

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

MTA Accountability: Progress?

While it's impossible to predict whether the Strap-hangers Campaign lawsuit to delay or temporarily roll back Metropolitan Transportation Authority transit fares will prevail, the broader effort to compel MTA financial transparency and accountability appears to be making headway.

MTA Chairman Kalikow, whose initial reaction to critical audits by NY State and New York City comptrollers was far more apoplectic than apologetic, softened his tone in public remarks this week. He said **new accountability measures** would be part of the MTA **reorganization legislation** the MTA would propose to the state legislature later this year. *Newsday's* Ray Sanchez quoted Kalikow as saying, "We could do a better job in the area that we call transparency — communicating with the public about our system, about our plans and about the way we work....The fault was ours for not doing it correctly, for not telling it in a better way."

After the comptrollers' announcement, the Strap-hangers Campaign said the MTA had hit the lowest point in its public credibility since its creation. The public's trust will not be regained unless Governor Pataki and the legislature take the issue seriously when the legislation is considered.

Hopefully, increased transparency will spotlight the **waning of city and state funding** for transit, and the rising mountain of **MTA debt**. New York City transit riders already pay the highest percentage of bus and subway system operating costs in the country. Without a change in the approach to transit funding taken under the Pataki administration, and in the city halls of mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg, the system is looking at a return to a 1980s-like time when **fare hikes** were an **almost routine occurrence**. At least then, the transit system could argue that it was recovering from the crisis of the 1960s and 70s, and that other sectors, like city and state governments and the business community, were also pitching in.

Re-Connecting Development and Traffic

On Thursday, May 8th, the NJ State Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee, will consider draft legislation (S.2093) sponsored by Senator Shirley Turner (D-Mercer) and co-sponsor Senator Leonard Lance (R-Hunterdon). The bill, if enacted, would re-grant local planning boards in New Jersey the **power to consider off-site traffic impacts** of development, a right they lost with passage of the Municipal Land Use Laws in 1975. Since then, municipalities have only been allowed to consider on-site vehicle and pedestrian circulation and the site driveways when evaluating potential developments.

The bill fits well into Governor McGreevey's Smart Growth agenda. It returns basic powers to municipalities to grow in a smart way. Without a link between traffic and land use planning at the local level, developers essentially have had a "hall pass" to spawn traffic.

The bill's provisions are voluntary. If a municipality wants to exercise power to control off-site traffic impacts, it must adopt a **circulation element** in its master plan addressing at least four targets: level of service (traffic flow), safety, alternative modes and delay. If the applicant fails to conform to the performance objectives outlined in the master plan circulation element, then the municipality can negotiate improvements (paid for by the developer) or, in case the developer is unwilling or the improvements would not fit the overall master plan, deny the application. Travel demand reduction measures could also be specified by the municipality.

The bill is supported on both sides of the political aisle, by representatives from a wide range of municipalities, including Surf City, Newark, Montgomery and New Brunswick.

Some have suggested that the bill be amended, saying its provisions are vague, and could result in litigation by developers whose projects are found to have severe traffic impacts.

Those critics are wrong, and need to consider the bill's clear procedures again. Either the town allows the development to go forth as is, requests that the developer amend the plan, or denies the plan. If the town does request changes to a plan, the bill allows municipalities and developers to negotiate an agreement which may include some type of compensatory

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

measure to mitigate traffic impacts. The measures for assessing traffic impacts are **objective and quantifiable**. Sophisticated traffic analysis tools are available and in use in studies for many development projects – they provide accurate predictions of traffic levels, congestion and transit use.

Call for Better Parking Starts NYC Bike Week

To mark the start of NYC's annual Bike Week, sponsored by the NYC Dept. of Transportation and Transportation Alternatives (T.A.), City Councilmember David Yassky introduced a bill last Thursday (Intro 458) that would require building owners to make provisions for employees and tenants to bring bicycles into buildings. The measure could indeed boost city bike commuting — a 1990 city DOT study found that 45% of Manhattan office workers commuting less than 5 miles to work would consider traveling by bike if safe indoor bicycle parking available was available. Indoor parking addresses New Yorkers' concerns about theft and vandalism. As T.A.'s *Bicycle Blueprint* points out, "Bicycles are lightweight, simple to operate and inherently mobile — hence, easy to steal."

The bicycle parking environment indeed received the lowest marks in Transportation Alternatives' **annual city cycling report card**, presented in the group's current magazine (see www.transalt.org for more info). Bike parking conditions received a D (down from C+ last year).

While on-street bike parking improved in 2002, bike access to buildings saw no progress.

In other areas, the report card gave government efforts to promote cycling in NYC a C+, down from an A- last year. The group cited ongoing development of bike lanes and paths, but is disappointed in the city's failure to better inter-connect the emerging segments into a more coherent network. Dangerous and/or confusing access to East River bridge bikeways, among the most critical bike infrastructure in the city, remained a problem, as did the lack of safe conditions environment on major roadways like Flatbush Ave and Queens Boulevard. Although the city made progress on the Hudson River Greenway (by closing four motor vehicle crossing and redesigning eight), generally in 2002, greenways in the city were overcrowded, and suffered from the absence of a full-time Greenway Coordinator at the Parks Department. T.A. says DOT officials were more accessible to the public than in previous years. But overall, their efforts to build bike ridership did not keep pace with efforts in previous years. Top government marks went to NYC Transit for maintaining its "common sense" approach to bikes on subway trains.

For more on city cycling, see the full calendar of 2003 Bike Week events at bikeweeknyc.com.

Lower Manhattan Hub: Time to be Heard

The MTA has opened the **public "scoping" record** for the proposed lower Manhattan transit hub. The proposed project, costing approximately \$750 million, would extend a **renovated Fulton Street complex** west, providing connection corridors to the N/R, E, and WTC PATH stations. The project also seeks to reduce overcrowding, make the entire complex accessible to people with disabilities, improve circulation in the stations and help anchor the revival of the district.

The draft environmental impact statement is scheduled to be completed in June, with construction beginning on the project in late 2004. To submit comments (due by **May 13**) or sign up for the mailing list, write to Fulton Street Transit Center Project, c/o New York City Transit Government & Community Relations, 130 Livingston Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201. For more information on the project, go to www.mta.info/planning/fstc/.

In related news, Governor George Pataki announced that the **temporary PATH station** at the World Trade Center site would be functioning a month **ahead of schedule**, by November, 2003.

White House Makes Opening Bid for "TEA-3"

Policy observers in Washington report that the Bush Administration's proposed bill for the reauthorization of the 1998 Transportation Equity Act (TEA-21) may be delivered to Congress as early as today. TEA-21 is the primary authorization for federal funding for highway and mass transit projects around the United States. It expires this September. Its successor is also expected to cover a 5-6 year period.

Several accounts of the bill — dubbed the Safe and Flexible Transportation Efficiency Act (SAFETEA) — say it contains the policy provisions noted below. This is a **preliminary synopsis** intended to **spotlight elements of note**, rather than an exhaustive overview.

- Single occupant vehicles would be permitted to use HOV lanes upon payment of a toll, as long as the SOV traffic doesn't jam up the lane in question. The operating threshold for such service degradation is set at 45mph, which could rule out some urban HOV facilities.
- States and public authorities would be authorized to impose tolls on highways, bridges and tunnels, including those on the Interstate system. Interstate tolls would be required to vary in price by time of day in order to create a congestion relief benefit. The FHWA's small value pricing program would be eliminated.
- The definition of mass transit "new starts" would

be broadened to include “development of corridors to support public transportation...including construction of dedicated bus and high occupancy vehicle lanes” or other capital projects designed to increase transit ridership in a corridor. Although bus rapid transit is a potentially very promising area of transit expansion for U.S. metro areas, blending HOV lane highway projects into the competition for scarce transit new start dollars is a terrible proposal. Several years ago, New Jersey transformed several federally-funded HOV lanes into general traffic lanes. Under this provision, the Long Island division of NY State DOT could grab transit new start funds to build HOV lanes under its widely-rejected “LITP” plan. The federal share of new starts projects would also be codified at 50%, as opposed to the traditional 80-20 federal-state split for transportation projects, including most federally-funded highway work. Note, however, that 50% is more or less today’s de facto federal share for large transit new starts.

- The bill distributes some of the funding previously under Federal Transit Administration discretionary programs like “rail modification” and bus capital funding to formula and new starts programs. It is not immediately clear that these changes herald adverse consequences for transit-rich states, though will continue to seek perspective on the issue.
- The bill directs US DOT to establish a national commission to assess the condition and future needs of the Interstate highway system, and another to investigate whether and how to replace the federal gas tax as the primary revenue source for the Highway Trust Fund, and provides for federal study of transportation and climate change.
- It would create “a freight transportation gateways” program to improve productivity, security and safety of freight transportation gateways, while mitigating congestion and community impacts in the area of such gateways.” Publicly-owned multi-modal freight transportation projects would become eligible for Surface Transportation Program funding. The bill also creates a set-aside within the National Highway System program for connecting freight terminals to the NHS – such connections are eligible for a 90% federal share.
- “Environmental streamlining” provisions in the administration bill are generally less radical than those proposed by Republicans in Congress. Rep. Don Young’s bill seeks to constrain public agencies from even considering a variety of impacts and issues. The Bush approach has more emphasis on inter-agency relations than on limiting the scope of environmental review. Still, its provisions would erode protections for historic properties, weaken the linkage between

transportation and air quality planning and enhance state abilities to “categorically exclude” some projects from environmental review.

Comment in Congress so far has focused on **disappointment** with the Bush bill’s **funding level**. It would authorize \$247 billion for 2004-2009. TEA-21 authorized about \$240 billion over its six-year time span. A variety of interests and agencies have pointed out the need for significant increases in U.S. infrastructure investment. Funding levels noted in House of Representatives statements indicate an intention to propose a **\$375 billion program**, though House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee leaders remain at odds with the White House over **tax increases** needed to create such a program. The Senate has indicated its interest in a program of approximately \$310 billion. The Bush funding level has been described as “irrelevant” by lobbyists and congressional staffers. In past authorizations, Congressional proposals have held far more sway than administration bills. The issue of taxes, however, is likely to remain significant during this reauthorization.

Members of the House have reportedly submitted more than **5,300 “high priority” projects** to the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee for inclusion in the bill. Their combined price tag comes to about \$500 billion. TEA-21 contained 1,850 high priority projects at a total cost of \$9.4 billion. The requests average about 12 projects per member and a cost-per-member of over \$1 billion.

X-Games, 2012

At the end of April, NYC Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff addressed a session of the Women’s Transportation Seminar about transportation and plans for the **2012 Olympics**. Doctoroff essentially gave fairly well-known 2012 presentation, adding little detail to the plan’s vaguer elements, like the east-west axis of the “Olympic X.”

Doctoroff said a 2012 NYC Olympics would be the first true “mass transit Olympics” and that there would be almost no parking available at venues. Athletes would travel only an average of 6 miles to compete and would almost never have to use NYC highways and streets.

The “Olympic X” is the heart of the transportation plan. Ferries would comprise the north-south arm, reaching from Staten Island to the uptown end of Manhattan.

The east-west axis is projected as a **rail route** from **Flushing Meadows to the New Jersey Meadowlands**. The 2012 presentation says the route is “along existing commuter rail lines,” but it’s simply not the case that NJ Transit trains serve the Meadowlands basketball/hockey arena, which is

supposed to be the X's western terminus. There is now some discussion about a NJ Transit link between the Secaucus Transfer Station and the outlandish "**Xanadu**" development proposed in the Meadowlands, but the Olympic connection hasn't yet been mentioned as part of that decision.

The city is moving ahead with its west side #7-train plans, but that has no conceivable through-train capabilities regarding New Jersey. New Jersey Transit needs a second commuter rail tunnel, but it will likely add capacity between Midtown's west side and Secaucus, leaving Meadowlands access unresolved. It also may be finished well after 2012.

If a Meadowlands NJ Transit link is built, and the **Sunnyside Yard station** that is supposed to be part of the LIRR East Side Access project is delivered on time (to serve Long Island City's Olympic village), Olympic through-trains could conceivably be run between the Meadowlands and Long Island City. Since those types of operations are not standard now, they could disrupt regular service, which could see heavier than normal demand during the games (the "X" plan is only to move the athletes).

When questioned about the difficulty of connecting the Meadowlands to Penn Station, Doctoroff gave a broad response about the disconnect between various train systems serving Manhattan, and said the city needed a deadline to get desired transportation projects accomplished.

The 2012 plan also depends on a new stadium west of Penn Station. Its regular tenants would be the NY Jets, and a conference center. It's difficult to disentangle the Olympic plan, far west side real estate ambitions and the #7 subway extension project. The MTA and the City Planning Commission are holding a "**scoping**" hearing for the environmental impact statement for the #7 project and the city's proposals to **rezone the far west side** of Midtown on the afternoon and evening of June 5, at the Fashion Institute of Technology (sessions start at 2pm and 6pm). See www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/hyards/hymain.html

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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more calendar entries at www.tstc.org

Calendar

May 5-11 NYC Bike Week. See www.transalt.org or www.bikeweeknyc.com for full schedule.

May 6 (revised), 6:30pm, Scoping Meeting for the I-95 Commuter Shoulders Project, Norwalk City Hall, 12700 Norwalk Boulevard, Norwalk, CT, 860-594-2002, www.dot.state.ct.us/releases/.

May 6, 6pm, Public Meeting on New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail Plan, Hartford Union Station, One Union Place, 1-800-786-2191, 203-865-2191, www.nhhsrail.com.

May 7, 6pm, Public Meeting on New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail Plan, Mildred Wakeley Community Center, 7 Linsly Street, North Haven, 203-865-2191, www.nhhsrail.com.

May 8, 4:30pm, Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council meeting. LIRR officials on LIRR air conditioning, www.pcac.org, 212-878-7087.

May 12, 4pm and 6:30pm, Public Hearing on 2nd Ave Subway draft environmental impact statement, U.S. Customs House, One Bowling Green, 212-878-7483, www.mta.info/planning/sas/

May 13, 4pm, and 6:30pm, Public Hearing on 2nd Ave Subway Draft Environmental Impact Statement, El Museo Del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Ave at 104th St, 212-878-7483, www.mta.info/planning/sas/

May 14, 6pm. Workshop on Lower Manhattan transportation projects. Municipal Art Society, Civic Alliance and Pace University. Multi-purpose room, Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, Pace University, info@imaginewyork.org, 212-935-3960.

May 19, 8am, Regional Business Partnership Annual Transportation Awards Breakfast, honoring Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, Gateway Hilton, Newark, 973-242-4219, bkauffman@rbp.org.

May 20, 9am, "Thinking Regionally: TEA-21 Reauthorization and Beyond," NY, NJ and CT DOT Commissioners. NYU Wagner Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management, bella.pierson@nyu.edu, 212-998-7545.

May 22, 6pm, Public Meeting on New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail Plan, Enfield Town Hall, 820 Enfield Street, 1-800-786-2191, 203-865-2191, www.nhhsrail.com.

May 27, 6pm, Auto-Free NY: "Transportation Vision for Downtown NY," Councilmember Alan Gerson, NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington St., 212-475-3394, www.auto-free.org

May 27-29, National Transit Institute, Rutgers University, Course: "Public Involvement in Transportation Decision Making", Newark, NJ, 732-932-1700.