

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NYC Coalition Launches "Save the Fare" Effort

A coalition of unions, community groups and transit advocates – joined by dozens of elected officials – kicked off a "Save the Fare" campaign at a City Hall news conference Friday.

The groups called on state and city leaders to **prevent a fare hike** – which Bloomberg has said could increase fares to \$2 – by finding new sources of revenue to fill a \$660 million MTA budget gap.

They said the gap is the result of **reductions in New York State support for the MTA capital program**, not higher labor costs or increased service. Since 1995, the MTA has issued billions of dollars in new debt, and interest payments on it will begin to grow in 2003. "There's a false presumption that the only way to balance the transit budget is on the backs of working people, whether they be riders or transit workers," said Roger Toussaint, president of TWU Local 100. "We say the state and city must adopt other, fairer ways to fund transit."

"Riders who battle for breathing space on overcrowded trains and buses shouldn't have to pay more for the privilege," said Neysa Pranger, the coordinator of NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign.

In the 1980s, the state funded transit far more generously, the coalition noted. Of \$5.5 billion in government funding in the current five-year MTA program, five billion – or 91% – is federal funds. The rest – about \$530 million – comes from the city, while **none comes directly from the state**. But the 1982-86 plan – the first of the rebuilding programs, contained \$1.5 billion in state funds, 36% of the government funding. 17% came from the city.

The groups also said NYC subway and buses move 84% of the state's transit riders, but that city transit gets only 63% of state operating aid for transit, creating a \$325 million annual shortfall.

So far, 61 organizations, inkling the Tri-State Campaign, have joined the coalition. It is led by TWU, the Straphangers Campaign and Citizen Action of NY. The coalition will propose several funding options to **spread the transit funding burden more fairly**. Save the Fare activities planned include an in-the-subways voter registration drive, subway car ads and the distribution of hundreds of thousands of leaflets.

McGreevey Aides Move Sprawl Roads into NJ's Project Pipeline

— Worse than Whitman, Say Critics —

All of Governor Jim McGreevey's representatives to the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, including Transportation Commissioner James Fox, voted last week to **upload 20 sprawl- and traffic-inducing highway widenings and extensions** to NJ DOT's study and development project pipeline. The projects are in places the State Plan targets for preservation. Representatives from the DEP and the Office of Smart Growth attended but said nothing.

Most of the highways are concentrated in the ecologically sensitive Highlands and Pinelands or in rural farmlands and fringe suburban areas.

In recommending approval of the regional transportation plan that included these projects, Commissioner Fox said, "These places have congestion problems. We have to face up to these problems. Not doing so would be tantamount to sticking our head in the sand." Yet that is exactly what the McGreevey administration is doing by **not addressing the problem of sprawl** and induced traffic these capacity additions will bring up front, before the projects are designed and gain momentum within DOT.

Assurances that the projects were only moving into a "study" phase ignore the fact that congestion management alternatives studies have already been performed, with **options other than highway expansion dismissed**. The projects are advancing only as widening or extension projects, not open-minded studies.

The McGreevey Administration's actions are so out-of-step with smart growth principles that they **make the Whitman transportation record look good** in comparison. In 1996, DOT chief Frank Wilson released a list of highway projects Whitman wanted to put on a construction fast track, many of which were executed. They look favorable, in terms of rural and environmental sensitive areas impacted, compared to many proposals on the McGreevey list.

"This plan is another example of providing highways so you can get more development in," Sierra Club's Jeff Tittel said. "We have plenty of 'fix it' projects that need to be done before we build anything new," Tri-State's Janine Bauer told the *Star-Ledger*.

McGreevey has ten days after he receives the minutes of the NJTPA meeting to veto the action and chart the new course he claimed to represent when he ran for office last year.

Again, Long Island Bus Registers Record Ridership

Although a weakened economy has reduced peak period commuter rail riding in our region (though not city subway and bus use — see *MTR #376*), MTA Long Island Bus has achieved another record high single-day ridership for the **third consecutive year**. Daily bus ridership hit the highest level in Long Island Bus' 30-year history on September 3, with 115,630 riders.

The record day capped a steady three-year improvement in the annual passenger peaks, growing from 111,314 in September, 2000 and 113,758 in September, 2001 to 115,630 this month.

Long Island Bus managers said that most of the system's customers use it for commuting. They said the ridership growth shows that **more Nassau County residents are taking the bus to work** than ever before.

A provisional multi-year budget released earlier this week by Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi projected cuts in the county's contribution to L.I. Bus if it couldn't trim other costs, like police pay. Despite its excellent record building suburban ridership, Long Island Bus often **struggles to meet its operating budget** needs. State aid has made up for county cuts made at the end of former county executive Gullota's term, but both sources are subject to annual budget politics. Given its value to the county, Nassau's leaders need to aid in Long Island Bus' search for budget stability.

Change of Route for Hudson-Bergen Light Rail

In action by the NJTPA last week, freeholders and agency personnel who comprise the body voted to drop the description of the Hudson-Bergen light rail as extending from the Vince Lombardi park-and-ride in Ridgefield to Bayonne's West 5th Street. They replaced it language indicating that the line would be **extended along the Northern Branch** to Tenafly.

When this action was questioned by acting Hudson County Executive Bernard Hartnet, NJTransit's representative assured him that NJTransit was still committed to three passenger rail projects in Bergen County and that the change was not significant (the other projects being the West Shore Line and a Cross-Bergen line).

No one could explain why the Northern Branch option was not simply added to the existing plan, rather than replacing it. We have previously reported (#371) that local interests and the McGreevey Administration apparently have agreed that the Northern Branch extension **will be advanced first** among the three, and that it will seek funding for it during the 2003 federal transportation reauthorization.

U.S. Transportation After 9/ 11: Any Lessons Learned?

Last week, we reviewed transportation in the region after the September 11 attacks, noting some of the system's strong and weak points, and urging that policy-makers and planners take the latter to heart. We argued that the region's response offered grounds for optimism, but that **the country as a whole seemed to be learning little** from last fall's events. Here we elaborate on the second part of that thesis:

Reconnecting America ?

The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon were also attacks on air travelers, airlines and airports. When the air system was grounded last September, inter-city travelers were not able to rely on a flexible system of alternatives the way displaced New Yorkers did. The temporary shut down and the subsequent drop off in air travel demand also required a **huge infusion of public resources** to keep the airline industry afloat. The airlines continue to reel, service is being cut in small markets and travel-related industries like tourism are feeling the impact.

A less vulnerable, more efficient system would emulate Europe's movement to replace some shorter air trips with rail service. But this summer's squabble over the **fate and funding of Amtrak** — especially the Bush administration's ill-conceived position (*MTR #372*)— indicates that will be an uphill battle.

The best thinking and research about this type of development is being done not by government, but by advocacy groups. The **Great American Station Foundation** and Chicago's **Center for Neighborhood Technology** are developing a "Reconnecting America" project to press the case for integrated planning and investment in a network of medium distance passenger rail and inter-city bus services, with improved connections to key airports and to downtown transportation hubs. CNT calculates that 58% of U.S. flights are **less than 500 miles** in length, and is developing an analysis of the cities that might be served by rail from the country's hub airports.

Next year, Congress will for the first time simultaneously take up both the reauthorization of surface transportation and aviation laws, and grapple with the future of Amtrak. Reconnecting America's arguments are sufficiently compelling and timely that they may be able to lend a real focus to these proceedings. www.reconnectingamerica.org

Foreign Entanglements and the Fuel Food Chain

In an early September editorial reviewing the Bush administration's response to the September 11 attacks, the *NY Times* argued that President Bush had failed to "leverage the political and moral capital Sept. 11 provided" to make the United States a

different, more responsible nation.

“For instance,” the paper wrote, “it is hard to imagine a sharper reminder of **America’s dependence on the volatile regimes of the Middle East** for their oil than the events of September 11. Yet instead of charting a new course, one requiring major investments in energy efficiency and the development of alternative energy sources – the two surest roads to greater energy independence – Mr. Bush clung stubbornly to the notion that the United States could drill its way to self-sufficiency. Absent presidential leadership, Congress did little better, **rejecting modest efforts to tighten fuel economy standards** while showering producers of traditional fossil fuels with a staggering array of subsidies and tax breaks.”

We have little to add to this argument, except to reinforce it with very brief account of a work entitled “**Ending the Oil Age**,” released last February by Charles Komanoff, a Tri-State Campaign trustee.

Komanoff presaged the *Times*’ observations, noting the public’s post-September mood, and reviewed how the Saudi Arabian political and economic elite, in control of world oil “swing production” that keeps pipelines full and prices stable, accommodates dissent by tolerating militant religious networks. “Our dangerous liaison with the Saudi regime is only the most egregious manifestation of the national-security disaster created by our programmatic commitment to the over-consumption of oil.” The kingdom supplies more than 8% of oil consumed in the United States.

“Ending the Oil Age” reminds that 30% of the world’s oil comes from ten countries bordering the Persian Gulf or situated on the Arabian peninsula. These countries have less than 3% of the world’s population, and two-thirds of Earth’s known oil reserves. “In fearful symmetry,” the United States consumes 25% of world oil production but has only 2% of reserves. Sprawl, rising vehicle miles traveled and other factors have **pushed U.S. oil use up by 20%** since the early 1980s.

Komanoff presents several scenarios for immediate reductions in oil use that rely not on policy or technology changes, but on a **changed public ethos** that, with effective national leadership, would identify oil dependence as a threat worth confronting. He cites the example of Californians cutting 5% of electricity use in response to a state educational campaign following the power shortages of 2000. Americans could save 5% of their oil consumption – over half of our imports from Saudi Arabia – if families eliminated one in fourteen car trips, reduce flying somewhat (a goal that had been met as of February), households and companies reduce heat levels in buildings 2 degrees and reduced electricity consumption 5%. He also develops a 10% savings scenario, and an appendix spells out seven policy measures needed to institutionalize voluntary conservation

and multiply savings over time. *MTR* readers will be familiar with most – they include higher fuel taxes that better reflect oil costs, per-mile auto insurance, land use reforms to remove impediments to in-fill and brownfield development, more investment in mass transit and an end to the fuel economy exemption for “light trucks.”

The *Times* noted that last fall, President Bush said that the U.S. had “glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self. We’ve been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass.” The paper asked, and answered: “What has Mr. Bush made of that moment of opportunity, which may have passed us by? Sad to say, not much.” www.rightofway.org/research/newoilage.pdf

White House Addresses Project “Streamlining” Issue

President Bush signed an Executive Order on September 19 that promises to closely examine the environmental review process for major transportation projects. However, the order **does not change existing federal environmental review laws**, as a variety of bills introduced in the House of Representatives this year would (*MTR* #357). Instead, it creates a task force of federal officials to further review the issue, and directs the Secretary of Transportation to develop a list of key projects whose implementation should be expedited.

The President’s order cancels a **proposed FHWA order** developed in 1999 that would have significantly impaired by environmental review process defined by the National Environmental Policy Act.

It’s unclear as yet whether the order will reduce the momentum of “environmental streamlining” efforts in the House. A release by House Transportation Committee Chair Don Young praised the order but **promised to introduce more streamlining legislation**. A road lobby spokesperson called the order a “good first step.”

New Jersey: HOV is Dead Parsons-Brinckerhoff: Long Live HOV

Only four years after journalists whipped up an anti-HOV campaign that had politicians and NJ DOT scrambling to **erase HOV lanes on I-287 and I-80**, Parsons-Brinckerhoff says new HOV lanes are the “best use” for the **Bergen Arches** railway trench.

Parsons’ recommendation to NJDOT was met with disbelief by most observers.

Local citizens and the Hudson Area Residents for Rational Transportation have adamantly opposed any rubber-tire option for the right-of-way as a trojan horse for a general purpose highway that would bring even **more traffic to clogged Jersey City neighborhoods** and waterfront areas.

Citizens have suspected all along that transportation agencies want to pave the Bergen Arches, because it can be linked to another project (the Secaucus connector, a highway linked to the NJ Turnpike), to satisfy developers who aim to build out an area around the Secaucus Transfer station. They fear that, as in other parts of the state, an HOV project would feel pressure from solo motorists and truckers.

Parsons Brinckerhoff also authored the study recommending the ill-fated HOV lane on I-287 in Morris and Somerset Counties. It was abandoned just ten months after opening. Parsons Brinckerhoff is also the main architect of New York State DOT's heavily-criticized plan to build a huge network of HOV lanes on Long Island.

CT Proposal Would Double-Deck I-95

The Connecticut Transportation Strategy Board chartered by Governor Rowland and the state legislature to chart a new course for the state's under-funded and overburdened transportation system appears to be an old-school bunch after all. Its plan to ease roadway congestion: widen the roads.

A new report by the Board's "Movement of goods and people working group" says I-95 should be double-decked **from Greenwich to New Haven**, according to the Stamford *Advocate*. The draft plan also calls for widening I-84 and the Merritt Parkway and completing the "Super 7" expressway along U.S. Route 7 in Fairfield County.

Members of the committee told reporters developing additional transit capacity in the same corridor could take up to 10 years, perhaps unaware that highly obtrusive, controversial highway expansion projects generally take even longer.

Many were swift to condemn the scheme. A strategy board advisory group said it would promote traffic and congestion. State Senator William Nickerson of Greenwich told the *Advocate* it was an "**anti-solution.**" "You're taking the problem and mathematically squaring it so by the time you're done, you'd be worse off. Nobody in America has ever drove their way out of a highway problem by building more highways." The head of the New Haven metropolitan planning organization backed the idea. R. Nelson Griebel, the Strategy Board's chair, said not every working group recommendation would receive the Board's backing.

Still, it's hard to know what to make of the Strategy Board. So far, its working groups have recommended that the state **build or buy more of everything**, but have signally failed to identify priorities, develop plausible funding ideas or focus on the sprawl-traffic dynamic that is gridlocking the state.

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CALENDAR

September 24, 4:15-6:15pm or 6:45-8:45 pm Long Island Sound Waterborne Transportation Plan Community Planning Workshop. One Bowling Green, Basement Meeting Room #2, Manhattan. 917-339-0488 or crya@hshassoc.com

September 24, 6pm Public Hearing on Proposed Weekly UniTicket/UniRail Metro-North fares. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7483 or www.mta.info

September 24, 6-8pm Auto-Free New York Meeting, "Transportation: the Architecture of Place," Alex Marshall, journalist and urban scholar. 212-475-3394 or www.auto-free.org

Sept. 26, Noon NYC Transit Riders Council meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 5th floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087. www.pcac.org

Oct. 3, 4:15-6:15pm or 6:45-8:45 pm Long Island Sound Waterborne Transportation Plan Community Planning Workshop. Glen Cove Ferry Terminal. 917-339-0488 or crya@hshassoc.com

Oct 8, 4:15-6:15pm or 6:45-8:45 pm. Long Island Sound Waterborne Transportation Plan Community Planning Workshop. Murphy Rd. Jr. High School, Oxhead Road, Stony Brook. 917-339-0488 or crya@hshassoc.com

Oct. 10, Noon-8pm Bruckner-Sheridan Interchange open house. NY State DOT. 198 East 161st St., Bronx. www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/bese/212-799-8803

October 18, 8:30- 4:30pm 2002 Environmental Congress. "What's Ailing Us? The Sprawl- Health Connection." Busch Campus, Rutgers University, Piscataway. 609-278-5088 or www.anjec.org

Oct. 25, 8:30am-2pm 3rd Annual Tri-State Transit Symposium. NYU Wagner School and others. Keynote speaker: MTA executive director Katherine Lapp. Others include NJ Transit's George Warrington, USDOT's Emil Frankel.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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