

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

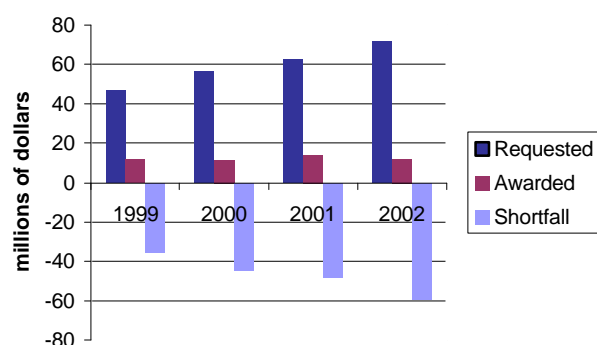
Again, NJ DOT Shorts Cities and Towns

Under New Jersey DOT's proposed **2003 capital program**, local aid projects for road preservation and bicycle and pedestrian projects will again be funded well below demonstrated levels of need. Trust Fund dollars for **local roads** are consistently in high demand. Requested amounts for **bicycle and pedestrian projects** have also risen steadily – by last year nearly \$60 million in projects went unfunded.

Each of the past four years, demand for aid to municipalities has outstripped available funds by over \$100 million. This is true even though DOT began devoting \$9 million more for aid to municipalities in FY2001. Last year DOT received 931 applications totaling \$182 million. With \$67.5 million available, only 424 projects were funded. Under DOT's capital investment strategy, municipalities would continue to receive **the same \$67.5 million from 2003 to 2005**. At the same time, DOT is reserving a large portion of its capital budget for unidentified projects funded at its discretion (*MTR #360*).

Demand for bicycle and pedestrian improvements have risen sharply in the last four years – up 35% from 1999-2001. Although Trust Fund spending for bicycle and pedestrian projects stays at the same low level of \$11 million, a \$4.25 million infusion federal CMAQ funds will make up some of the shortfall. \$3 million in additional state funds will also go to specific state pedestrian projects at Bridgewater Mall and along Route 130. Despite these gains, even if demand for bicycle and pedestrian projects stays level, next year's shortfall is likely to be near \$50 million.

TTF Funding for Local Bike/Ped Projects, 1999-2002



NY DOT Seeks to Shore Up Support for Huge Long Island Highway Plan — Pataki's DOT Pushes Biggest NY Road Plan Since Robert Moses Era

The NY State DOT is planning special “info-mercial” sessions late this month to promote its “LITP 2000” plan to widen most major highways on Long Island. The DOT seems alarmed that criticism of the plan is gaining momentum.

Despite the **Pataki Administration's** strong interest in environmental protection, mass transit advances seen during Governor Pataki's tenure and the fact that the Governor pulled the plug on the **Westchester County HOV lane network** in 1997, State DOT's Long Island division and some of the companies that live off of it seem hell bent on nailing down the **huge road and HOV expansion plan** on Long Island.

A March 25 letter mailed to civic groups on “LITP 2000” letterhead warned of disinformation campaigns against the plan, suggesting the April 23 and 24 sessions would be a tonic against the “hearsay and influence of other groups.”

In the typically passive voice of bureaucracy, the letter asserts that “[The plan] is viewed as a blueprint for future transportation that can foster coordinated land use planning and growth management at the local level.” The letter was signed by Marvin Gersten of Parsons Brinckerhoff.

It is largely because of the plan's complete omission of land use considerations and its **colossal failure to identify sprawl development** as the **root cause of car dependence** and increased traffic that environmental and civic groups have declared the plan dead on arrival for the past several years. “It looks like we're on our way to more of the same — more paving, more cars, more sprawl, more gridlock and more pollution,” Richard Amper, Long Island Pine Barrens Society President, said in a 2000 release backed by other Long Island and regional groups.

NY DOT and its consultants make much of its extensive **public outreach**. They tend to express it in the **quantitative terms** of meetings and videos broadcast. However, critics say **most public input has been ignored**.

DOT has looked forward to building downstate networks of HOV lanes since the late 1980s, and no

amount of input to the LITP process has changed that. Letters published in the *NY Times* during 2000 from members of the various public committees originally established by LITP painted the clearest picture of the outreach process. One noted the workings of public committees supposed to shape the study:

When the time came for suggestions, the dept.'s observers (they were not members of the committees) would propose their favorite solutions, like widening roads and building more HOV lanes. Their suggestions would be included in the summary, giving them the appearance of having been endorsed by the committee...

When DOT disclosed [its] analyses in June, it became obvious that a proposal contained a 'fatal flaw' if it did not involve pouring megayards of concrete or endless acres of asphalt, to say nothing of the destruction of countless trees....

Properly carried out, LITP 2000 could have served as a model for cooperation between government and private citizens. Unfortunately, such was not the case. Many volunteers feel we were the victims of a hoax.

Another member of the study's Technical Advisory Committee wrote:

So after a \$7 million study, we get more of the same — more asphalt, more traffic, more ozone-alert days. If our leaders cannot buck the car culture, why bother to ask the public's opinion?

...The predictable conclusion of the plan to widen roads is an insult to members of the public who took the trouble to take part in the study. As a member of the public committee, I can tell you that widening roads was not a majority opinion...

While the plan includes rapid bus service using HOV lanes, giving it a **mass transit veneer**, it is not clear that the services envisioned are feasible or fiscally sustainable. Bus rapid transit likely has promise in congested parts of Long Island, but the mode's future shouldn't be chained to DOT's paving ambitions.

Far more than a rational plan to preserve or increase the quality of life on Long Island, **LITP is a powerful argument for stripping the NY State DOT of all planning functions.** In the post-interstate, multi-modal, contain-sprawl world, DOT has no clear mission and very limited capabilities. The most direct route to fixing this problem would be to make DOT into a department of roadway maintenance and construction. Decision making about appropriate transportation investments should be shifted to a new department of multi-modal access, equipped with economists, land use and transit experts, inter-governmental relations specialists, and without the state DOT's inherent highway construction bias.

AirTrain Newark Ridership Rising

According to the Port Authority, daily average ridership on the **Newark AirTrain** has steadily increased since its debut nearly six months ago. Last month, ridership topped out at 2,527 average passengers daily. The system is making the gains despite high fares — \$11.55 from New York Penn Station and \$7.50 from the Newark side. The train's main appeal is its speed: just 27 minutes from NY Penn Station to Terminal C, according to the Port Authority.

Month	AirTrain Daily Average Ridership
Oct (partial)	1,000
Nov	1,682
Dec	2,142
Jan	1,944
Feb	2,084
March	2,547

Initial Downtown Report a Grab-bag

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation released its preliminary report last week, containing development principles and a "Blueprint for Renewal" with recommendations for rebuilding. Six of the blueprint's 14 elements focused on transit-oriented and pedestrian friendly transportation improvements. However, a number of major Manhattan transit considerations are left out, and the report does not convincingly address whether building new commuter railroad connections to downtown passes elementary feasibility and cost/benefit tests.

The report does not even mention the **Second Avenue subway** or East Side Access projects, which are essential to fill gaps in Manhattan's transit network, are significant for Lower Manhattan and have widespread support. However, the report mentions a proposal to connect **Metro-North** to Penn Station, which requires the completion of East Side Access.

The report's most controversial transportation recommendation is development of a **LIRR "super shuttle"** from Jamaica to lower Manhattan, which is likely to hijack an A/C subway track for LIRR trains. Such a plan is unlikely to attract enough riders to justify disruption to over 100,000 daily subway riders (*MTR #355*), triggering opposition from Brooklyn riders and well-organized NYC transit advocates.

Although the report's proposal to **bury West Street** reflects a commitment to create more park space and a better pedestrian environment, the cost of the project may detract from other, more pressing transportation needs. The report's other proposals to create wider sidewalks and provide more open space along the waterfront sound more do-able.

The report also continues the strong current of official thinking favoring additional **Manhattan ferry**

service. While infrastructure investment may build on existing ferry markets, any public expenditure in this area — especially of city funds — needs to take account of the eventual restoration of downtown PATH service. It also should be subject to a cost-benefit analysis of investment in other, existing transit services. For instance, the report pays **scant attention to buses**, despite their importance within NYC and to suburban-Manhattan commuting. It does call for a solution to downtown bus parking problems, but does not address ways to improve bus circulation downtown, or to build on booming express bus markets. The numbers of buses using Broadway and Trinity Place/Church Street are close to those plying a number of Midtown avenues where the city created **bus-only lanes** long ago.

The report calls for modernization of the South Ferry 1/9 station to complement the Whitehall Ferry terminal upgrade, for temporary restoration of PATH service from New Jersey and creation of a permanent downtown PATH/subway hub. Because the report does not outline funding mechanisms or agency involvement, it is difficult to tell where the Corporation's transportation plans will go from here. Some news stories have reported that more detailed LMDC transportation plans are set for release in June.

NJ Opinion Pages Support Gas Tax Increase for Transit

Two New Jersey editorial pages called on officials to raise the state's gas tax to support bridge and road preservation and mass transit.

The *Trenton Times* criticized the McGreevey administration and DOT Commissioner James Fox for avoiding a commitment to raise the gas tax to pay for transportation projects. The *Times* also chided officials for not reviving the flagging plan to fix the state's infrastructure. "Lisa Peterson of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign complained last week that the federal government, not the state, is responsible for the additional \$60 million that will be spent this year to fix bridges, and that the state is actually making its **smallest financial contribution** in several years to bridge repairs," wrote the paper.

The *Star-Ledger* also supported a gas tax increase last week, saying the revenue should be used exclusively to fund transportation projects. "A gas tax increase should be dedicated strictly to transportation, and it will have to help the highways and bridges as well as mass transit, wrote the *Ledger*. "But a serious chunk of [gas tax revenue] should be reserved for NJ Transit's needs. **Better transit benefits everyone**, including drivers. More people on buses and trains mean fewer cars on our congested highways."

NJ Scrapes Up Money for Driscoll Bridge Twin

By combining capital resources, the New Jersey Turnpike and Parkway Authorities will begin work on a massive \$230 million twinning of the Alfred E. Driscoll Bridge this summer. The bridge carries the **Garden State Parkway over the Raritan River** in Middlesex County, just west of Perth Amboy, accepting traffic from I-287, Route 440 and the Turnpike.

Rehabilitation of the existing span, which has been discussed for some time, gained new urgency after an eight by ten foot chunk of the bridge fell into the river last summer. Rather than inspiring a stronger effort to prevent other bridges from reaching a similar state of disrepair, funds will be spent on expanding the bridge's capacity. In addition to adding eight new lanes of traffic, the twinning will cost \$175 million more than simply rehabilitating the existing bridge.

Agencies claim that twinning is necessary to avoid traffic **disruptions during repair of the existing bridge**, even though the Route 9 Edison Bridge is just 100 feet to the east. An environmental assessment of the project done in 1998 claimed diverting traffic to the Edison Bridge during construction is not feasible because the bridges have different traffic streams. However, the same assessment **rejected congestion relief pricing** as an alternative to building a new bridge because higher peak period tolls would cause traffic to divert to the Edison Bridge (*MTR #162*).

The Driscoll plan is one of **three road expansion projects** underway **along the lower Raritan**. A twin of the Edison Bridge along Route 9 opened in December, with rehabilitation underway on the existing span. The plan to replace the Victory Bridge along Route 35 with a wider bridge is delayed because of contracting problems, according to the *Courier News*.

The Driscoll twin will be paid with \$40 million from the Highway Authority and \$135 million from the Turnpike Authority. The Turnpike will spend \$91 million in general capital reserve funds and \$44 million from its annual payment to the Transportation Trust Fund for 2004 and 2005. The Trust Fund will instead receive \$44 million from the state's **general fund** for those two years, extending the impact of the Driscoll twin beyond transportation to impact state spending in other areas. It's likely that the project will delay more important Parkway projects, like installation of **non-stop toll collection** facilities.

PA Plans More Manhattan PATH Entrances

Since the destruction of the World Trade Center PATH station, the number of passengers using Greenwich Village PATH stations has more than doubled. Consequently, the Port Authority is seeking to build additional entrances at the Christopher and

9th Street Stations in order to improve safety and convenience. Their initial proposal places the new Christopher Street entrance on the north side of the block between Hudson and Bedford Streets, and the new 9th Street Station at Waverly Place. Both would use portions of the street and sidewalk. The initiative has run into neighborhood opposition, however.

A *Villager* editorial recently characterized community organizations' negative reactions as a case of NIMBY. Residents say the entrances will encourage people to congregate late at night, increase graffiti and vandalism, and worsen other quality of life problems on their blocks.

Manhattan's Community Board 2, on the other hand, has focused on traffic and pedestrian flow problems in the area. The board does not oppose new station entrances, but wants them in less-traveled areas. It has made a number of suggestions, including a direct link between the West 4th Street subway station and the PATH 9th Street stop. The Port Authority has reportedly estimated that the board's options would be more costly to build. The 4th Street-9th Street link should be strongly considered in any case as a general improvement to the city's transit network.

New Haven Port Bid Boosted

Legislation to create a New Haven port authority was unanimously approved by the General Assembly's Appropriations Committee in March, according to the *New Haven Register*. The creation of a port authority would put New Haven on better footing in its competition with Bridgeport for about \$7 million in ConnDOT **barge port development funds**.

CT's Transportation Strategy Board, which created the plan for port development to reduce truck traffic on I-95, is considering proposals from the two cities. If New Haven's port authority is approved by the legislature, the city's only drawback will be that it has less space for development than Bridgeport. New Haven, however, has a better location, allowing containers barged there to avoid the **severely congested stretch of I-95** between New Haven, NYC and Ports Newark/Elizabeth (MTR #358).

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

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Calendar

April 16, 6-8pm Presentation by Enrique Peñalosa, Former Mayor of Bogota, Colombia. "Sustainable Urban Transportation." Pratt Graduate Center, Higgins Hall North, #302, 61 St. James Place, Brooklyn. 718-399-4391

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

April 18, 12-2pm Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting, 10th Floor Conference Room, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087 or mail@pcac.org

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

April 19, noon City Club of New York Luncheon Forum. "Service Under Stress." Explores how 9-11 has impacted the Port Authority. 212-207-3676 or cityclubbofny@nycmail.com

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

Rebuilding Downtown New York Regional Plan Association's Regional Assembly

April 26, 8am - Noon

Public officials, business and civic leaders, academics and professionals who participated in working groups on rebuilding Downtown will present findings and recommendations from forums held earlier this year.

Participants will discuss plans for a living memorial; improved transportation and access; new civic amenities; urban design and development guidelines; goals for social and economic justice; and the changing shape of our region's economic geography, among other issues.

NY Marriot Marquis, Manhattan.

To register, 212-253-2727 x309 or www.rpa.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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