

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Much of Middlesex Firm Against Route 92

With the draft environmental impact statement for Route 92 due from the U.S. Army Corps this spring, a group of seven central New Jersey officials have organized to voice continued opposition to the highway. The officials – mayors from Rocky Hill, Hopewell, Franklin, South Brunswick, Montgomery, Manville and Middlesex County Assemblyman Upen-dra Chivukula – told press last week that they don't want Route 92 constructed.

The NJ Turnpike Authority encountered strong opposition several years ago when it announced plans for Route 92, a new 6.7-mile highway through Middlesex County. The highway is estimated to cost \$350 million to build, which could require a **toll increase**. After efforts by central New Jersey mayors, citizen groups, and the Tri-State Campaign, due to **significant wetlands impacts**, U.S. EPA mandated a full environmental impact statement. Route 92 would extend from New Jersey Turnpike Interchange 8A to Route 1 at Ridge Road in South Brunswick.

"Route 92 will clog Route 1 to the south of Ridge Road and **flood two lane roads to the west** with car and truck traffic, worsening traffic flow," Rocky Hill Mayor Brian Nolan told reporters.

"Our town should not be seen as a throughway for highway traffic," said Hopewell Mayor Jon Edwards. "Other options, such as improving existing roads or looking into rail development, would be a much better investment for central New Jersey. The last thing we need during these tough financial times is to cut through the region with an expensive and unpopular highway. This is an **older type of solution — just building more roads**," Edwards said.

Route 92, in addition to destroying open space and farmland, would have a domino effect in central New Jersey, inviting more congestion, trucks and sprawl to the area. The officials hope that an avowed anti-sprawl Governor and new leadership at the Turnpike Authority will lead the state to let go of the project.

Funding for Downtown Transit Hub in Hand

The additional federal transportation funding announced several weeks ago would go a long way toward paying for the **PATH/subway hub** that Port Authority and NYC Transit planners have described to reporters. That plan would link downtown destinations and transit lines with a 3000-foot underground concourse, running from the World Financial Center to a renovated Fulton Street subway station. Like the World Trade Center's lower levels, the concourse would feature extensive retail space (*MTR #349*).

However, if downtown interests continue their efforts to include **direct Long Island Railroad** and/or **Metro-North** train access in the mix, the \$1.8 billion in emergency transportation grants may amount to **only a down payment** on the eventual cost of downtown transit service. It's unclear where the rest of the money would come from, or when a hub that includes commuter rail access would be up and running.

The \$1.8 billion is a request by the Bush Administration for an emergency appropriation to the Federal Transit Administration. Senator Charles Schumer was instrumental in securing the extra request. It should be available soon, because it is emergency funding, not part of the 2003 federal budget process. It will be available for mass transit enhancements in lower Manhattan, over and above transit restoration spending that will come from the Federal Emergency Management Administration. Besides the PATH-NYC Transit hub, another strong candidate for such funding is modernization of the **1/9 South Ferry station**. Platforms there are too short for today's trains — upgrading it would be a good complement to the ongoing renovation of the ferry terminal itself.

The Bush emergency request also includes \$167 million in Federal Highway Administration funds to enhance roadways downtown. It's likely that some officials view the grant as **start-up money** for the popular notion of **submerging the West Side Highway** between the World Financial Center and the World Trade Center site, though the total cost of such a project could run to \$1.5 billion or higher. A more immediate use for the money would be to **improve streetscapes** and expand space for pedestrians on streets throughout downtown in tandem with the util-

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

ity work that will require most of the streets downtown to be torn up and then re-paved.

The issue of transportation priorities may soon come to a head, as the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation proceeds with its work.

Praise for Gowanus HOV-3 Plan

The *Staten Island Advance* heaped praise on the NYC Dept. of Transportation's policy to upgrade the access standard for the Gowanus Expressway's HOV lane to require **three or more** passengers.

NYC Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall announced last month that vehicles using the Gowanus Expressway HOV lane would be required to carry at least three people starting this week with the re-opening of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel.

The Gowanus HOV lane **primarily carries bus riders** from Staten Island and southern Brooklyn. But increasing car use of the lane, which previously was open to any vehicle with two or more passengers, had slowed movement in it considerably. The Tri-State Campaign had pressed the state to act on the access standard since 1999.

In an editorial, the *Advance* applauded the city's for combating congestion "in an area that on some days, seemed as if it could not bear one more car."

"The three-people-to-a-car-plus-E-ZPass requirement will insure that the city gets the maximum bang for its buck on HOV lanes on its ancient, crowded expressway leading into Lower Manhattan... it will make for a pleasanter commute and provide a **stronger incentive** for more people to leave their cars at home and **take mass transit.**"

"Too many solitary drivers in too many cars led to the monstrous congestion on the narrow streets downtown even before Sept. 11 as well as on the bridges and tunnels into that area, which were designed by people who never envisioned the flood of vehicles we see today," the paper wrote.

In response to expected complaints from solo commuters, the *Advance* wrote, "what is unreasonable was the idea that drivers have some sort of right to drive their own vehicles, by themselves, into and out of Manhattan at any time, using any route they want."

Will Downtown Dump Dirty Diesel ?

At an otherwise uneventful NY Metropolitan Transportation Council annual meeting last week, a U.S. EPA representative said that the EPA regional director would recommend that the Federal Emergency Management Administration pay for the use of **low-sulfur diesel fuel** and for **clean engine retrofits** to construction equipment in use in lower Manhattan.

FEMA's response to the request is not known at this writing.

The *NY Times* reported last week that the Corporation would release a series of publications outlining the overall work of rebuilding downtown. It said a report on the restoration of essential services, including transit access, will be released in May, and one on **downtown regional transit center** is due in June.

Bloomberg Maintains Strong Stance on Tolls

NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg created a stir last week when he suggested an East River bridge toll and congestion pricing system that would charge **lower tolls for city residents**. The mayor discussed East River tolls while addressing the New York Building Congress, a business group for construction and design companies. The mayor said tolls would in part replace the defunct commuter tax. He noted that the MTA and Port Authority charge **special rates** at certain bridges for Staten Islanders.

"Because of technology today, we have the opportunity to **change the tolls at different times of the day**, you can have different tolls depending on where you live...you can have different tolls for different-weight vehicles very easily," Bloomberg said. The *NY Post* reported that Governor Pataki would meet with the mayor on Friday (3/29) to discuss the idea.

The mayor apparently raised the toll issue in his remarks, not in response to questions. Transportation reformers view it as encouraging that the issue continues to be under active consideration, including thought on how best to sell it to the public.

No. 7 Extension Underway

Moving a step closer to extending New York City's #7 subway to Midtown Manhattan's far west side, the MTA is seeking bids from consultants to study the project, *Newsday* reported last week.

According to MTA, the project is likely to cost \$1 billion. The Bloomberg Administration is a strong backer of the project. The **mayor** has said it is at the **top of his transit expansion list** (*MTR* #351), and city officials say they will pay for it with tax-increment financing scheme (*MTR* #355). The MTA study of the project was included in the MTA capital program in 2000 at Mayor Giuliani's insistence.

The city says the tax-finance plan would alleviate the impact of No. 7 construction on other transit projects likely to have wider impact on riders, such as the Second Avenue Subway.

A #7 extension would likely link Times Square with the Javitz Convention Center and the Penn Station development in the Farley Post Office building. The far West Side area is also prominent in proposals for bringing the **2012 Olympics** to NYC, which the mayor supports. The NYC Dept. of City Planning is working on far west side development. Despite the

subway project, some development scenarios further widen the West Side Highway, some city streets and involve extensive parking construction (*MTR* #354).

E-Train Crowding Unabated, V Has Rush-Hour Seats to Spare

A recent Straphangers Campaign survey submitted to NYC Transit officials confirmed that **V train service** has attracted **relatively few riders** from crowded E and F lines in its first three months.

The E/F/V service plan, implemented in December, is designed to take advantage of a new connection between Queens Boulevard subway lines and the 63rd Street tunnel under the East River. Rider advocates predicted that re-routing the F would lead to **worse E crowding**, while commuters shunned slower V local service. Their fears appear to have been realized.

The Straphangers survey, taken at the Lexington Avenue E/V platform, found that all but two of nine V trains arriving between 8 and 9 a.m. on a Friday morning had **seats available in every car**, and one of the others was only "lightly crowded." All of the 15 E trains arriving in the same hour were standing-room only, with 11 "**heavily crowded**."

NYC Transit told reporters that it too soon to judge the service plan.

Route 110 Plan Jibes with L.I. Parkway Widening

Despite municipal and business interest in a transit solution along western Suffolk County's congested Route 110, NY State DOT has made an unsurprising proposal — widen the road. DOT announced its plan at a March public hearing, according to *Newsday*.

DOT's proposal would **widen Rte 110** between the Long Island Expressway and the Melville Mall, a short distance north of the Northern State Parkway. The plan requires replacement of the Parkway's bridge over Route 110. DOT said the **Parkway bridge would also be widened** to include new acceleration and deceleration lanes. It's also likely that the bridge plan would accommodate the Department's interest in widening Northern State with **new HOV lanes**, controversial plan with no official approval.

Citizen and business groups who have been calling for a solution to congestion on the corridor had a lukewarm response to the announcement. A spokesman from Action Long Island, a Long Island business group, told *Newsday*, "In fact, our fear is that all it will do is **shift the funnel** — the bottleneck — to a different section of road."

The towns of Babylon and Huntington have proposed **mass transit hubs** at either end of Route 110, a north-south route. These would link railroad stations with Route 110 workplaces via frequent bus and jitney services.

Toll Agency Merger to Save Parkway?

As expected, New Jersey Governor James McGreevey announced last week he will consider merging the state's three toll-collecting agencies — the New Jersey Turnpike, the Garden State Parkway and Atlantic City Expressway. While the Governor said the move could reduce costs by eliminating agency redundancy, a more significant effect may be the potential to **shift revenues** between toll highways.

The three authorities rely on toll revenue for capital and operating funds. While the **Turnpike Authority** consistently earns enough **surplus revenue** to contribute to the state's transportation trust fund, the Parkway is heavily in debt. It's unknown if consolidation would permit the free movement of toll revenue within a super-agency, but it could bail out the Parkway **without a toll increase** and help fund improvements such as high-speed E-ZPass installation.

Former Governor Donald DiFrancesco proposed using \$800 million in state money to pay for Parkway improvements, which included replacing cumbersome highway toll barriers with high-speed E-Z Pass.

According to the *Star-Ledger*, Governor McGreevey did not say last week whether consolidation of the toll agencies would contribute to the **fantasy of eliminating Parkway tolls**. If that were indeed a near-term goal, it would make more sense to fold Parkway management and projects into NJ DOT.

Governor McGreevey's executive order to study the merger plan creates of a Toll Road Consolidation Commission, made up of toll road officials, finance and labor specialists and citizens, including a toll payer and a transit commuter. The Governor will receive a report from the Commission in August.

Port Development Plan Off To Slow Start

With consultants retained after almost two years of turf battles and contracting technicalities, the agencies that comprise the **Comprehensive Port Improvement Plan** consortium are finally moving forward with planning and an environmental impact statement that will accompany the plans.

The consortium includes the Empire State Development Corp., NJ DOT, the Port Authority and the NYC Economic Development Corporation. The U.S. EPA and Army Corps of Engineers are also involved.

Public input to the study's options for port development to accommodate the expected **doubling of containers** arriving at NY/NJ docks over the next ten years will occur through a "stakeholders council." In 1999, environmental, community and transportation reform groups had tried to persuade the agencies to identify principles like increasing terminal efficiency, not filling wetlands and reducing or minimizing truck trips to guide the plan.

Now that work has started, the stakeholder council has reaffirmed those goals. The "infrastructure stakeholder" group has chosen **reduction of port-related vehicle miles traveled** as its top priority. Other prominent goals are brownfields reuse and a "least-fill" site development strategy.

The "community stakeholder" group urges maximum "input from local community, elected officials, labor, and business and environmental interests."

It is unclear if the agencies can create an investment plan for projects that match these goals. To do that, they will need an infusion of cash from Congress, shippers and others. A top priority of freight and port interests is passage of a **TEA-3 bill in 2003** that provides more investment in intermodal freight infrastructure, like rail freight, container barging, port capacity and efficiency improvements.

The website for the plan is www.cpiponline.org.

The Other Road Toll

New York State pedestrian and total deaths from vehicle crashes fell slightly in 2000, according to data from the U.S. Dept. of Transportation. Downstate fatality numbers showed few surprises, with the highest number of pedestrian fatalities in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Suffolk and Nassau Counties.

In NY State, crash-related fatalities dropped 9% between 1999 and 2000, while the number of pedestrians killed in crashes fell 11%. In 2000, pedestrian fatalities made up 23% of the total crash fatalities (335 pedestrians out of 1,444 deaths), compared with 24% in 1999 (378 pedestrians of 1,588 total).

Long Island, which typically has high numbers of crash-related deaths, saw some improvement. In Nassau, pedestrians killed dropped from 46 to 30. Suffolk pedestrians, however, did not see significant improvement between pedestrian deaths in 1999 (34 deaths) and 2000 (33 deaths). Suffolk County – where 161 people died as the result of crashes – kept its long-standing #1 position with the most overall traffic deaths in the state.

Worst 10 counties: total deaths — Suffolk, Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau, Erie, Manhattan, Westchester, Bronx, Monroe, Orange.

Worst 10 for pedestrian deaths — Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Suffolk, Nassau, Bronx, Erie, Westchester, Monroe, Albany.

Highest pedestrian share of total fatalities — (omitting counties with less than 10 pedestrian deaths) — Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens, Nassau, Erie, Suffolk, Westchester.

Calendar

April 4, 6:30-10pm "Thinking Regionally: Planning for the Next Step on the East End," SEEDS Visioning Session, Southold High School Auditorium, 718-482-4536

April 11, 8:30am Manhattan Second Avenue Subway Task Force, Manhattan Borough President's Office, One Centre Street, 19th Floor Conference Room. rmuller@manhattanbp.org, 212-669-8164

April 11, 11am-7:30pm National Alternative Fuels Day & Environmental Summit, Hostos Community College, 149th & Grand Concourse, Building C, Bronx. 303-275-4321 or megan_maguire@nrel.gov

April 11, 11:45am Transportation Research Forum, "The Rise and Fall of Local Suburban Transportation in Northern New Jersey" - William Fahey, Esq. New York School Bus Contractors Association. 212-435-4226 or pgessner@panynj.gov

April 15, 6-9pm Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study public meeting, John Dewey High School. 50 Avenue X. 212-799-8803 x22 or SouthernBrooklyn-TIS@zetlin.com

April 15-17 "Transaction" — Annual NJ State Transp. Conference and Expo. Atlantic City. www.njcost.com/transaction 908-903-1077

April 17, 6-9pm Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study public meeting, George Wingate High School, 600 Kingston Avenue. 212-799-8803 x22 or SouthernBrooklynTIS@zetlin.com

April 19, 10am-noon University Transportation Research Center Visiting Scholars Seminar. "Transportation Reform at the Crossroads: TEA 21" - David Burwell, Surface Transportation Policy Project. NYC Technical College 285 Jay St., Brooklyn 212-650-8050

[more calendar entries at www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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MTR#359 Contributing: Janine Bauer Editors: Jon Orcutt, Lisa Peterson Executive Director, Janine Bauer

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