

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Trucks Returning to Holland Tunnel?

- Bus Access a Boon for Lower Manhattan Transit -

The *Staten Island Advance* reported last Tuesday that the Port Authority would soon lift the ban on trucks at the Holland Tunnel. Commercial traffic restrictions have been in place at the tunnel since the Sept. 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. Presently, all trucks are excluded in the NYC-bound direction, while tractor trailers are excluded from NJ-bound lanes. The *Advance* said the reason for the change is easing **congestion on the Staten Island Expressway**. The piece was based on an account by S.I. Borough President Molinaro of his discussions with the Port Authority. Molinaro said he had complained about truck diversion to the S.I.E. The PA did not comment on any pending policy decision, but a spokesperson told that paper that truck traffic had increased 16% on Staten Island-NJ bridges in the month after Sept. 11, and that truck volume is still at a higher level on the Staten Island Expressway than before the attack.

However, the Holland Tunnel truck restriction is one of the traffic vestiges of the Sept. 11 emergency that **enjoys support in lower Manhattan**. The Canal Street corridor has functioned better and been more liveable since the tunnel truck rules were imposed. Downtown interests have not made their positions clear on the truck issue.

The *Advance* story said that while single-chassis trucks would return to the tunnel, **tractor-trailers would be permanently excluded**. This would permit buses to return to the tunnel (previously, the PA did not want wide trucks and buses to share it). The *Advance* said NYC Transit was interested in routing some Staten Island-Manhattan **express bus** routes through NJ to lower Manhattan via the Holland Tunnel. NJ Transit and private carriers would presumably also take advantage of such access.

The NY Metropolitan Transportation Council has undertaken a "Canal St. Area Transportation Study" to address a range of transportation issues there. Holland Tunnel bus access is under consideration — it is looking at a Holland Tunnel rush hour bus lane and lanes or other bus priority treatments on streets near the Manhattan end of the tunnel. It is also considering a variety of local truck route changes and pedestrian signal and street space improvements. ❖

Trenton Reviewing Route 92 Project

The McGreevey Administration has reportedly requested a delay in the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Route 92, a major new alignment highway on the NJ Turnpike Authority's books. Apparently at the state's request, the NJ Turnpike Authority recently asked the Army Corps of Engineers to **delay the Route 92 DEIS release** pending a review of the project in light of the state's smart growth objectives. This is welcome news to advocates who say the project will promote sprawl and traffic growth in southern Middlesex County.

Route 92, a proposed 6.7-mile new alignment toll highway that would be managed by the Turnpike, would extend from Turnpike Interchange 8A to Route 1 at Ridge Road in South Brunswick.

The **McGreevey Administration is right** to worry that building new highways across open land does not fit with its smart growth agenda. The highway would ruin 14 acres of wetlands and travel through an area designated on the state's anti-sprawl "big map" as "red," or an area where development growth is less desirable.

McGreevey's battle to fight sprawl is already facing some skepticism, most recently in a *Star-Ledger* editorial that urged a faster pace for the administration's legislative agenda. The construction of a brand new \$400 million highway through a greenfield area would cause far more damage to the campaign's credibility.

Only one local paper reported on the DEIS' possible delay. But the *South Brunswick Post* incorrectly reported that the letter had been sent from the Army Corps of Engineers to the state, rather than vice versa. ❖

Route 92 Would Add Traffic to Bad Section of Route 1

Meanwhile, NJ and federal transportation officials, as part of a "Safety Impact Team," are studying possible safety measures for a segment of Route 1 that is close to the proposed Route 92 right-of-way. The part of Route 1 in question is already overcrowded and would only see more traffic and crashes after the construction of Route 92.

According to the *Home News Tribune*, Route 1 is New Jersey's **most dangerous highway**. It saw

over 7,000 crashes and 20 fatalities in 2001.

According to Turnpike documents, the completion of Route 92 would cause an additional 10,000-15,000 cars and 1,200 additional truck trips per day on nearby Route 1. If traffic from new development induced by Route 92 is included, volumes would worsen further. The additional traffic would mean more congestion, and **more dangerous conditions** for drivers and pedestrians.

The Safety Impact Team plans to release a detailed report of safety measures for the ten-mile stretch of Route 1 from South Brunswick to Lawrence. In the meantime, according to the *Home News Tribune*, interim safety measures such as signal timing and resurfacing will be implemented.

City Truck Route Study Finally Underway

NYC DOT has announced that its study to revise the city's truck route system will begin with a kick-off outreach meeting on Tuesday, June 17, at City College in Manhattan. Community groups, civic leaders and local elected officials have been waiting for five years for the effort to begin (see calendar, last page). The project is formally known as the "Truck Route Management and Community Impact Reduction Study." The city says its goals are to coordinate engineering, educational, informational and enforcement efforts **so that trucks remain on designated routes**.

The city recently extended the deadline for filling out its on-line survey, intended to identify key issues and truck trouble spots. The survey is open through today, June 2. We urge our NYC readers to fill out the survey to specify local truck problems and conditions for the city's study team. See www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/motorist/truckintro.html for the survey. The survey's results will be discussed at the June 17 meeting.

Bush, Congress Offer Free Humvees

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, the \$350 billion tax cut bill passed by Congress and signed by President Bush last week includes a loophole that **quadruples the business deduction** for the **largest, least efficient suburban utility vehicles** from \$25,000 to \$100,000. The increase, which will cost taxpayers billions, effectively subsidizes the full purchase price of 38 of the biggest and most expensive SUV models on the American road, including Hummers, Range Rovers, Expeditions, and Escalades.

NRDC is encouraging the Senate to address this issue by passing an amendment to the forthcoming energy bill that would limit the deduction available for SUV purchases to the same amount currently available for car purchases.

A Ticket Blitz We Could Use

The *Daily News* is right – NYC law enforcement should focus on real problems, not the dopey stuff highlighted last week. A *News* editorial urged a summons for "every driver who 'blocked the box.'"

A 2001 study by Comptroller Hevesi (*MTR #319*) found the city's worst intersection — E 70th St. and Madison Ave. — to be the site of an average of 56 red light violations per hour. If ticketing focused on such dangerous behavior, the city would write its tickets and make the streets safer for everyone.

End Nearing for City Bus System?

The Straphangers Campaign's Gene Russianoff laid out the likely pitfalls of Mayor Bloomberg's efforts to rid the city of responsibility for the franchise bus system operating in the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn in a Friday *Daily News* opinion piece.

Standing alone, the franchise system constitutes the **seventh largest bus fleet** in the U.S. It carries 111 million riders each year, on 82 routes.

The mayor wants to hand the entire system off to the MTA and pocket \$98 million in savings for the city budget. However, as everyone knows, MTA finances are not in a state to simply **begin running 82 new bus routes** without some new source of funding. Moreover, state government has often matched city transit cuts. \$52 million in state operating support for the buses could also be put in jeopardy. Likely outcomes of a city move to walk away from the bus services are:

- Significant financial pressure on the MTA. Not only will the MTA have to pay to operate the routes, but the buses and their depots are in need of substantial **capital investment**. The \$98 million the city pays to run the franchise routes would amount to a dime added to NYC Transit fares.
- Because the MTA is unlikely to be able to meet all of these costs, riders can expect **major service cuts** along the franchise routes.

Transit advocates agree that MTA control of the routes makes sense, but oppose the city's leaving them on the MTA's doorstep without any budgetary support. They have called on the city to **maintain its operating support and contribute capital funds** to modernize depot and replace aging buses.

The *Daily News* reported earlier in May that three of the franchise operators in Queens had put their **depots up for sale** in anticipation of the June 30 deadline Mayor Bloomberg has set for striking a deal with the MTA over the bus lines. The paper reported that the operating companies had put bus lots in Far Rockaway, Jackson heights and two in Jamaica on the auction block. The companies said they were in the dark regarding the MTA-city discussions about the takeover.

Another Washington Plan to Take Our Transit Funding

If a coalition of southern and midwestern states has its way, New York and Connecticut could lose desperately needed transportation funding as part of the upcoming TEA-21 reauthorization. A recent study by **NYU's Rudin Center for Transportation** says this would mean a funding loss of \$300 million annually (or 18% of total highway funding) for New York's transportation system.

Currently, motorists pay into the Federal Highway Trust Fund primarily through the federal gas tax. The amount collected in each state is different, depending on a variety of factors, such as population size, percentage of rural or urban areas, infrastructure (roads vs. transit) and geography. In the end, as with all federal programs, motorists in some states send more in federal revenues than the state receives in return via federal transportation agencies. "States' Highway Alliance for Real Equity" (SHARE), a **coalition of so-called "donor" states**, mostly in the southern and Midwest, wants to rewrite the federal transportation formula so that they get more money, using "donor" status as their logic.

Presently, TEA-21 provides a **minimum guarantee** to states, so that they receive at least 90.5% of the federal gas tax revenues collected within their borders in the form of federal transportation aid. In the upcoming TEA-21 reauthorization, SHARE aims to increase the minimum guarantee to 95%.

The plan is backed in Washington by Rep. Tom Delay, Ohio Senator George Voinovich and others.

Because New York relies so heavily on mass transit, the amount it sends to Washington from U.S. gas taxes is relatively low per capita. Therefore, SHARE's plan to hike the minimum guarantee would greatly **reduce transportation funding for New York**, along with other "donee" states, such as Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Washington, Massachusetts and Maine. For example, according to the Rudin Center report, if the 95% guarantee was enacted for FY 2002, **Connecticut would have lost \$163 million**, or 33% of its total highway budget. New Jersey, on the other hand, because it is so densely paved and serves as an East Coast corridor between major metro areas, would have seen an increase of \$57 million (or a 7% increase) in highways funds. (Apparently, New Jersey has recently signed on to the SHARE plan, though it could reduce federal transit funding for the state).

The SHARE alliance has even gone as far as to say that the recent \$4.5 billion given to Lower Man-

hattan for transportation improvements after 9/11 is more evidence that New York receives more transportation funding than it deserves, even though those funds are from the general fund for emergency response, not from FHWA or Federal Transit Administration programs.

There are many ways to look at the fairness of federal funding. The **"donor" states approach is sophistry**. It equates funding needs with federal gas tax revenues collected within a certain jurisdiction — a random measure by anybody's logic. The Rudin Center took several different perspectives:

- The federal funding formula, because it accounts for lane miles and other factors besides population, greatly benefits sparsely-settled states. For example, Wyoming got four times the national average in federal transportation aid per capita from 1996-2000.
- The MTA and NYC DOT receive the smallest amount in federal funding per passenger mile of the top 20 largest mass transit agencies in country.
- Nationally, the federal government paid an average of 18% for states' transportation projects, with states and localities making up the rest. However, New York and Minnesota paid a much highest proportion themselves, with only 11% and 12%, respectively, coming from the federal government.

The late Senator Moynihan used to publish an annual report showing how much more NY State residents and businesses paid in federal taxes each year than the state received back from federal programs. Transportation is one of a **tiny handful** of areas where NY was in the black regarding federal aid.

Senators Schumer and Clinton ought to revive the annual report, and make a practice of introducing minimum guarantee provisions into federal farm bills and other legislation regarding federal formula programs until SHARE state representatives get the message and agree to lay off our transit funding.

For the entire Rudin Center report, see www.nyu.edu/wagner/transportation/

Transit-Chek Fixed for City Van Riders

Last week, the TransitChek organization issued a notice stating that its benefits were again available to NYC Access-a-Ride users. Access-A-Ride vans, which take the city's disabled population from point to point, traditionally accepted tokens, which riders could purchase with the pre-tax TransitChek vouchers. The token was phased out the beginning of May, but no provision had been made for maintaining the benefit for Access-A-Ride riders. Access-A-Ride users will now be able to obtain TransitChek coupons that they can use to pay for van rides. For more info, call 1800-622-5000.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

NJ Bicycling Promo Events Mark End of Road Building Era?

To mark National Bike Month and Bike to Work events around the state, NJ DOT commissioner Jack Lettiere recently handed a check for \$1 million to Wall Township officials for **bikeway construction**. But the significance of the event went far beyond the fact that Wall will construct a 20-mile linear park with a bike and pedestrian path — it is using the Route 18 right-of-way, which DOT originally intended to use for a highway extension to Route 71 in Manasquan. The new bikeway will link to another popular shore greenway, the Felix Edgar Path from downtown Manasquan to towns to the west.

DOT formally announced that it was **abandoning the highway extension** in favor of the bikeway. Asking Janine Bauer of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign to join him at the press conference, Lettiere said, “Tri-State was there advocating for bikeways when it was a tough sell, but we wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for their and her advocacy.” The bike path was largely the idea of Phil Beacham, head of the NJ Alliance for Action, a construction group. Bauer credited both Beacham and DOT for recognizing that Monmouth County doesn’t need another highway.

In another sign of change, Commissioner Lettiere also recently hosted a group of six pedestrian safety advocates, traffic engineers and municipal officials to tackle the State’s horrific pedestrian crash and fatality rate, again saying that he has a “hard time sleeping at night” knowing that pedestrian deaths soared 37% in 2002. He promised to get capital works into the ground and pursue other strategies to **better protect pedestrians**.

In other events around the state, Trenton Cycling Revolution marked its 4th annual Bike Week with a bike race, a bike tour, free bagels and coffee for bike commuters, bike themed movies at the public library and other creative events. The Association of NJ Environmental Commissions held a planning workshop to **foster bicycle friendly communities** at Thomas Edison state College in Trenton. South Orange held a “Bike to Work/Bike to the Train” event, where DOT announced funding for more bike racks at the train station. Residents and parking permittees were urged to bike or walk to the train station or to their jobs downtown. The event, also sponsored by NJ Transit, garnered participation by more than 200 residents. Maplewood joined in by passing a resolution that urged residents to walk or bike, capitalizing on its hugely successful “walk to school” efforts to combat rising traffic congestion, busing costs and juvenile obesity.

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Calendar

June 4, 4:30pm, Public hearing on MTA federal funding proposals, 347 Madison Ave, Board Room, 5th Floor, 212-878-7483, www.mta.info/mta/cap200-2004.htm

June 4-5, "Coordinating Transportation and Land Use," National Transit Institute at Rutgers, 120 Albany St, Suite 250, New Brunswick, 732-932-1700, www.ntionline.com

June 5, noon, Permanent City Advisory Committee to the MTA meeting, Linda Kleinbaum, MTA Director of Policy will discuss Intelligent Transportation Systems, 347 Madison Ave, 5th Floor, 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org

June 5, 5pm, NY Chapter Transportation Research Forum, 100 Washington St. "Trains, Plains and Automobiles," Speakers: Theodore Kleiner, Aviation, Port Authority; Richard Oakley, Capital Management, LIRR; Douglas Currey, NYSDOT, 212-435-4226, pgessner@panynj.gov.

June 5, 2pm and 6pm, Public scoping meeting on the Environmental Impact Statement for the Number 7 Subway Extension/Hudson Yards Rezoning and Development Program. Fashion Institute of Technology, 27th Street between 7th and 8th Aves, 212-799-8803, ext. 07, www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/hyards/hymain.html

June 10, 7pm, BQE Reconstruction public meeting, Lexington School for the Deaf, 75th St and 30th Ave, Contact: Craig Ruyle, NYS DOT, 718-424-4157, cruyle@gw.dot.state.ny.us

June 10, 10am, Portway Extension Task Force and Freight Initiative Committee meeting, NJTPA, One Newark Center, 17th floor, For more info contact Jody Barankin, 609- 530-3520.

June 11, 6pm, Somerset County Smart Growth Strategic Plan, Report to the Community. Somerset County Vocational and Technical Institute, North Bridge Street and Vogt Drive, Bridgewater, 908-231-7021, pthomas@co.somerset.nj.us.

June 12, 4pm, Public hearing on resumption of full subway service over Manhattan Bridge, LIU Health Science Building, Room HSM 107, Flatbush and Dekalb Aves, 212-878-7483.

June 12, 7pm, BQE Reconstruction public meeting, White Castle District Headquarters, 69-01 34th Ave, Contact: Craig Ruyle, NYS DOT, 718-424-4157, cruyle@gw.dot.state.ny.us.

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