

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### **Booth Bill Puts Governor On Hot Seat**

Governor Pataki has the final say on whether or not the 62 token booths slated for closure are going to be shut down.

Last Friday, the Assembly and the Senate passed a bill (A.9020, S.5473), sponsored by State Senators Guy Vellela and Martin Golden and State Assembly Member Keith Wright, that prohibits the MTA from closing any token booths for up to 3 years. The final decision now lies in the hands of Governor Pataki.

The bill creates a seven person committee to study methods of making the subways safer, free from terrorist acts and crime. It also provides for "a moratorium on the closing of token booths," until July 1, 2005 or until the full safety report is submitted to the Governor. The report must be completed within three years after the bill goes into effect.

Transit advocates commended the legislature for its decision and urged Gov. Pataki to approve the bill. "If Gov. Pataki wants to protect four and a half million daily subway riders, he will sign the bill into law," said Gene Russianoff of the Straphangers Campaign. But MTA officials this week put pressure on the Gov. to veto the bill, saying passage of the bill would be "extremely bad" for the agency.

Despite the fact that the Governor ultimately has control over the MTA and its policies, he has been distant from the recent MTA fare increase and financial scandal. This bill forces him to take a stance on the token booth issue, and gives him an opportunity to stand up for NYC's transit riders. If he does veto the bill, he risks dealing with another embarrassing override by the Legislature. The legislature overrode the Governor's budget just a few weeks ago.

*Daily News* columnist Lenore Skenazy called for the Governor to heed riders' concerns about safety, and keep the booths open. "Don't let the MTA cover its mistakes by ousting its clerks, Governor. Stand clear of the closing booths," she wrote. She also criticized the MTA for spending over \$100 million on its new headquarters at 2 Broadway, while closing 62 booths to save just \$6 million. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

### **NYS DOT Defrauds Public and Taxpayers on West Street "Options"**

In a "public information session" last week, top officials from NY State DOT's Albany and NYC offices and the agency's consultants for Rt. 9A presented the public—and politicians, in a private briefing—with just two options for rebuilding West Street near the World Trade Center site. But one of the options is the "no build" option, as required under federal environmental law. DOT has never, to our knowledge, selected a "no build" option as a preferred alternative at the end of an environmental review process.

Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-Manhattan) objected to the short tunnel as a waste of money when NYC needs money for more beneficial transportation projects. Assemblymember Deborah Glick and City Councilmember Alan Gerson have also expressed skepticism, and private reports indicate that Mayor Bloomberg and his staff were cool to the tunnel option. Still, Gov. Pataki and DOT seem resolute about building it.

Why? Although drawings for the tunnel option included objectives like "creates a park-like setting for the memorial," and "more space for pedestrians adjacent to the memorial," in fact, the designs next to the WTC site are nearly identical. The tunnel option provides a 12 ft. sidewalk next to the memorial area while the surface street option provides 10 feet. The tunnel option devotes another 64 feet of space to green space adjacent to the sidewalk. In the surface street option, 54 ft. of green space is adjacent to the sidewalk. However, even this minor difference (12 feet total) could be evened up; DOT handicapped the surface street option by putting in two turn lanes at Liberty and Vesey Streets. These extra lanes used up more land that could have been green space.

The surface street promenade would cost just \$175 million and take 2 years to build; the tunnel will cost \$860 million and cause five years of construction and traffic staging downtown. "What are we getting for \$860 million?" asked Bill Love of the Coalition to Save West Street and a Battery Park City (BPC) resident. On the west side of West Street, Brookfield enjoys a full 78 ft. of green space in front of the World Financial Center and the Win-

ter Garden.

“DOT’s preference for the tunnel is a fraud on the public,” said Janine Bauer of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. “DOT is claiming that the principal difference between the two options is that one (the tunnel) will better respect the memorial, but it doesn’t.”

Citizen and environmental groups that oppose the tunnel were stunned at the boldness of DOT’s maneuver, which DOT claimed was done to comply with the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirement for a baseline, or no-build option, but which demonstrated the agency’s preference for one and only one preferred option—the “short” tunnel bypass at the WTC site.

NYPIRG, Tri-State, Clean Air Campaign, and Coalition to Save West Street pointed out that the tunnel and approach ramps will divide BPC from the rest of Lower Manhattan (and conversely, Lower Manhattan from Hudson River and the park). They point to the ramps on Park Ave near 33<sup>rd</sup> St as an example of how tunnels blight the neighborhood—pedestrian traffic is prohibited across Park Avenue there because of the dangerousness of the ramps.

Citizens also noted that there would still be four lanes of (faster-moving) traffic on the surface, once 75% of the traffic for that stretch is diverted to the tunnel. DOT had no information as to how it arrived at the 75% figure. Prior to 9/11, West Street was used by 10,000 pedestrians during peak hour but just 5,000 vehicles. DOT now projects West Street will be used by 60,000 vehicles per day (no peak hour info was revealed at the “info session”).

The “no build” option continues West Street as a mostly 8-lane highway at the surface street level; DOT did not include other versions of this promenade option which citizens and other groups favor. They previously requested additional designs of both LMDC and DOT, including a 6-lane at-grade West Street with broader landscaped medians, and a West Street designed for maximum green space between the street and the WTC memorial site, at the expense of Brookfield. West Street only carries 6 lanes of traffic now, post 9/11.

“The process DOT created here is like a Soviet election,” said Janine Bauer, director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, at the info session. According to DOT’s plans now, there will be no public scoping session for the project. A year from now, the supplemental environmental impact statement will be released with the preferred alternative.

The DOT process stands in marked contrast to the LMDC process kicked off this week. LMDC is holding a full public scoping session for the WTC site. LMDC also identified two different baseline

### Transit Oriented Development and Parking

A new report takes a look at what the NJ Transit Friendly Communities program has accomplished, and provides a refreshing look at how to deal with parking near train stations. The report, entitled *Building a Transit Friendly Community* was compiled by NJ Transit, NJ Office of Smart Growth, Downtown NJ, Inc, NJ Future, Project for Public Spaces, the Regional Plan Association, and Voorhees Transportation Policy Institute.

NJ Transit created the Transit Friendly Community program in 1999 with a \$500,000 grant from the Federal Highway Administration and a \$300,000 grant from NJ Transit and NJ Community Affairs. The program was set up as a means for state agencies, mainly NJ Transit, to work with local communities to help them encourage transit-oriented development (TOD). 11 communities were chosen for the pilot project: Bayonne, Hackensack, Hillsdale, Hoboken, Matawan, Palmyra, Plainfield, Red Bank, Riverton, Rutherford, and Trenton. In contrast to the NJ transit village program – which awards towns that have already succeeded in encouraging TOD – the transit-friendly community program starts at the beginning, helping towns establish transit friendly areas around train stations.

The report indicates that the transit friendly community program has gotten off to a good start. For example, the program has helped design new pedestrian friendly stations at Trenton and Rutherford and assisted in the construction of a new station in Red Bank which is designed to also serve as a community center. Bayonne has also taken TOD recommended zoning into account in station area plans around the South Jersey Light Rail, which is expected to open in the fall.

The report also takes a more thoughtful approach on parking than others of its kind, saying that more parking is not necessarily the best solution for communities. It says that commuter parking “need not dominate the station area either aesthetically or physically” and promotes the dual use of commuter parking with that of retail or entertainment complexes. The report warns that larger park-and-ride lots should “not become an undifferentiated sea of parking where pedestrian circulation is disregarded” and mentions shuttle buses and jitneys as a reliable non-automobile option to get to the station. ❖

alternatives—the pre-9/11 conditions at the site, and the current conditions there. DOT claimed it couldn’t use the current West Street conditions *or* the pre-9/11 conditions on West Street as the no-build baseline under NEPA, so they chose the surface street option. But LMDC’s planners seem to have found a way to do just that. ❖

## **LIRR to Start Webticket in the Fall**

Come fall, LIRR riders will be able to purchase tickets on the web, the LIRR press office told Tri-State this week.

LIRR and NYC Transit riders, who saw recent fare increases, are not yet able to benefit from web discounts already offered to Metro-North riders, even though both agencies have been discussing the option for years (MTR # 167). Metro-North riders have been benefiting from online purchases, which offer convenience and allow them to save between 2% and 5%, since January 1, 2001. And with the recent fare increases, Metro-North riders have responded — Metro-North recently told the *Journal News* that online sales this April were up 250% from the same period in 2002.

According to NYC Transit press office, NYC Transit still has no plans to institute web tickets. ❖

### **Exchange Place Reopens With Free Rides**

On Sunday, June 29, the PATH station at Exchange Place reopened. The station has been closed since it experienced significant water damage from the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. With the \$160 million renovation complete, PATH riders can now get off at Exchange Place and board ferry service to Lower Manhattan. The Port Authority estimates that PATH service from Exchange Place to the WTC station will be reopened before the end of 2003.

The Port Authority rewarded all PATH riders entering at Exchange Place on Sunday with free rides all day. ❖

### **High Speed EZ Pass Catches On**

Two recent developments in the metropolitan region may help show the MTA that 5mph speed limits and gates at all toll plazas are not necessary. Last Sunday, the Outerbridge Crossing was fitted with 25mph E-Z Pass lanes in a Port Authority pilot program to test viability of non-stop tolling on all three Staten Island – New Jersey Crossings (Outerbridge, Bayonne and Goethals). New barrier infrastructure will ensure that the higher speed traffic and lower speed cash traffic will not have problems merging. Cameras are also being positioned for high-speed enforcement of violators.

In a related development, construction has begun on the Tappan Zee toll plaza to implement two 20mph non-stop toll lanes by later this year. Traditionally lower summer traffic volumes are expected to make delays minimal. The new lanes, which will have new barrier infrastructure to make merging easier, are expected to process up to 1,800 cars per hour versus the previous capacity of only 800 cars per hour, according to a study by the National Research Council. ❖

## **CT Misses Chance for Smart Growth**

This week, the CT Legislature failed to act on two smart growth bills that would have helped reduce sprawling development in the state.

House bill # 6640 would attempt to establish a state smart growth policy by requiring state and local development plans to illustrate geographic areas (or state-designated Priority Funding Areas) where transit friendly mixed-use development should be encouraged. These areas would be given priority funding for state redevelopment grants. The bill would also set guidelines for evaluating state, regional, and local plans to measure how well they are conforming to the overall state growth plan.

Another smart growth bill basically “dead” in the House is SB 6605, which would make it harder for developers to get permission to build in areas that are not designated for growth according to a town’s 10 year master plan. Currently, town plans don’t have “teeth”— towns are able to approve development projects even if they are not consistent with the local master plan. Under the new bill, municipalities must change their master plan – which requires public hearings and legislative approval before they can approve development that does fit in with their plan.

There is still a slight chance that the bills will be heard in the special session or during the fall, but budget negotiations and other matters will likely dominate the rest of the legislative year. ❖

### **CT Strategy Board Funding Still in Limbo**

Meanwhile, the CT Transportation Strategy Board has to wait for the state budget to be passed before its 20-year plan can be considered by the full General Assembly.

But it is still not clear how the recommendations of the Strategy Board will be funded. Even though the TSB spent two years developing the plan, funding mechanisms have not yet been established. According to the *Stamford Advocate*, Senate President Sullivan and Speaker of the House Moira Lyons recently appointed a seven-person committee to study funding mechanisms for the plan, and evaluate provisions that could prevent it from being approved by the General Assembly. The Committee will include Economic Development, Transportation, and Planning representatives, along with elected official Andrew McDonald (D-Stamford).

Transit advocates and environmental groups have said that the TSB’s plan is too focused on highways and fails to identify sprawl development as the root source of much of CT’s traffic growth. However, it seems that the legislative bill that would approve the TSB’s recommendations (HB6671) may be slightly more transit-oriented than the original plan.. ❖

## In Washington, Bike/Ped Bills Gain Speed

Responding to increasing obesity rates, Congressman James Oberstar, ranking Democrat in the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, introduced a bill earlier this month that would encourage people to walk and bike in their communities. Entitled the Pedestrian and Cyclist Equity Act of 2003 (PACE), the bill would establish a national Safe Routes to School program which would seek to increase the number of children who walk or bike to school and hope to reduce car trips to and from school. The bill provides \$250 million a year, from 2004 to 2009, from the national Highway Trust Fund to states and communities for pedestrian and bicycle friendly projects. Grants would be given for traffic calming, bike lanes, and walkways, along with educational and traffic safety programs.

Oberstar's bill is long overdue. Lack of physical activity is a key reason why over one-third of American children are overweight or obese. According to Surface Transportation Policy Project, a transportation watchdog group based in D.C., the estimated annual cost of physical inactivity and obesity in the United States is approximately \$117 billion. A recent study by Belden, Russonello and Stewart found that over 70% of parents used to bicycle or walk to school, while only 18% of children do today.

Driving to school also causes neighborhoods traffic jams. Oberstar asserts that in many communities, 30 percent of morning commuter traffic is generated by parents driving their children to school.

The PACE bill would help reverse the obesity trend throughout the country by providing a safer, more attractive environment for the use non-motorized transportation in local communities. The bill currently has 17 sponsors, including Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY) and Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-NJ).

Similarly, another bill being considered by Congress is the Bicycle Commuter Act, (S.1093, H.R.1052) which would extend the transportation fringe benefit currently available for transit riders and drivers (e.g TransitChek in NYC) to those who commute to work on bike. Sponsors are Senators Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Congressmen Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Mark Foley (R-FL). ❖

### TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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## Calendar

**July 8, 6pm**, NYC Truck Route Management Study Borough Meeting, Staten Island Borough Hall, 10 Richmond Terrace, <http://www.nyc.gov/dot>, [cdalessio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalessio@ekmail.com), 212-944-2000, ext. 6168.

**July 9, 6pm**, NYC Truck Route Management Study Borough Meeting, Queens Borough Hall, Community Room, 120-55 Queens Boulevard, <http://www.nyc.gov/dot>, [cdalessio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalessio@ekmail.com), 212-944-2000, ext. 6168.

**July 10, 6pm**, NYC Truck Route Management Study Borough Meeting, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 62 Mott Street, Manhattan, <http://www.nyc.gov/dot>, [cdalessio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalessio@ekmail.com), 212-944-2000, ext. 6168

**July 14, 6pm**, NYC Truck Route Management Study Borough Meeting, Bronx Lebanon Hospital Milstein Building- Community Room, 1650 Selwyn Ave, <http://www.nyc.gov/dot>, [cdalessio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalessio@ekmail.com), 212-944-2000, ext. 6168

**July 15, 6pm**, NYC Truck Route Management Study Borough Meeting, Brooklyn Borough Hall, Brooklyn 209 Joralemon Street, <http://www.nyc.gov/dot>, [cdalessio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalessio@ekmail.com), 212-944-2000, ext. 6168

**July 15, 3:30pm and 7pm**, NYMTC Public Listening Sessions, H. Lee Dennison Bldg. (ground floor) 100 Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, New York, [shausch@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:shausch@dot.state.ny.us), 718- 482-7512, <http://www.nymtc.org>

**July 16, 3:30pm and 7pm**, NYMTC Public Listening Sessions, Westchester County Center Room A, 198 Central Avenue, White Plains, New York, [shausch@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:shausch@dot.state.ny.us), 718- 482-7512, <http://www.nymtc.org>

**July 10-26**, "Designing the High Line," Culmination of an open, international ideas competition seeking visionary design proposals for High Line's reuse as 1.5-mile-long elevated public promenade, Grand Central Terminal's Vanderbilt Hall, For more info see <http://www.thehighline.org/>.

**July 29, 6pm**, Auto-Free New York meeting, "Achieving Consensus for Regional Transportation Investments," Tom Schulze, NYMTC, 104 Washington Street, just north of Rector St, 212-475-3394, <http://www.auto-free.org>.

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