

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NJ Senator in Tight Race Opposes Route 92

Opponents of Route 92 — the proposed toll highway that would link Route 1 to New Jersey Turnpike Exit 8A and bring sprawl development to the largest parcel of open space in southern Middlesex County — have an ally in **Senator Peter Inverso** (R-Hamilton). Running a tight race against former assemblyman **Anthony Cimino** (D-Hamilton Township), the Senator opposes the project due to its ballooning costs and environmental impacts, according to his campaign manager.

Route 92 is an expensive project with potential to strain state transportation coffers while adding to Middlesex County's congestion woes. The Turnpike Authority estimates that Rt. 92 **would generate an additional 10,000 to 15,000 new vehicles per day** on Route 1 south of the new road and attract over 1,200 additional truck trips to the area. The project would cost over \$350 million (in 1994 dollars), not including wetlands mitigation. New tolls on the road would not cover its cost.

Given these impacts and his stated aim to end subsidies for sprawl, Governor McGreevey should **call off Route 92** for good. However, this May, the governor subjected the project to a review by his administration and asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to delay the release of its draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). Nothing has been heard since about where the project is going.

The clarity of Inverso's position is refreshing and would present an interesting **role reversal** if the vocally anti-sprawl Governor McGreevey decides to proceed with the road project.

The Army Corps of Engineers expects to release its DEIS in the months following the election.

Inverso's challenger, Anthony Cimino, is taking a wait-and-see approach to Route 92. Cimino's campaign manager said the candidate would develop a position on the project when the DEIS becomes available. However, given the long history of the project, the DEIS is likely to provide little new information. ❖

Port Authority: Congestion Pricing Works

The *Star-Ledger* said on Friday that Port Authority staff had recently reported **positive effects** from congestion pricing on Hudson crossings to the PA board. Although the *Ledger* did not report detailed data, it noted that at one point last year, 18% more cars were traveling in the early 5am-6am time period than prior to the implementation of the variable bridge and tunnel toll schedule in March, 2001, and that the program has **reduced congestion** during the 6-10am period. The pricing scheme — which charges cash payers more than E-ZPass holders at all times of day — has also increased EZ Pass users by about 8%. NYC-bound traffic is off somewhat during the current economic slump, but PA officials stress that the pricing scheme will be essential to manage congestion as traffic grows in the future.

London also reports strong success with its anti-congestion program. According to a recent government press release, reviewing six months of central area cordon pricing, congestion has been **cut by 30%** within the tolled central zone, and the number of cars entering the zone during peak hours has dropped 16%. ❖

NYC's "Found Money" Should End Claim it Can't Afford Buses

The \$110 million in unexpected revenues described earlier this month by NYC City Council Speaker as "found money" is about the same amount as the annual operating contribution the city makes to the **franchise bus fleet** it says it can no longer afford.

The \$110 million in extra revenues was discovered following a series of tax audits. There are other signs that an improving economy may be poised to ease the city's fiscal crisis, including estimated third quarter tax revenues and a general improvement of conditions for the securities industry.

If fiscal pressures do ease, the city's claim it cannot afford to support the bus system — which Mayor Bloomberg articulated during budget presentations over the last several years — **will weaken significantly**. The mayor wants to transfer the city-franchised bus routes to the MTA. But the MTA rightly says it cannot absorb the routes without **some source of funding** for the additional operating and capital costs doing so would entail.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

The city will still face a budget deficit next year, but the mayor is already risking **political backlash** in important political territory by leaving the bus issue unresolved. In Queens, memories are still fresh from the 2002 strike on the franchise bus lines, which carry over **200,000 riders per day**. The mayor has been campaigning in city boroughs to bolster his public image, and would have to seriously weigh any step that led to another disruption of Queens transit service this winter.

The bus companies say they are on the verge of **cutting service** and even going under because city support is insufficient. The City Council is reviewing legislation that would extend the bus companies' franchises past their pending December 31 expiration. Some of the companies say that simply extending this deadline without more funding will cause them to go under. Others say they don't see service ending in January unless the franchise agreement lapses. ❖

New Leases Boost Air-Rail Plans

The new airport lease deal between the Port Authority and New York City includes provisions that direct the Port Authority to study a **direct rail link between lower Manhattan and both JFK and Newark** airports. The *Daily News* reported that the Port Authority would spend up to \$90 million investigating the links, and \$500 million in construction funds would be available for each link.

It's unclear that such **large-scale funding** would come from the Port Authority's current capital program, which has been reported to be strained by a variety of costs associated with the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

As part of a deal struck over the Port Authority's toll and PATH fare hikes in 2001, New York and New Jersey each received a one-time cash fund of **\$250 million** for projects of choice. New Jersey quickly allocated the money to buy double-deck NJ Transit cars. Earlier this year, NY had not identified a use for its portion. A Port Authority official told the Campaign he did not think the new airport lease deal had directed this \$250 million toward the airport transit projects.

A downtown-Newark link would presumably involve an extension of the PATH train to the airport. That would be a far more modest undertaking than the new East River rail tunnel to bring LIRR trains into lower Manhattan that Mayor Bloomberg and others support as a JFK link. The MTA and transit advocates **oppose this tunnel plan** as an unwelcome addition to a transit expansion menu with many huge project and not enough money. The *News* mentioned that Governor McGreevey has concerns about the rail funding provisions. ❖

New Deal Preserves Nassau Bus Service

Last week, the Democratic majority in the Nassau County legislature worked out a deal that **restores at least some of the county funds** that would have been cut from with Long Island Bus' operating support under County Executive Thomas Suozzi's budget proposal. The county will set its bus funding at **\$6 million** — \$2 million shy of the \$8 million the County contributed this fiscal year. Long Island Bus agrees to seek cost cutting measures to make up the deficit, but if by the end of June 2004, these cannot be put into practice, the county will allocate the additional funds required to keep bus service whole. Suozzi appears to support the plan.

In a press release last week, the county legislature's presiding officer, Judy Jacobs said, "The yearly battle to keep Long Island's buses rolling is a fight we would like to see **put to rest once and for all, with a long term solution**." It is unclear how long this agreement is good for, but it seems Jacobs intends the \$6 million level to stand as the county's offering for several years. It's likely that this is not the last of Long Island Bus' funding woes. Nassau officials seem to think that the MTA's proposed reorganization, which envisioned Long Island Bus being combined with NYC Transit's bus division, may be the **ultimate solution**. There may be pitfalls to such a consolidation, such as "service rationalizations," that Nassau officials should consider.

However, if the economy picks up, stopping bus service cuts each year will not be enough. Despite the budget struggles of recent years and the economic downturn, LI Bus has managed about a **25% increase in annual ridership** since 1996, with no drop off in the last few years. Job growth in NYC or Long Island will push ridership demand still higher.

At a county budget hearing last week, the Campaign's Kate Slevin testified that if county revenues improve, bus riders and advocates will look for the county to return some of the money it has taken out of the system since 1999 and use it for **new service**.

Transit advocates and bus riders mobilized by **Long Island ACORN** held a press conference two weeks ago at the county government building in Mineola, garnering substantial coverage of the bus budget problem. During the event, Jacobs invited participants into her office to discuss the issue.

Nassau County is in the midst of an ambitious effort to build new mass transit capacity to anchor re-development of the **Nassau Hub (MTR #433)**. This effort, if successful, could provide a smart growth blueprint for other sprawling suburban areas. But the county needs to maintain a strong base of local transit ridership and stable transit funding to ensure that the new transit plan and associated projects are credible as they move forward. ❖

Bringing the Freight Tunnel to New Jersey

NYC Economic Development Corporation staffers and consultants presented a summary of their assessment of the potential of a **Jersey City-Brooklyn rail freight tunnel** to an audience of transportation planners, freight industry representatives and elected officials in Newark last week.

A weak point of the planning that has gone into the tunnel project has always been its location in a

Suffolk's Romaine on Transportation

MTR has received responses from Republican candidate Ed Romaine to questions the Campaign issued to both major **Suffolk County Executive** campaigns in early September. So far, we have not heard back from **Democrat Steve Levy**. If we do receive a response from Levy, we will present it in *MTR* #435.

Romaine writes that he is “not an advocate for road widening as a primary means to reduce congestion. Free flowing and high-speed traffic is well suited for our interstates, but not well suited for travel within towns and communities.” He says that **traffic calming** may be a better solution for roads such as County Route 16, which the county has sought to widen under the current administration (see *MTR* #XXX). However, on his web site, www.romaine2003.com, the candidate says “I am committed to re-building and improving Suffolk’s infrastructure by re-building, improving and **adding lane capacity** to our roads and bridges.”

Romaine also says “Stabilizing car use will only be possible if there are **viable alternatives** to automobile use.” He advocates better synchronized bus, train and ferry schedules, a monorail to connect McArthur airport and the Ronkonkoma LIRR station electrification of the Port Jefferson line and the LIRR Main Line **third track project**. Romaine strongly supports expanded use of rail freight, and development of a “truck/train freight depot.” He also says he is generally in favor of a rapid bus system using designated lanes.

Romaine expresses great concern about Suffolk’s high level of pedestrian fatalities. He recognizes the vehicle speed vs. pedestrian safety relationship, and says he will develop better sidewalks, apply law enforcement and traffic calming road designs to address the problem. Romaine also supports the goals of **Suffolk’s Smart Growth Plan**, and would focus affordable housing development in mixed-use settings.

An “economic development” position paper on Democrat Steve Levy’s campaign web site, www.levy2003.com, indicates the Democrat’s interest in downtown revitalization. Another statement on the site pledges to obtain “extra federal funding for extended north-south bus routes.” ❖

New York City agency, rather than the bi-state Port Authority. However, the EDC and other backers of the project are reaching out increasingly to New Jersey leaders and interests. The tunnel’s environmental impact statement, which is reported to be nearing release, demonstrates considerable truck savings in New Jersey, because it obviously would divert NYC– and Long Island–destined cargos to trains from trucks that would otherwise cross New Jersey. Tunnel advocates say they have won the support for **Congressman Robert Menendez**, who represents Hudson County.

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority’s freight committee says it will investigate the project thoroughly and make a recommendation to the organization as a whole, but the NJ opinions that matter are those of Governor McGreevey and of the state’s U.S. Senators and Representatives.

At the meeting, the **Association of NJ General Contractors** announced that it had joined “MOVE NY,” a coalition of interest groups that supports the tunnel’s construction. The group needs to change its name to become more accommodating of support from New Jersey.

Questions and comments at the presentation were primarily on points of information. However, a fair degree of concern was expressed about the freight tunnel competing with a new NJ Transit/Amtrak passenger tunnel from NJ to Manhattan — a project that is developing extensive support west of the Hudson.

Cunningham’s Embarrassing Rant

The one marked note of hostility was sounded by a representative of **Jersey City Mayor Glenn Cunningham**. He released a letter at the meeting that labels the tunnel study as “nothing more than a bad public relations attempt to justify running 28 to 64, up to one mile long, mainly trash trains a day, seven days a week, through the heart of Jersey City.” Cunningham charges that EDC wants to site the western end of the tunnel in Jersey City because NYC officials “do not have the courage to run this 24 hour a day Trash Train through Staten Island.” He wrote that the engineering and environmental analysis in the draft environmental impact statement is “at best shoddy and at worst a lie.”

The draft EIS for the project is in fact **not released** yet, though perhaps the Jersey City administration has seen some of it. The letter poses a number of questions the EIS is very likely to answer. As for NYC trash, it is now being driven seven days a week through Jersey City and other NJ municipalities in droves of poorly sealed, crash-prone trucks. However, the EDC says that the tunnel will be **economically viable** and environmentally beneficial even if trash export is banned from it entirely. ❖

Bridgeport Barges: Becalmed?

Despite a vote last May by the CT Transportation Strategy Board (TSB) to recommend Bridgeport as the recipient of state financing to develop a barge port and service to receive freight containers from major East Coast ports, the CT transportation and economic development agencies have **yet to approve** release of the funding. The TSB decision in May came after a **year of debate** and several years of competition between Bridgeport and New Haven over siting the barge facility.

Connecticut DOT officials told the *Connecticut Post* last week that the project would not help reduce I-95 truck traffic very much. The barge service is apparently only supposed to run five times a week. Despite this, it is a **step in the right direction** for the region. The *Post* reported that ongoing conversations between various state DOTs (including New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Delaware) and the Port Authority of NY and NJ are aiming to establish other regional locations for freight barge ports.

The paper reported that if Bridgeport does not receive the state agency recommendation, **New Haven** could have another shot at the funds. However, ConnDOT spokespeople told *MTR* this is unlikely, and the decision to release the money to Bridgeport will be approved in the next few weeks. A *Post* editorial this week urged the state DOT to “**act swiftly**” to approve the first installment of \$1.5 million. \$7 million total is available for the barge facility. ❖

Transportation Alternatives Seeks Executive Director

Transportation Alternatives' long-time executive director, John Kaehny, is stepping down in 2004.

The executive director should be committed to long-term employment with T.A. (minimum five years) and should have a job history which reflects commitment as an activist and strong communications and fundraising skills.

If you are a strong leader and have the required skills and experience, T.A.'s board of directors encourages you to apply.

Transportation Alternatives is a 5000-member NYC-area non-profit citizens group working for better bicycling, walking and fewer cars.

Applications are due by Nov. 15. See www.transalt.org for more information.

Calendar

October 23-24, 10am, "How to Turn a Place Around," Sponsored by Project for Public Spaces, Various locations. For more info, contact Jande Wintrob, jwintrob@pps.org, 212-620-5660.

October 28, 6pm, "Reclaiming the High Line - a citizen's initiative," Joshua David, Co-Founder of Friends of the High Line, 104 Washington St, 212-475-3394, www.auto-free.org.

October 29, 8:30am, 4th Annual Tri-State Transit Symposium, Sponsored by NYU Wagner Rudin Center for Transportation. Kimmel Center, Rosenthal Pavilion, 60 Washington Square South, izp200@nyu.edu, 212-998-7545

November 5, 5pm, Public Scoping meeting on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Electric Train Storage Facilities, Kings Park High School, 200 Route 25A, Kings Park, Long Island. For info call 718-558-3809 or www.mta.info.

November 6, 5pm, Public Scoping meeting on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Electric Train Storage Facilities, Smithtown High School, 100 Central Road, Smithtown, Long Island. For info call 718-558-3809 or www.mta.info.

November 12, 5pm, Public Scoping meeting on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Electric Train Storage Facilities, East Northport Middle School, South Auditorium, Fifth Avenue (East of Larkfield Road), Long Island. For info call 718-558-3809 or www.mta.info.

November 13, 5pm, Public Scoping meeting on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Electric Train Storage Facilities, Huntington Intermediate School, 155 Lowndes Avenue, Huntington, Long Island. For info call 718-558-3809 or www.mta.info.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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