

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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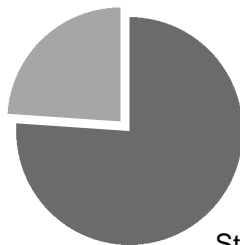
NEWS

NJ DOT Budget Discretion Unprecedented

Although accountability was supposed to be a watchword of the **transportation legislation** the New Jersey legislature passed in 2000, the New Jersey Department of Transportation's 2003 capital plan gives

Distribution of New Jersey Transportation Trust Fund Monies, 2003

Location-specific projects:
24%



Statewide/various programs: 76%

the agency unprecedented discretion over how funds are spent.

In 2003, an alarming 76% of DOT's state funds are **grouped in "statewide line items,"** rather than dedicated to identified projects. This gives DOT complete control over \$480 million in state transportation funds. In the meantime, DOT officials complain that the agency does not have enough money to comply with the 2000 law's "fix-it-first" mandate by providing more to road and bridge repair.

NY Railroad Tax Relief Still on Hold

Although Governor Pataki's proposed 2002-2003 budget contained significant tax relief provisions for freight railroads, and Senate and Assembly leaders have said in the past that they backed the measure, it was **left out** of the final NY State budget last month.

It is unclear at this writing why lawmakers took the railroad provision out. It is now the second year in a row that the governor has recommended railroad tax relief, only to see it fail in the final budget.

A CSX spokesperson told *Crain's* that the railroads hoped for a **post-budget bill** from Albany. CSX also said the measure's exclusion from the budget would lead it to pursue **lawsuits** it filed, charging unfair taxation, against municipal governments and the state in 2001 (*MTR's* #308, 312).

Despite Big HOV Investment, Carpooling Down on Long Island

Despite the state's investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in the Long Island Expressway carpool (HOV) lane, ridesharing declined in both Nassau and Suffolk Counties from 1990-2000, according to the U.S. census. The LIE HOV lane's construction has spanned the decade. The first segment opened in 1994. The final segment is still under construction.

The Pataki Administration and NY State DOT are likely to recommend construction of 60 **more** miles of **HOV lanes** on Long Island in their "**Long Island Transportation Plan 2000**" (LITP). But the census results raise questions about whether the big HOV investment is paying off.

HOV lane critics say that adding them to highways serves more to **sort out existing traffic** than to induce solo drivers to carpool. When the new lanes are added, carpools that move out of the old lanes open up more capacity for new driver-only trips, helping worsen overall traffic.

The NY State DOT says the new HOV lanes will serve express buses, but the construction of the LIE lane for much of the island's length has not led to any significant increase in express bus service or use.

Census "journey to work" data show that carpooling's share of commuting fell 8.6% in Nassau County and 5.5% in Suffolk from 1990-2000, or 6.67% for Long Island overall. Nearly 10% of Long Islanders told the census that carpooling was their primary means of commuting in 1990, prior to construction of the HOV lane, while 9.3% reported the same in 2000.

Households with no car increased marginally in Nassau County, to 7.7% of all commuters. Car-less households in Suffolk declined to 5.4%, a 7% reduction of share from 1990. Households with two cars increased slightly in both counties.

Long Island is unlikely to make any serious dent in its car dependence or worsening traffic congestion through the highway construction approach embraced by the NY State DOT. An incremental strategy that begins to **shift development** to more transit- and pedestrian-friendly mixed use patterns, closes off remaining open spaces to mall and subdivision construction and continues to **add transit service** to meet

growing demand is far more realistic. The Pataki administration should be identifying ways to encourage such planning. In the meantime, it needs to rein in its engineers and shelve the LITP plan.

Other census data show that all types of car commuting increased slightly among Long Islanders (to 83.2% of all commuting), while transit's share was down marginally (from 11.39% share to 11.1%). This result, despite strong ridership gains by agencies like Long Island Bus and Long Island Railroad in the latter part of the decade, likely reflects the **growth of employment on Long Island**, where most workplaces are not easily reached by transit. Walking also declined, from a 2.73% share to 2.16% (a smaller decline than elsewhere in the U.S.) probably in response to the continued movement of jobs from main streets to office parks. **Working at home** is up to 2.81%, a 25% increase in share from a decade ago. The trend likely reflects the influence of the Internet and possibly, frustration with all types of commuting.

Nassau's Chance to Set an Example

The Suozzi administration plans to **consolidate Nassau County's far-flung facilities** into "campuses" based on function. The county wrapped up a solicitation period last week for consulting proposals to plan the transformation. According to the *Long Island Business News*, the county currently owns 2,500 parcels of land, 797 of which contain buildings.

The consolidation plan offers the county a unique opportunity to demonstrate the value of transit- and pedestrian-friendly development. The County should site its workplaces **as close as possible to rail and bus facilities**, and to walkable downtowns. Utilizing offices in areas with near-by amenities will reduce car trips by allowing workers to walk, rather than drive, for lunch hour and other errands.

County Executive Thomas Suozzi, who says the current scattering of county sites is the result of poor planning, reached out to real estate planning consultants in early May with a request for proposals. Suozzi hopes to reorganize the facilities with funding from state, federal and private grants and by selling unused properties. He would like to avoid passing the project's estimated \$100 million cost on to taxpayers.

With an integrated planning approach that considers the transportation consequences of siting, Nassau's leaders can start to reverse scattershot development decisions of the past and set the stage for a less congested, more transit-friendly Long Island.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Transportation is Region's Big Global Warming Culprit

Car-dependent sprawl development will likely pose the greatest challenge to any U.S. attempt to come to grips with global warming, if greenhouse emission trends from our region are any indicator.

While the transportation sector was reported to account for just over 31% of U.S. greenhouse emissions in 1999, the transportation percentages in our de-industrializing region are higher, even in transit-rich New York. Emission shares in Connecticut and New Jersey show that **transportation emissions** are the main greenhouse product of **suburban service-industry economies**.

1999 Greenhouse Gas Emission Sector Shares

| | Commer- cial | Industrial | Residen- tial | Utilities | Trans- portation |
|-----------|-----------------|------------|------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| CT | 11.3% | 7.2% | 21.3% | 15.2% | 44.9% |
| NJ | 9.9% | 16.8% | 13.7% | 7.3% | 52.2% |
| NY | 16% | 15.1% | 17.9% | 15.7% | 35.5% |

U.S. EPA estimates based on DOE fuel consumption data

Global warming policy documents from countries attempting to meet Kyoto accord emission reduction targets are struggling with similar phenomenon. They argue that big increases in **vehicle fuel efficiency** alone **will not solve the problem** in the context of rapidly growing vehicle miles or kilometers traveled.

Canada's Transportation Climate Change panel concluded that only by coupling fuel efficient vehicles and an array of **aggressive VMT reduction strategies** could permit the country to meet its Kyoto goal of reducing 2010 emissions 6% below 1990 levels. The panel called for combining increased fleet fuel efficiency with investments in an extensive menu of mass transit incentives and upgrades, more efficient freight practices, bike and pedestrian enhancements and **market pricing of urban parking** combined with **increased fuel taxes and roadway pricing**. Anything less would not achieve the goal.

A recent European Union report similarly warned that its agreement with car makers to reduce greenhouse emissions from new cars by an average of 25% by 2010 **will only slow the growth** of transportation sector CO₂ emissions. Steep increases in vehicle-kilometers-traveled have led the European Climate Change Programme's transport working group to identify increased fuel taxes and roadway pricing as measures needed to complement the tailpipe fixes.

On the other hand, a 2001 draft **NY State "Greenhouse Gas Action Plan"** failed utterly to grapple with the question of **vehicle miles traveled**, and listed highway widening as a

greenhouse gas reduction strategy. Another version, advised by a group of experts from outside of government, is in the works now. Hopefully it will treat transportation more realistically. **Connecticut** is part of a global warming conference with other New England states and eastern Canadian provinces, but it too seems far away from policies that seek to stabilize or reduce VMT.

Transportation Share of Greenhouse Emissions , 1990s

| | 1990 | 1995 | 1999 |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
| CT | 38.9% | 41.8% | 44.9% |
| NJ | 52.6% | 53.1% | 52.2% |
| NY | 31.2% | 33.2% | 35.3% |

Add NY 347, Suffolk 16 to Brookhaven Collaboratives

Rather than leave planning to the state and county transportation officials, Brookhaven civic leaders and some town elected officials are proactively creating designs for pedestrian-friendly centers in Coram-Middle Island (*MTR #365*), and Mastic-Shirley. Town leaders ought to add NY Route 347, the biggest highway widening planned for Long Island, and Suffolk Route 16, where community members oppose another widening plan, to the list

Newsday praised the citizen/politician planning efforts in Brookhaven last week. "Something good is happening with land-use policy in the Town of Brookhaven, and politicians are playing a positive role. That's great news, but a small caveat is in order: The town has a long way to go in implementing the smart-growth principles that it is exploring," the paper wrote in an editorial.

"But for now, Brookhaven's leaders deserve credit for making a start toward reversing years of scandal, shortsightedness, sprawl and ugliness, and for trying to plan instead for livable, walkable communities."

If Brookhaven leaders are serious about creating less car-centered, sprawling development, Route 347 and Suffolk 16 need to be at the tops of their radar screens. The town had considered the Suffolk route, but backed off when county government said the expansion was a "done deal." But unwavering opposition to the county's plan makes that unlikely.

Civic and elected leaders have also opposed the NY 347 widening plan since it was first proposed in the mid-1990s. DOT's plan fails to consider alternatives to adding more capacity, and does nothing to address design problems with the commercial strip that contribute to congestion. Brookhaven Supervisor John LaValle raised the idea of a collaborative planning process with DOT last year, but has not followed up.

U.S. "Environmental Streamlining" Battle Begins

Over the winter and spring, environmental, historic preservation and transportation groups have met with federal legislators and staff on Capitol Hill to let them know they oppose the draft "**environmental streamlining**" bills which Representative Don Young, chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, hopes to pass in 2002 (*MTR #357*). The organizations view the bill, called "Expediting Project Delivery to Enhance Transportation and the Environment," as completely unworkable.

This week, **Young's chief staffer** in charge of bill drafting told the groups that administrative fixes aren't satisfactory, and that "[F]rom our perspective, **some legislation is needed** to expedite project delivery... even if it only addresses a minority of projects stuck in delay. My hope is that we can do this and adequately address your main concerns with the original draft." Recent research by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and FHWA shows that a mere 3% of full-environmental-impact-statement highway projects are delayed and that **most delay** is due to non-environmental factors, like **lack of funding** and **community opposition**.

The situation is that **state DOTs** are having a hard time getting projects built and are looking for scapegoats, rather than improving their project process or **improving their environmental and community track records** with more acceptable projects.

Young recently got the similar, but weaker, airport and pipeline streamlining bills out of his committee, with language that dictates:

- Agencies must concurrently conduct environmental impact reviews and permit applications. This significantly **predisposes the outcome** of the review, because permits must specify a project's parameters.
- That states are bound by decisions of a federal agency in determining a project's purpose and need and range of alternatives. This is a major usurpation of local control that appears to run counter to conservative thought on state power and sovereignty.

The transportation bill is even worse, because it **limits environmental agency reviews to 30-45 days**, even for major decisions about big projects, and limits judicial review of FHWA decisions.

Groups are now gearing up to fight the bills, enlisting state environmental agencies. Meanwhile, transportation reformers are asking the Senate to talk sense to their House counterparts before TEA-3 negotiations begin. Similar concurrent processing and deadline provisions were soundly defeated in the TEA-21 debates in 1997-98 (*MTR #164*).

Finally, Staten Island Freight Link to Reopen

After more than a decade of isolation from the country's rail freight network, Staten Island may soon have its **rail access to New Jersey** restored. According to the Staten Island *Advance*, officials expect that freight trains will begin running over the Arthur Kill lift bridge from Howland Hook Marine Terminal and other Staten Island sites by early 2004.

The restoration of rail freight will likely have a strong impact on traffic congestion. The Howland Hook Marine Terminal is now served exclusively by trucks, which clog the Goethals Bridge and Staten Island Expressway. Truck traffic on the Goethals Bridge is projected to drop by 56,000 a year as rail freight is restored.

Business leaders also expect the return of rail to boost Staten Island's economy. The Staten Island Economic Development Corp. names revitalization of the North Shore Railroad as its number one priority, according to the *Advance*. The group will spend \$14.5 million over the next three years to overhaul the **Arlington Yard**, which will provide Staten Island with rail-truck transfer capacity.

Cesar Claro, SIEDC executive director, said investment in the line and the growth of companies that will expand and relocate near the line will benefit the Island. "It will ultimately create a whole new economy on Staten Island," he said.

The **Arthur Kill rail bridge** has in fact been **ready for service** for several years, awaiting the conclusion of drawn out negotiations in New Jersey to fix a connecting rail segment. The NYC EDC invested \$15 million for restoration of the lift bridge and track repair on Staten Island in 1998 (*MTR* #162).

A set of nagging disputes between the Port Authority, Elizabeth and Union County over land near Newark Airport and compensation for various airport impacts held up the purchase of a section of property crucial to connect the rail bridge to New Jersey's Chemical Coast freight line. County officials wanted compensation for the Newark deal built into the price of a parcel new Turnpike Exit 13A that the Port Authority wants to use for an overpass (*MTR* #324). With a deal struck this month, design and construction for the rail link can now advance.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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MTR#368 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

Calendar

June 5, 4:30pm Public Hearing regarding federal funding proposals for MTA. MTA Headquarters Board Room, 5th Floor, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7483

June 6, 11:45am Transportation Research Forum, "NY Waterway Ferry Service Post 9/11...and Beyond," Donald Liloia, NY Waterway. Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington Street, Manhattan. 212-435-4226 or pgessner@panynj.gov

June 6, Noon Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee meeting, MTA Headquarters, 5th Floor Board Room, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087 or mail@pcac.org

June 6, 2-8:30pm New York Bicycling Coalition "Better Roads for NY State" H. Lee Denison Building, 100 Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, AAA, FHWA, DOT and local bicycling clubs. 518-505-9499 or jesse@nybc.net

June 10, 1pm North Jersey Planning Authority meeting. NJTPA Headquarters, One Newark Center, 17th Floor, Newark. 973-639-8400 or della@njpta.org

June 13, Noon-2pm Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council meeting, 10th Floor Conference Room, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087

June 13, 6:30-9:30 Canal Street Community Transportation Workshop, NYMTC. P.S. 234, 292 Greenwich Street, Manhattan. 212-221-1131 ext. 6132 or mduoyle@ekmail.com

June 14, 9am-1pm "Walking on Water, A Vision for Restoring the High Bridge," Amy Freitag, NYC Parks & Recreation, Sidney Horenstein, American Museum of Natural History, and Jeff Olson, Trailblazer, Inc. 718-430-4641

June 18, 6:30-9:30pm Canal Street Community Transportation Workshop, NYMTC. The Puffin Room, 435 Broome Street, Manhattan. 212-221-1131 ext. 6132 or mduoyle@ekmail.com

more calendar entries at www.tstc.org