

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 399

January 21, 2003

## NEWS

### New Jersey Maps War Against Sprawl — “Red Zones” Appear to Rule Out Controversial Highways —

After Governor James McGreevey made his campaign against sprawl development a centerpiece of his state of the state speech Tuesday, New Jersey officials moved quickly to add substance to the effort.

Late Thursday, they unveiled a map that **clearly identifies growth zones**, areas where uncontrolled growth is undesirable and an intermediate zone where development should proceed cautiously. About 2/3 of the state, excluding the already-protected Pinelands, is in the red zone, where the state would like to discourage sprawl. The green growth areas are focused mainly in the NY metro region, in Hudson, Essex, Bergen, lower Passaic, eastern Morris, Union, northern Middlesex and northern Monmouth Counties. The map defines smaller growth areas around Trenton and along the Delaware facing Philadelphia. It also shows local growth areas in key towns inside the primarily red zone. The yellow “caution” zone is primarily a buffer between large red and green areas.

Though the map is a draft, it would be difficult to make the issue of stopping sprawl more concrete than actually mapping where growth is and is not desirable. The map is a very strong early step by the McGreevey administration. It is the kind of **clear blueprint** for policy debate and decisions that smart growth discussions elsewhere — **Long Island**, for instance — so far lack.

NJ officials said green areas will get **priority transportation investment**, and building permits there will be expedited. The state says it will not spend resources for new or wider roads in red areas, and added that it would be tougher for developers to get permits and receive permission to link projects to existing roads there. The governor pledged hearings in every county to finalize the map.

“We’re going to make sure that not a single dime is spent to subsidize growth there. It means that the (transportation) **projects that contribute to sprawl** — lane widenings and new roads — are going to be limited in these areas,” NJ environmental protection commissioner Brad Campbell told the *Star-Ledger*.

The map appears to show that the Turnpike Authority’s **proposed Route 92** would run through

mainly red zones. NJ DOT’s plan to **widen Route 15** in Sussex County is clearly **deep in a red zone**. However, these projects are both in project pipelines, at different stages of environmental review. Whether these and similar projects in the pipeline move forward or are canceled by the state will be **important tests** for NJ’s anti-sprawl transportation policy.

Other measures that may go along with the map and directed infrastructure spending are tougher sewer hookups in red zones and laws to: let towns **charge developers for roads** and schools that growth requires; allow local governments to consider **off-site impacts** of projects, permit municipalities to impose 1-year development moratoriums and to give county planning entities more power.

It’s unclear how development policy will be addressed in yellow “caution” zones.

The building industry criticized the whole approach as allowing development “where no one wants to live.” The **sprawl lobby** is said to be mobilizing heavily to combat McGreevey’s initiative. Municipalities in sensitive areas said they should get state aid for foregoing development. Editorial boards are generally behind McGreevey. While calling for identification of more rural centers, the *Star-Ledger* endorsed the overall thrust of the map. The *Home News Tribune* also backed the red/yellow/green approach. Several pieces called for bolder action on tax reform, noting the revenue chase that causes municipalities to embrace development in any form.

### MTA’s Financial Picture in Better Focus — But Does it Help Riders? —

The NYC City Council Transportation Committee met last Friday to discuss MTA finances, MTA transparency, and alternatives to a fare increase.

The meeting came a day after the NYC Independent Budget Office released an analysis of the authority’s finances, indicating that the deficit the MTA needs to make up with new revenues during 2003 and 2004 is \$951 mill., rather than the \$2.8 billion gap the MTA has advertised.

The wider gap will be bridged by higher fares and a **variety of cost-cutting measures** the MTA says are

underway. Katherine Lapp, MTA executive director told City Council members that the information presented by the IBO came directly from MTA documents that have been available since Nov. However, critics say the MTA has **not presented the info clearly**, and has widely advertised the **\$2.8 billion** figure.

City Council transportation chair John Liu said the council had received “virtually nothing to shed light” on MTA finances. He called on the MTA to “end its cloak of secrecy and non-accountability.” He said it was “disturbing” that none of the MTA options put forth included a “no fare hike” option.

The IBO report focused more attention on the mounting debt burden in the MTA budget than previous critiques had done during this fare hike season. The report showed that **debt service costs will rise rapidly in '04**, consuming all of the revenue transit operations receive from MTA bridge/tunnel tolls.

The MTA capital program adopted in 2000 was widely criticized for heavy reliance on borrowing. Skeptics predicted the plan contained ticking debt bombs that would heavily pressure fares in the future. The plan has less support from general NY State and NYC revenues than earlier plans (see *MTR* #268).

One very worrisome implication of rising debt service costs and the city's and state's increasing abdication from supporting transit with revenues other than higher fares is whether **fare increases will again become a common occurrence** in the lives of straphangers. MTA documents and statements have said little about what will happen after 2004, and whether a \$2 fare will be sustainable in the face of the MTA's overall debt. “This is what business and civic leaders feared when the MTA began its massive borrowing program — that debt would explode and swallow up a huge chunk of the money that goes to operations,” Straphangers Campaign attorney Gene Russianoff told the *New York Times*.

#### **A recent history of the NYC Transit fare**

##### Four fare increases, 1980-1984:

- \* 1980: from 50¢ to 60¢
- \* 1981: from 60¢ to 75¢
- \* 1983: from 75¢ to 90¢
- \* 1984: from 90¢ to \$1.00

##### Three fare increases, 1990-1995:

- \* 1990: from \$1.00 to \$1.15
- \* 1992: from \$1.15 to \$1.25
- \* 1995: from \$1.25 to \$1.50

Cost saving measures the MTA says will close the bulk of the \$2.8 billion gap include the **agency restructuring** program announced during last year's gubernatorial election. However, Albany sources told *MTR* that legislative leaders have yet to receive any draft legislation from the MTA to begin the process.

The MTA also has operating cost-saving ideas, but one of them — **closing many station booths** in favor of fare machines and automated turnstiles — promises to become a pitched battle in itself.

#### **Campaign for Freight Tunnel Underway**

At another City Council hearing last week, Congressman Jerrold Nadler made his case for a NY harbor rail freight tunnel to the Council's waterfront and transportation committees. After the NYC Economic Development Corporation presented its work on the tunnel to date, Nadler took the microphone and argued that preserving the pre-eminent status of the Port of NY/NJ on the East Coast relied on the port's ability to handle bigger ships. He said developing **deep water shipping berths** along the **Brooklyn** waterfront was necessary to accommodate the ships of the future, but that such a port would need rail access to the mainland. He also said that if NY/NJ does become the East Coast's “hub port,” then container traffic here would likely increase dramatically. The EDC study predicts rapid growth in freight traffic through the port. Findings of earlier phases of the study suggest the tunnel would reduce truck traffic significantly on major city highways. Local truck trips would still be needed to serve regional rail yards.

Nadler told councilmembers he had gotten **Mayor Bloomberg's agreement** to include the freight tunnel in the city's list of priorities for this year's TEA-3 6-year federal funding authorization. He emphasized that building the freight tunnel was not a matter of competition between NY and NJ, but about the region competing with other areas for predominance in the freight business. He also linked the tunnel to a revival or at least retention of manufacturing in the city, though he cited city land use policies that are helping to drive manufacturing elsewhere. At the hearing, EDC officials said the environmental impact study for the freight tunnel would be finished this summer.

The congressman criticized the highly political way that infrastructure projects are chosen in NYC, and said the rail freight tunnel would have a **stronger economic benefit** than any of the mass transit expansion projects presently on the table.

Railroad industry representatives who testified were **less enthusiastic** about the tunnel than Nadler. They spoke more about reviving cross-harbor rail car barging service, with admonitions to “walk before we run.” Norfolk-Southern said bluntly that its service territory did not extend across the Hudson or into New England, so it has little interest in the tunnel. Others also emphasized the difficulties of balkanized rail freight service in the region, citing the need to **switch cars** between the operator on LI and the larger railroads serving most of the northeast. Generally, the railroads called on NY and NJ to execute **existing commitments** to upgrade rail infrastructure before undertaking something as large-scale as the tunnel.

### New PATH Fare System on Track

An upgrade of the PATH fare collection system is on track, according to the Port Authority. In a recent letter to the Campaign and the NJ Association of Rail Passengers, PATH general manager Michael DePallo stated that the introductions of **Metrocard-compatible** turnstiles and a non-swipe “smart card” for PATH riders have **not been impacted** by the agency’s **budget problems**. A *Star-Ledger* report in Nov. about Port Authority capital budget problems had listed the new fare collection system as an item that could be delayed to save money.

The Port Authority board authorized \$51 million for the system a year ago, and the PA issued notices seeking consultants for the project this fall. The implementation timetable for the system remains unclear, however.

### Reducing Truck Speeds: Myth and Fact

Lowering interstate highway speed limits for trucks have been a hot topic in New Jersey since a series of catastrophic truck crashes on NJ interstates in December. State Assemblywoman Connie Myers introduced a bill to **lower truck speed limits** to 55 mph on NJ highways this week. New Jersey transportation commissioner Jack Lettiere told reporters the state administration was considering the measure, and that NJ DOT wanted to beef up a truck safety initiative it floated after the December crashes. However, a *Courier-News* editorial bought the line that different car and truck speed limits would cause bloody chaos on NJ highways. Other news reports also looked at the issue pessimistically.

All of the articles on the issue presented myths and facts, without adequately sorting them out. We attempt to do so here:

**MYTH #1:** Lowering truck speed limits would create a dangerous speed differential between cars and trucks which would increase traffic accidents.

**FACT:** According to highly respected research from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, speed variation does NOT make highways more dangerous. A study done in the 1950s did report that speed differential was a problem, but it was conducted on two-lane rural roads, not on multilane highways with limited access. As the IIHS says, “The authors of this early study acknowledged that their findings could not be extended to controlled access freeways, but some proponents of higher speeds have attempted to

### Trucks on Grand Central a Good Move

NYC’s recent decision to ease rules prohibiting trucks from Queens’ Grand Central Parkway between the **Triborough Bridge** and the **Brooklyn-Queens Expressway** is a good deal for a part of Astoria, whose streets play host to all manner of big rigs traveling between BQE and bridge. *Newsday* said the decision will allow trucks up to 12 ft in length to use the connecting section of the Parkway. It is unclear at present why neighborhood streets will **still have to accommodate larger trucks**.

The change has been sought by community leaders since the early 1980s – *Newsday* said transportation commissioner Weinshall and Queens Borough President Helen Marshall have finally overcome DOT’s inertia on the problem.

Because of the peculiar rules governing parkways, **truck routing in NYC is mainly backwards** — huge trucks travel city streets, inflicting noise, vibration, pollution and aggravation on many more people than necessary because they are barred from many limited-access highways. The city should **seek other opportunities** to keep trucks on highways and out of neighborhoods. The NYC parkways may have been special at one time but many are now little different from “expressways” like the BQE, Gowanus or Van Wyck.

do so.” More recent studies by the IIHS have shown that lower truck speed limits “lower the proportion (of trucks) traveling faster than 70mph” while allowing roadway traffic to move at sufficient speeds without imposing a “speed differential” problem. It’s time to stop repeating the myth about speed differential causing weaving and crashes.

**MYTH #2:** The number and severity of truck accidents occurring at 55mph are going to be the same as those that occur at 65mph.

**FACT:** Speed kills. Studies by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Texas Transportation Institute both found that the increase in the national speed limit in 1996 increased the number of fatalities on our nation’s highways. Trucks moving at high speeds are particularly dangerous because they take a longer time to stop or slow than smaller vehicles. State troopers in Ohio, where highway speed limits for trucks are lower, are fighting an increase in trucks’ speed limit. The police say the 10mph increase in the speed limit will increase trucks’ stopping distance by 30%.

**MYTH # 3:** A truck’s involvement in an accident will not increase the severity of the accident.

**FACT:** A truck’s involvement in an accident means the accident is more likely to be fatal, block road-

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

[www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

ways, and lead to increased clean up and delay.

**MYTH # 4:** Experiences with truck speed limits on highways in other states, like Ohio, are not applicable to New Jersey roads.

**FACT:** Many of the highways in Ohio that have lower truck speed limits are near urban areas, and thus roughly equivalent to highways in New Jersey.

**MYTH #5:** Lower truck speed limits are useless without heavy police enforcement.

**FACT:** There does not always have to be heavy police enforcement for speed limit laws to be obeyed. Even relatively light speed limit enforcement, combined with increased speeding penalties, can be effective in reducing average truck speeds on the road and saving lives.

### City Hall, Albany Bills Target Truck Routes

Earlier this month, NY City Councilmembers from Queens Leroy Comrie and John Liu introduced a bill (Intro 344) that would require trucking companies to supply their drivers with **city truck route maps**. The legislation would also **hike fines** for trucks traveling off of designated truck routes by \$150, from \$100 to \$250. At our press time, over 20 Council members from all five boroughs have endorsed the bill.

The Council will likely hold a hearing on the bill later this winter.

A similar move, with even more teeth, is afoot in Albany. Assemblyman Joseph Lentol of Brooklyn has introduced legislation that would penalize truckers who are found off of designated truck routes with a \$500 fine, and, perhaps most importantly, **points on their driving records**.

NYPD officials who have addressed recent community forums on the problem of truck impacts in neighborhoods say many companies are willing to absorb truck route violations as part of the **cost of doing business**. A change in state law to add points to truck drivers' licenses would make that practice much more difficult for companies and their drivers.

Lentol's bill was just introduced. It is unclear if there are any co-sponsors at present. There is no State Senate version of the bill as yet.

### TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

MTR#399 Contributing: Jennifer Siegel Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kate Slevin Executive Director: Janine Bauer

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

### Calendar

**January 23**, 1pm, South Jersey Transportation Authority public hearing on passenger rail improvements from Philadelphia to Atlantic City, Atlantic City Convention Center, Room 405. 609-965-6060.

**January 23**, 4-8pm, Westchester bus public hearing on fare hike, County Center, White Plains, Westchester DOT. 914-813-7777

**January 23**, noon, NYC Transit Riders Council Board Meeting, 347 Madison Ave, 5th Floor, 212-878-7087, [www.psac.org](http://www.psac.org)

**January 24**, Noon, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Regional Citizens Committee, Philadelphia, PA. 12pm

**January 28**, 6-8pm, Auto- Free NY Meeting, "Advocating for Greenways for NYC," David Lutz, Neighborhood Open Space Coalition, 212-475-3394, [www.visions42.org](http://www.visions42.org)

### MTA Fare Increase Hearings

Call 212-878-7483 for info on all hearings.

**February 4, 4pm**, Beacon High School, 101 Matteawan Road, Beacon.

**February 5, 4pm**, Roosevelt Hotel, Junior Ballroom, Madison Avenue at 45th St. Manhattan.

**February 6, 4pm**, NYC College of Technology, Klitgord Auditorium, 300 Jay St, Brooklyn.

**February 10, 4pm**, Hofstra University, Student Center — Multi-purpose Room, 200 Hofstra University, Hempstead.

**February 11, 4pm**, Stony Brook University, Student Activities Center Ballroom, Stony Brook.

**February 12, 4pm**, Susan E. Wagner High School, 1200 Manor Road, Staten Island.

**February 13, 4 pm**, Westchester County Cntr, Little Theatre, 198 Central Ave., White Plains.

**February 18, 4pm**, Bronx County Building, Rotunda, 851 Grand Concourse, Bronx.

**February 19, 6pm**, Queens Borough Hall, Central Jury Room, 120-55 Queens Blvd, Kew Gardens, Queens.

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