the West Shore rail line.

The Council's unanimity procedure does of course put any voting member in a strong position any time they are sufficiently disgruntled about a transportation-related matter, because members can **block any number of proceedings and approvals** until satisfied. In 1997, for instance, Mayor Giuliani refused to approve the

### Scenic Hudson Calls for T-Z Pricing

In an April 20 *Journal News* opinion piece, Scenic Hudson planner Jeff Anzevino urged the NY State Thruway Authority to implement congestion pricing on the Tappan Zee Bridge.

By increasing the commuter toll from \$1 to \$2.50 during peak hours, Anzevino pointed out, the Thruway Authority would encourage commuters to travel at off-peak hours, carpool, use express buses, or take transit. A Thruway study has in fact shown that a **modest price differential** could reduce peak period traffic by around around 9 percent.

"...by providing discounts to commuters, the Thruway Authority actually **rewards drivers for crossing when the bridge is most congested**," Anzevino wrote.

Recently, other Hudson Valley groups and municipalities joined Environmental Defense and the Tri-State Campaign to urge the Thruway to adopt road pricing as part of a near-term congestion relief package for the Tappan Zee Bridge (MTR #312).

"In what has seemed like a foregone decision to build a replacement bridge, the Thruway Authority has gotten ahead of itself," said David Gordon, attorney for Riverkeeper at an April press event. "From a public policy standpoint, the obvious first step is to see how congestion pricing and other demand-side strategies work to ease traffic problems along the I-87/287 corridor."

Council's overall regional transportation program, potentially jeopardizing federal transportation assistance throughout the region, in order to win concessions from the Port Authority on airport transit issues (MTR #143). In 1994, former Westchester County Executive Andrew O'Rourke threatened to veto the regional program until the MTA agreed to a full environmental impact statement for its Harlem Line third track project (MTR #4).

### Peds 2, NYC Buses 0

Last week, a *New York Times* reporter resurrected what has unfortunately become a popular speed challenge: **walking versus taking a NYC bus**. The reporter and his wife set out together from Broadway and 82nd Street, headed for Third Avenue. He walked while she took the cross-town M79 articulated bus. As before, leather beat out rubber. This time, the pedestrian's margin was only one minute, as the reporter arrived in 22 minutes, his wife in 23 minutes.

In a similar test in 1994, A *NY Newsday* reporter on foot **left a Midtown cross-town bus in the dust** (MTR # 5). Her article was prompted by the forthright Transit Authority report entitled, "Faster than Walking?" which detailed how bus transit in the City has slowed to a near stand-still due to traffic congestion. The paper called for a redesign of city curb space and better bus lanes to move buses on chronically jammed avenues. The NYC DOT has also planned a "Bus Priority Network," but little effective action has been taken in either case. In 1999, the Federal Transit Administration gave NYC the dubious distinction of having the **slowest city transit buses** of any major U.S. city, averaging 8mph compared to the average speed of 13mph.

### Speed Cameras Promise Big Safety Benefits

A new report by Transportation Alternatives shows that New York City could significantly boost enforcement of motor vehicle speeding laws if it deployed photo-radar (also known as speed cameras) systems in key locations. The paper, *Slowing Speeds, Saving Lives* recounts the **prevalence of speeding in fatal car crashes** — speeding is a factor in 31% of all U.S. crashes resulting in death, and is an even greater determinant of death when **pedestrians** are hit. It also presents speed camera success stories around the U.S. and the globe.

In a London test corridor, for instance, deaths fell from 68 to 20, and serious injuries were down over 25% after speed cameras were deployed. On a Portland, Oregon street, 88% of vehicles traveled 11mph or more over the speed limit before camera installation. Afterward, only 12% of vehicles traveled 11mph or more over the limit.

Speed cameras consist of a stationary camera and a Doppler radar unit. A vehicle in the radar beam that exceeds a pre-set speed threshold triggers the camera, which records the car's license plate. A summons is then issued to the vehicle owner.

New York City needs state legislation in order to deploy this technology. The *NY Post* reported last week

that **Mayor Giuliani will ask the Legislature** for the OK to begin a photo-radar program. “[The city’s red light camera] program has years worth of experience, and we feel it’s worked pretty well,” Anthony Piscitelli, NYC’s Albany lobbyist, told the *Post*. “We think [speed cameras] is an idea worth pursuing.” The city also wants the state’s go-ahead to **double the number of red-light cameras** it is allowed to deploy, from 50 to 100. The NYC DOT says that the city’s red light

### **Recipe to Worsen Traffic Chaos: Right-on-Red for Staten Island**

Legislation in Albany submitted by State Senator John Marchi and Assembly Member Eric Vitaliano (S1763 and A6819) would eliminate NYC’s **no right-turn-on-red** rule on Staten Island. The bills also allow drivers making a left hand turn from one one-way street onto another one-way street to go after stopping at the light without having to wait for it to change.

Right on red can only make matters worse for beleaguered Staten Island pedestrians. It would also stand as a bad precedent for future attempts by pro-motoring attempts to extend the rule to the rest of NYC. In fact, the City Council’s outgoing transportation chair, Noach Dear, has already stated that he viewed right-on-red in Staten Island as a **test case** for the rest of the city.

In the Senate, the bill has advanced to a third reading, which allows the bill to be acted upon. The Senate has approved the legislation in two of the last three sessions. However in the Assembly, the bill is in the transportation committee where a similar bill submitted by Assembly Member Elizabeth Connelly in previous sessions never made it to the floor for a vote.

Mayor Giuliani **opposes the bill**. The city’s recent memo in opposition presents a cogent argument for the status quo, which authorizes right-on-red on a case-by-case basis (Staten Island in fact has many right-on-red intersections that have been OK’d by the city DOT). “...this legislation...would severely jeopardize public safety... allowing right-turn-on-red on Staten Island poses a threat not only to other vehicles, but to pedestrians as well.” The memo notes that both NHTSA and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety have both found that vehicle crashes with pedestrians and cyclists **tend to increase after right-on-red has been authorized**.

In NYC, the leading cause of pedestrian fatalities is **vehicles turning into pedestrians in crosswalks** (see *Right-of-Way’s Killed by Automobile* study which studied fatal crashes involving pedestrians and cyclists from 1994-1997 — MTR #212). Right on red can only worsen the situation.

Borough President Molinari has made press statements that right-on-red could make intersections less safe, and has refused to support legislation. City Council Member and Borough President candidate Jerome O’Donovan has submitted a Council resolution to support the state legislation. The *SI Advance* also supports the change.

cameras resulted in issuance of 400,000 tickets to red light runners last year. Anyone spending any time in New York City knows that red light running and speeding are epidemic. A Tri-State Campaign half-hour survey at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 36<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan last year noted 19 cars and truck running lights. Motorists in other boroughs treat stop signs as a joke.

The **NY chapter of the AAA** is demanding that studies be done before the city uses photo-radar, even though a recent **survey of its members found that 80% supported automated traffic law enforcement**. NY State Assembly Transportation Committee Chair David Gantt’s office told the *Post* it took a “dim view” toward automated enforcement and insultingly told New York City to “hire more police.” Gantt represents Rochester.

### **Green Backs Car-Free Parks Goal**

Mark Green’s campaign for mayor of New York City has informed transportation reform and environmental groups that he supports to goal of **removing car traffic from the loop roads of Central and Prospect Parks**.

The current *Transportation Alternatives* magazine reports that the mayoral campaigns of Alan Hevesi, Fernando Ferrer and Peter Vallone all back a three-month trial traffic closure of the parks (MTR #316).

Green said that he would have the city transportation and parks departments investigate potential traffic impacts of closure and devise mitigation measures for any potential problem spots. With mitigation in place, the park roads would be made into **permanent refuges** for cyclists, runners, skaters and pedestrians.

### **McGreevey, Franks on Anti-Toll Bandwagon**

Answering a question on a New Jersey radio program last week, Democratic gubernatorial candidate and Woodbridge mayor Jim McGreevey told listeners that he aims to **eventually abolish tolls** on the **Garden State Parkway**. Although he hedged by voicing concern over the \$620 million in bond debt the removal would dump onto all NJ taxpayers and by also supporting the introduction of **high-speed E-ZPass facilities** on the Parkway, McGreevey said that within 90 days of taking office he would present both a short- and long-term plan to the public for taking down the toll booths.

Parkway tolls emerged as an issue when long-shot Republican candidate Jersey City mayor Bret Schundler made their removal a signature issue in his campaign. Republican front-runner **Bob Franks** has apparently also remarked that he favors eliminating Parkway tolls.

Any plan for transforming the Parkway into a freeway is expected to face big challenges. Parkway drivers now pay \$170 million annually in tolls. The money is mainly used to fund Parkway maintenance and upgrades. If tolls are removed, these costs will be passed to taxpayers statewide whether or not they drive on the highway. Now 20-25% of that cost is paid by out-of-state drivers.

The diversion of state transportation funds to maintain the Parkway would also result in an even tighter operat-

ing budget for NJTransit, which already resorts to the bad practice of using capital funds to pay operating costs. **Overall under-investment** in transportation infrastructure will worsen.

McGreevey supports the proposed Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex transit line. During last year's Senate campaign, Franks also said he would provide funds for the M-O-M service, resurrect the West Trenton line and declared support for a new commuter rail tunnel from NJ to Manhattan. An anti-toll policy clearly flies in the face of an ambitious transportation improvement program.

### Local Politics: Traffic, Transit Focus

**West Windsor Township** Incumbent mayor Carole Carson lost her re-election bid to Councilman Shing-Fu Hsueh, who campaigned to limit new residential development and reduce traffic. Hsueh's two running mates also unseated council members aligned with Carson.

To make good, the new leadership should join concerned citizens to oppose NJ DOT's **Millstone Bypass**, a 2.3 mile, four-lane elevated highway that would run through West Windsor. The Department is preparing an environmental impact statement for the proposal (MTR #294). Besides damaging wetlands, the new highway is expected to draw 35% more traffic to the corridor.

**Hoboken** Councilman David Roberts defeated Mayor Anthony Russo's bid for a third term in a campaign also based in part on runaway development and traffic. Hoboken's construction boom under Russo combined with increasing regional use of the city's transit links to NYC have led to **record traffic and parking demand**. Mayor Russo made an effort to address these problems in April by restricting rush-hour roadway access — an edict the County prosecutor found unconstitutional (MTR #312). Roberts told the *NY Times* that he plans to begin the process of rewriting Hoboken's master plan for more controlled growth, perhaps pushing most parking to city's outskirts.

**Nassau County** The Nassau Democratic establishment has thrown its weight behind Assemblyman Tom DiNapoli last week in the race for county executive. With State Senator Dean Skelos, DiNapoli has secured state funding twice to stave off bad **Long Island Bus** service reductions threatened by county budget cuts.

Outgoing County Executive Thomas Gulotta and the County Legislature slashed Nassau's contribution to LI Bus from \$20 million in 1999 to just \$7 million in 2001. In the 2003 budget submitted to the Nassau Interim Finance Authority last year, no county funds are set aside for the transit agency (MTR #296).

DiNapoli still faces a primary challenge from Glen Cove mayor Tom Suozzi. Hopefully, his record and prominence in the race will lead to a more pro-transit stance by county leaders.

MTR#317 Contributing: Sarah Donaldson, Lisa Schreiberman 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

## Calendar

**May 16, 7pm** CT Metro-North/Shore Line East Rail Commuter Council monthly meeting. ConnDOT, New Haven RR station. [www.trainweb.org/ct](http://www.trainweb.org/ct), 203-655-0138.

**May 17, Noon** Metro-North Commuter Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 10th floor. 212-878-7087.

**May 21**, "Taking Back What is Rightfully Yours" NY/NJ Baykeeper conference on the Public Trust Doctrine, helipad site McCarter Highway, Newark. 732.291.0176 and [www.nynjbaykeeper.org](http://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., Manhattan, 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](http://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 24, Noon** NYC Transit Riders Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 5th floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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

**June 6, 4:30pm** MTA public hearing on 2001-2002 federal funding request. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 5th floor. Registration to speak closes at 6pm. To register, call 212-878-7483.

**June 7-10 9th** Annual Congress for New Urbanism. New York City. Registration info, 800-788-7077, [www.cnu.org](http://www.cnu.org)

**Find additional calendar entries at [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)**

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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