

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 442

January 12, 2004

## NEWS

### 30-Year Transportation Plan, Out of the Blue

Last week, the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission approved its first master plan in thirty years, and introduced a **\$3 billion** transportation plan that includes new, congestion-creating road projects. The agency is responsible for promoting development and environmental protection in Jersey City, Secaucus, and 12 other communities straddling the Hackensack River in Bergen and Hudson counties.

The master plan, approved last Thursday, will transform 8,400 acres of land that formerly housed toxic landfills into an ecological preserve and the largest urban park in the region. The plan, in effect for the next 25 years, also allows 24 million square feet of commercial space and 2,750 hotel rooms.

Some major development projects are already moving. The \$1.4 billion Meadowlands **Xanadu** entertainment complex, to be built on the site of Continental Arena, was recently approved by the NJ Sports and Exposition Authority and is now in design. A developer also hopes to build a golf course resort and 2,000 residential units.

Because such projects will bring thousands of new jobs, residents and visitors to the area, a sound transportation plan is vital to their success. But the transportation proposal unveiled last week – “Meadowlands Mobility 2030” – includes projects that will **promote gridlock**.

It remarks favorably on building a new highway through the **Bergen Arches** rail cut in Jersey City, even though the idea is strongly opposed locally and NJDOT recommended transit for the corridor.

The plan also calls for a new highway running through the eastern Meadowlands to provide access for damaging warehouse developments. They would be better located closer to the ports in Newark, Elizabeth and Bayonne.

The transportation plan also calls for **valuable projects** such as rail connections from the Pascack Valley and Bergen commuter lines to Giants Stadium and Xanadu, expanded Lincoln Tunnel bus lane capacity; and reactivation of the West Shore rail line. But the Commission’s apparent rush to adopt the transportation plan without adequate input threatens its effectiveness. The single public hearing, set for January 28<sup>th</sup>, needs to be accompanied by more thorough vetting with stakeholders. ❖

### Pataki Sets Tight Schedule for Downtown LIRR Plan

In his state of the state speech last week, NY Governor George Pataki said that later in January, the Lower Manhattan Development Corp., the MTA and the Port Authority will announce **four options** for a new Long Island Railroad route into the downtown area. The governor said that by April, he would announce the selected option and a “concrete plan to fund it and build it.”

Such a project has been promoted non-stop by downtown business groups in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, and they have won support from Pataki, Mayor Bloomberg and U.S. Senator Charles Schumer (*MTR #441*). The plan was initially billed as a critical Long Island-downtown link, but when transportation experts showed that demand from Long Island commuters for such a line would likely be weak, the justification shifted to “airport access,” with the argument being that a LIRR line from lower Manhattan to Jamaica would connect to the newly-opened JFK AirTrain. However, a high percentage of business travelers flying to NYC still reach the city via LaGuardia Airport.

It will be interesting to see the **ridership projections** that emerge from the current studies, if they are made public before the project selection takes place. Recent data shows that the fastest growing suburb-NYC commuter market is in **New Jersey**, while commuting from Long Island has been static for some time.

The announced timing for the project study and selection could have significant impacts on other major projects in downstate New York. In July, the MTA is expected to announce its 2005-2009 capital program, and the agency had previously slated significant spending for the next few years for the LIRR-Grand Central connection and Second Avenue Subway projects (*MTR #427*). One plan would **displace subway trains** from part of an existing tunnel (the A/C Cranberry St. tunnel), saving capital costs, but of course provoking intense and widespread opposition.

The MTA had earlier expressed disinterest in the downtown LIRR project, because it would have very low ridership compared to these other system expansion projects. The current studies are apparently

being paid for by the Port Authority, as part of the recent NYC airport lease renegotiation deal brokered by Governor Pataki (MTR #434).

Likewise, **Long Island business interests** say they have bigger priorities than the downtown link. They would like to see the LIRR-Grand Central connection, a third track on the LIRR Main Line, rail freight infrastructure in NYC and Long Island and some Long Island road work done before a LIRR-downtown link is pursued.

Transit planners generally see the Second Avenue subway as a greater boon to downtown, and some have called for that line's eventual extension to Brooklyn. It's unclear at this point if an option of this sort is under consideration. ❖

### Pataki Challenges Deadly Drivers

A perhaps more promising element in Governor Pataki's speech was his pledge to propose legislation that would eliminate the notorious problems prosecutors in New York have had going after criminally **negligent drivers** (see MTR #436). According to the *Daily News*, the governor's legislative package will:

- Remove district attorneys' burden to prove criminal negligence when a driver using drugs or alcohol seriously injures or kills someone or violates traffic laws.
- Give consecutive sentences to drivers who kill or seriously injure more than one person.
- Increase the strongest prison terms for deadly hit-and-run drivers from four to seven years. Licenses would automatically be suspended for drivers who flee the scene of a fatal crash.
- Go after unlicensed drivers by requiring them to be fingerprinted, making it tougher to get new licenses under phony names.
- Revoke licenses of drivers who break traffic laws and kill or seriously injure another person in the process.

A *Daily News* investigation last fall found that in 580 NYC cases of pedestrian fatality from 2000 to 2002, **only 80 of the drivers** were charged with serious crimes. Prosecutors followed the report with calls for stronger laws. The *News*' work on the subject was spurred when Giulia Lewis was killed in Queens by a driver who crossed a double yellow line. The driver was not charged. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

### Bloomberg Says 7-train Extension Project to Begin in 2005

In his state of the city address last week, Mayor Bloomberg said that despite lower pedestrian fatalities city-wide, his administration would later in January unveil another round of engineering and enforcement measures for **Queens Boulevard**.

The mayor also said the city would extend the **down-zoning initiatives** he recently backed on Staten Island (MTR #429) to residential neighborhoods in the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn.

On the other hand, Bloomberg noted areas slated for growth, including the Williamsburg, Brooklyn waterfront, the Ratner plan for extensive development, including an **NBA basketball stadium** on the edge of downtown Brooklyn and the plan to densely develop midtown Manhattan's far west side. With the exception of the #7 subway extension project for the latter, the mayor did not mention any expansion of transportation capacity to accommodate the development. Regarding the #7 project, the mayor said construction on it would begin in 2005. ❖

### High-Speed Tolls Coming this Year

Despite the MTA's reluctance to institute non-stop tolling on its bridges and tunnels, the region may still become a national non-stop toll capital.

The **Port Authority** opened its second 25mph toll lane at the Palisades Interstate Parkway entrance to the **George Washington Bridge** on January 4<sup>th</sup>. Last summer, the Port Authority opened its first 25mph toll lane at the Outerbridge Crossing. According to an agency press release, the rest of Port Authority bridges expected to implement these medium-speed EZ Pass only lanes "through 2004."

New Jersey's **second high-speed toll plaza** is expected to open within the next few weeks at the Pascack Valley Toll Plaza (until recently the Hillsdale Plaza) on the Garden State Parkway. Although the lanes — which allow cars to drive through at highway speed — are already open, the camera enforcement system there is not quite ready to go. Exit 6 on the NJ Turnpike already has a highway-speed system. Turnpike Exits 18W will also unveil open-road toll lanes in the near future. Turnpike Exits 1, 18E, and Parkway toll plazas at Toms River, Raritan South and Asbury Park and the Pleasantville plaza on the Atlantic City Expressway are also scheduled to receive the new system within the next few years.

Last August, **Governor Pataki** also directed the NYS Thruway to develop high speed EZPass systems, though the timing for medium-speed 20mph EZPass tolling is already available in left lanes at the New Rochelle and Tappan Zee barriers. A Pataki press release states that the 20mph lanes can

process **300-400 more vehicles per hour** than the 5mph roll-through plazas.

### **Job Search Sends Urban NJ Residents to the 'Burbs**

New Jersey's war on sprawl came none too soon. The *Star-Ledger* recently reported that New Jersey suburban areas now house the majority jobs of jobs in the state, and even urban residents' jobs are moving away from cities.

The paper reported that during the nineties, the state's 30 largest cities **lost a whopping 23%** of the jobs that were held by local residents. Major cities did experience some job growth, but it did not necessarily benefit local residents. In Newark, for example, the nineties attracted 6,500 new commuter jobs into the city. Newark jobs for Newark residents, however, dropped by 11,500. At the same time, many suburban areas, such as Parsippany-Troy Hills, gained jobs at a higher rate than competing cities. In the 2000 Census, Parsippany-Troy Hills moved up to 6<sup>th</sup> place, from 10<sup>th</sup>, as the most frequently named place of work for NJ residents. The number of jobs in the municipality during the same period increased by 11,000.

The statistics advocate strongly for a **better connection** between land use, transportation, and affordable housing. In many cases, sprawling land use patterns not only induce congestion, but also mean that lower income urban residents, many of whom don't have cars and are priced out of higher income neighborhoods, have to travel **longer distances** to work in the more wealthy, suburban communities. This type of segregation can also lead to a host of other longer term social and economic problems.

It also means that traffic congestion dilemmas in the state are going to be harder to solve, since mass transit depends heavily on land use patterns that concentrate development in certain areas. If workplaces are spread throughout the state, it is impossible or at best, extremely difficult, to **adapt transit routes** to reduce commuter traffic.

Many towns also lose their appeal (and possibly see declining property values) as office parks, strip malls, and other employment centers bring traffic and destroy open space. One Parsippany resident told the *Star-Ledger* that although her town was still a great place to live and raise a family, she was tired of the effects of sprawl. "It's built up so much, there's no space left. The traffic is unbearable. Enough is enough," she said.

The paper did not mention how New Jerseyans working in **New York City** affected these statistics. Perhaps New Jersey-NYC commuter data would make the numbers somewhat more encouraging. ❖

In upstate New York, the NYS Thruway Authority is considering the replacement of traditional plazas on Exits 23, 24, 25 in Albany and Schenectady, though the design speed for these projects is unknown as yet. The Thruway told the *Times Union* that high speed tolls will reduce congestion in these urban areas.

Meanwhile, **E-ZPass**, which just celebrated its 10 year anniversary here in New York, is now available on the **entire Pennsylvania Turnpike**, and on Turnpikes and state roads in Massachusetts, West Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland. ❖

### **LIRR Capital Program = Higher Property Values**

At public hearings for a new storage yard for the LIRR Port Jefferson Branch late last year, local officials and residents protested that the rail yard will lower property values and increase pollution (*MTR* #437). Various studies from across the country indicate that in fact the opposite may be true.

A new electric rail storage yard is needed to **increase LIRR service** on the Port Jefferson line and allow more Long Island residents to reap the benefits of the pending **East Side Access** project. The project would also extend electric train service by several stations east of Huntington and is a precondition for eventually offering one-seat service between Port Jefferson and Manhattan.

Objections by communities and politicians have also held up the project to build a **third track** along the LIRR's Main Line, which would also improve service and accessibility to a wide swath of Long Island residential and commercial areas.

Despite local protests, residents near new or improved rapid rail service from San Francisco to Atlanta to Boston have found that the upgrades have **pushed up the property values** on their homes and generated new commercial investment in their neighborhoods.

Experience in New Jersey after establishment of one-seat rides on the NJ Transit Morris & Essex line during the 90s and the Boonton line last year is that property values increased sharply along with improved rail access to Manhattan. Real estate agents in these locations have said that proximately to the train is the **driving factor** of where people chose to locate. In Maplewood and South Orange, median property values increased by 99% between 1992 and 2002. While some of this is due to other factors, there is no question that the start of Midtown Direct service in 1996 contributed greatly to this increase.

New Jersey is not alone in this regard. The Metro-link light rail system in St Louis has contributed to a \$100,000 increase in property values around certain stations since service began there a few years ago.

A 1999 American Public Transportation Associa-

tion paper found a positive relationship between twelve rail projects and property values. Even in cases, such as the MAX light rail transit line in Portland Oregon or the MARTA east line in Atlanta, where noise and increased traffic associated with new rail service created a “nuisance factor,” the positive effect of the service on property values overshadowed the negative effect.

An earlier study cited in the same APTA report found that in Toronto savings in commute time were the **most important factor** in determining home value premiums.

Better rail service can also attract business and commercial development and spur redevelopment projects. In **Bloomfield, NJ**, new one seat ride service on the Montclair-Boonton line attracted developer Forest City Daly to begin a plan to bring new residential and commercial development to the neighborhood’s struggling downtown area. Nearby, in Morristown, NJ, direct rail service to midtown has spurred **\$200 million** in private development over the last couple of years.

Similar increases in property values and business investment are likely along the Port Jefferson line even though Manhattan commuters do not make up the majority of Long Island’s workforce. With the LIRR East Side Access project coming in the future, such gains may be further magnified. ❖

### MTA New Year’s Gift to Boroughs: City Ticket

The MTA started its pilot program for a “City Ticket” this weekend, allowing LIRR and Metro-North riders traveling within NYC limits to pay a base fare of just **\$2.50** one way. The new ticket will save riders up to 50% on intra-city trips. For the six months trial period, only weekend riders will be able to purchase the tickets.

Depending on rider response from the 6 month trial, MTA officials said they will consider extending the program. Hopefully they will. City Ticket could give neighborhoods of the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn without good subway access a **faster option** to get to Manhattan. In some cases, this could mean paying \$1 more a day for trips that, compared to the subway or bus-subway combinations, take half the time.

The MTA has said for some time that LIRR capacity constraints that a full-time City Ticket program would aggravate will be reduced disappear after the **East Side Access** service to Grand Central begins in 2012. The new service will allow the agency to run more LIRR trains, thus accommodating an increase in ridership from stations in Queens that are now poorly served. ❖

## Calendar

**Jan. 13, 4:30-9pm.** Multi-agency Comprehensive Port Improvement Plan (CPIP) Public Scoping Meeting, Cordero School, 158 Erie Street, Jersey City, NJ. Info: (866) 877-2747, [nepacoordinator@cpipeis.com](mailto:nepacoordinator@cpipeis.com).

**Jan. 13, 6-8:30pm.** NYC DOT Truck Route Study-Workshop for Queens Community Boards 7, 8, 11. Queens Public Library-Flushing Branch, 41-17 Main Street at 41st Road. Info: Cheryl D'Alessio 212-944-2000 x6168 [www.nyc.gov/dot](http://www.nyc.gov/dot), [cdalesio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalesio@ekmail.com).

**Jan. 14, 6-8:30pm.** NYC DOT Truck Route Study-Workshop for Queens Community Boards 10, 12, 13. York College, 94-20 Guy Brewer Blvd. 212-944-2000 x6168, [www.nyc.gov/dot](http://www.nyc.gov/dot), [cdalesio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalesio@ekmail.com).

**Jan. 15, 12-2pm.** Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council. 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor. 212-878-7087, [mail@pcac.org](mailto:mail@pcac.org); [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org).

**Jan. 15, 4:30-9pm.** Multi-agency Comprehensive Port Improvement Plan Public Scoping Meeting, Bayonne City Hall, 630 Avenue C, Bayonne. 866-877-2747, [nepacoordinator@cpipeis.com](mailto:nepacoordinator@cpipeis.com).

**January 15, 6pm.** Downtown Brooklyn Rezoning Public Hearing, Brooklyn Technical High School, 29 Fort Greene Place, Contact: Carmen Salamo, Community Board 2, 718-596-5410.

**Jan. 15, 6-8:30pm.** NYC DOT Truck Route Study-Workshop for Queens Community Boards 1-6. Maspeth American Legion Hall, 66-28 Grand Ave. at 58th Ave. 212-944-2000 x6168, [cdalesio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalesio@ekmail.com); [www.nyc.gov/dot](http://www.nyc.gov/dot).

**Jan. 17, 7:30pm.** CT Metro-North/Shore Line East Commuter Council. Offices of SACIA, One Landmark Square, Stamford CT. 203-655-0138, [trains@camcomm.com](mailto:trains@camcomm.com); [www.trainweb.org/ct](http://www.trainweb.org/ct).

**Jan. 20, 6-8:30pm.** NYC DOT Truck Route Study-Workshop for Brooklyn Community Boards 1-4. Beacon Center-Grand St. Campus, Grand Street & Bushwick Ave. 212-944-2000 x6168, [cdalesio@ekmail.com](mailto:cdalesio@ekmail.com); [www.nyc.gov/dot](http://www.nyc.gov/dot).

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

MTR#442 Contributing: Jennifer Siegel Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kate Slevin

350 West 31st Street #802, New York, NY 10001 tel. (212) 268-7474 fax (212) 268-7333 [tstc@tstc.org](mailto:tstc@tstc.org)