

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NJ Looks to Extend Debt, With No Plan to Raise Revenue

Last week, Governor McGreevey floated a proposal to borrow **\$900 million** to pay for road and transit projects in the next year.

The state's Transportation Trust Fund will be empty next fiscal year (starting July 2004) — all of the \$805 million that will be left in the fund is needed for debt payments from existing bond issues. Without new revenue, road and transit projects and maintenance will have to be **severely cut**. Even with the bonding proposal, the state says it will have to put off certain projects.

The proposal would use "Garvee" bonds ("grant anticipation revenue vehicle" allowed by the federal government since 1995), which are secured by future federal transportation allocations. Debt payments would start in 2007 and would be about \$90-\$100 million per year that the state would have to plan for in its transportation operating budget for 12 years, according to the *Star-Ledger*. 22 states currently use Garvee bonds for transportation projects.

The governor's proposal was met with **strong opposition**. State legislators and officials called it "irresponsible" and a "total mistake," saying previous borrowing plans landed NJ in its current situation. They also noted that the next administration would be deeper in debt. The up-side is that New Jersey would see fewer potholes and less deterioration at NJ Transit in the next few years.

McGreevey's proposal is at odds with the recommendations of his own **Blue Ribbon Commission**. Along with a 12-15 cent increase in the gas tax, the commission called for "adherence to **strict financial standards**," including requiring a 50/50 "pay-as-you-go" to bonding ratio for the state-funded capital program to reduce soaring debt. Recommendations also included a cap on capital spending so it does not surpass Transportation Trust Fund resources. The commission's report said NJ's transportation system "has been jeopardized by poor fiscal policy and growing financial constraints." Calling transportation needs "staggering," it bluntly stated "without a significant influx of new revenues it [the trust fund] will cease to fund any capital projects...eliminating any possibility of improving transportation in New Jersey."❖

Three of Four LIRR-Downtown Options Would Take Brooklyn Subway Lines

Three of the four options presented last week by Governor Pataki and the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. would **displace subway trains** from existing tunnels in order to create a Long Island Rail Road connection downtown.

This emphasis is likely to set up a **bruising fight** over the project, which has little support except among downtown business groups and the political leaders they have enlisted.

One alternative would use the **A-C Cranberry Street subway tunnel**, pushing C trains to the F-train Rutgers Street tunnel (and thus preventing C riders from reaching stations in lower Manhattan). Another would run LIRR trains through the M/N/R train Montague St. tunnel, displacing other subway trips through lower Manhattan (though the N-train will soon be re-routed over the Manhattan Bridge). A third would take both subway tunnels, one for JFK Airport service and one for LIRR trains.

The fourth would not disrupt subway configurations, but would require a new tunnel between Brooklyn and Manhattan, costing billions.

Even without the problem of removing subway capacity, there are big, basic **feasibility and fairness** questions the project will have to face. First, the JFK-downtown market is likely to be quite small, and the downtown LIRR market is dubious at best. The Regional Plan Association has already made the case (*MTR #393*) that such a link will provide **little time-savings** for Long Islanders working downtown, and that the Second Avenue subway is a far more important investment for lower Manhattan. Second, the MTA is preparing to invest billions in a Long Island Rail Road link to Grand Central Terminal. Of all the big transit needs facing the region, are two Long Island rail links at the top of the list? The Long Island Rail Road has never identified a downtown link as a need, and the Long Island business community says it has a half-dozen big priorities it would place ahead of this project.

One of the major developments on the issue last week was a statement by MTA Chair Peter Kalikow to reporters that the MTA is prepared to make a "significant contribution" to the project in the agency's 2005-2009 capital program. Kalikow had

previously distanced the MTA from the project (see *MTR #369*). It's hard to imagine how the MTA will put serious resources into such an initiative at a time when both its capital and operating budgets are under such pressure that additional fare increases are on the table, when Governor Pataki continues to fight any suggestion of new state revenue and when the federal government is gridlocked over transportation funding. ❖

New Transit Tunnel: Anything in it for Brooklyn?

There is some discussion in Brooklyn of using a LIRR-Lower Manhattan link to add needed transit capacity to the Brooklyn transit network. A Community Board 2 committee resolution recently urged construction of a new shared LIRR and subway tunnel between Manhattan and Brooklyn. That would allow the Second Avenue subway to be extended to Brooklyn and presumably piggy-back on the momentum around the downtown LIRR link.

However, before anyone in Brooklyn gets behind the latter, they should be extremely clear that they are **supporting something very different** than what the LMDC and downtown business leaders are talking about. The fact that three of the four LMDC options to be studied would **reduce rather than add to Brooklyn subway capacity** is a clear signal that the lower Manhattan advocates of the project do not care about subway access (even if they in reality depend on it) and are operating from a very strong suburban bias. Moreover, a major MTA commitment to the project is likely to slow construction of the Second Avenue subway. It will still be a huge political and fiscal lift to see the Second Avenue project even reach lower Manhattan, let alone Brooklyn. ❖

New Jersey Pedestrian Deaths Ease

Preliminary data from the New Jersey Dept. of Law & Public Safety indicates a **substantial drop** in pedestrian fatalities last year versus 2002.

2002's 184 pedestrian deaths were a dramatic upward spike (37%) over 2001's 134 fatalities. 2003 data show 142 pedestrian deaths, a 17% decline from 2002 levels.

While the results may show that 2003's high number was a temporary spike, it also confirms that the steady down-trend in pedestrian deaths New Jersey saw from 1998 to 2001 has clearly broken. It won't be easy for the Garden State to reduce danger to pedestrians without **devoting more resources** to safer, more accommodating road and street designs.

Total NJ traffic deaths are down about 7.5%, from 788 in 2002 to 733 last year, according to the figures. **Camden and Essex** Counties were the worst areas for pedestrians, with 14 deaths each. ❖

Abuse piles up for CT Train Riders

Governor Rowland's proposed budget calls for a **5.5% fare increase** for Metro-North New Haven Line riders. The New Haven Line's over-age fleet has been pummeled by snow and cold this winter, resulting in daily train cancellations, many breakdowns and a huge repair backlog. The old trains suck fine snow into their innards, where it melts and freezes and causes havoc.

The hike would take effect in July, when the line will presumably have recovered from the winter of woe. The Connecticut Rail Commuter Council says Rowland's budget contains no money for new train cars. The fare increase would be the **second in two years** for CT riders, the last — at 15% — coming in July, 2003. The new increase would affect both intra-CT riders and those bound for New York City.

The Southwest Regional Planning Association, the metropolitan planning organization for the Fairfield County area, is holding a public meeting on the New Haven Line's crisis on Saturday **February 14th** at 9 am at Norwalk City Hall. Organizers say local First Selectmen, Mayors, ConnDOT and Metro-North officials will attend, along with the Commuter Council. See www.trainweb.org/ct.

— NY Too? —

Of course, New York Metro-North riders may not be spared a fare increase for much longer either, since the MTA is facing significant budget gaps. MTA riders paid a big fare hike last year, but at least the agency has a functioning capital program and is not letting its train fleet reach the sorry state seen on the New Haven Line. ❖

Doctoroff Outlines Look at Downtown Brooklyn Traffic

The city is committed to conducting a **comprehensive transportation** analysis on Downtown Brooklyn, Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff told Brooklyn Community Board 2 in a recent letter about the Downtown Brooklyn Development Plan. The letter also addressed community concerns about affordable housing and displacement.

The letter said the details of the transportation study, which will be conducted by NYC Economic Development Corporation and NYC DOT, would be available in early February. (The study would not be finished until after the city review of the Downtown Brooklyn Plan is complete.) Doctoroff also said the Downtown Brooklyn Council and Congressman Towns' office are also looking into creating a **Transportation Management Association (TMA)**, which would work to "reduce congestion, improve mobility, and increase pedestrian and vehicular safety" in the area. He said they would look to the MTA to become part of this group.

Doctoroff also said the city will reduce the number of **city agency curbside parking spaces** by 30% (about 80 spaces), consider using parking garages for city vehicles, expand the zone where city vehicles are allowed to only park in certain spaces (“no-permit” zone). The letter went on to say that NYC DOT is also rethinking its stance on **residential parking permits**. Based on the findings of an investigation by the Downtown Brooklyn Council, DOT will “re-examine the feasibility” of a residential parking permit.

Doctoroff’s letter does not adequately explain how an **increase in mass transit ridership** will be accommodated. Two projects he mentions, the Atlantic Ave renovation and the connection of Jay Street/Borough Hall station to the Lawrence Street station, will help with crowding and circulation problems in the stations. However, the city has still not answered local community groups’ concerns about how already overcrowded Brooklyn subways will handle a massive increase in ridership if the rezoning is passed without a commitment from NYC Transit to increase service.

Community Consulting Services told the *NY Post* that the Downtown Brooklyn rezoning, along with a new Nets stadium plan and associated development will bring **174,000 new cars daily** to congested Brooklyn streets. “The cumulative result of all these projects will be double- and triple-gridlock,” said CCS’ Brian Ketcham. ❖

Feds Going Through the Motions

The U.S. Senate continued work last week on its version of a major transportation funding bill (to replace 1998’s “TEA-21”). One contentious issue was resolved when Senators led by NY’s Chuck Schumer added mass transit funds to a committee bill that significantly boosted highway funding but left mass transit at an older, lesser level. The bill will still be problematic in this region, however, due to its inclusion of a “**minimum guarantee**” that returns 95% of a state’s U.S. gas tax receipts in the form of federal aid. States like CT and NY will lose heavily according to the formula.

The Senate believes it can find the money to finance a \$311 billion six-year bill, but some of its increase over the 1998 law relies on catching tax cheats, and its transit funding on greater use of **general funds**. Transit advocates were working lately to build guarantees so that general funds allocated to mass transit are not lost in appropriations processes in later years.

However, it’s still far from clear that all the maneuvering will amount to legislation this year, since the **House of Representatives** is not actively working on its bill, and is **riven by disagreements** over how to pay for increased spending.

Needed in Brookhaven: Cooperation by NYSDOT

According to Vision Long Island, on January 27th the Town of Brookhaven **extended the Middle Country Road development moratorium** for another six months. The purpose of the moratorium is to enable Brookhaven to conduct a master plan within the Middle Country Road corridor (NY Rte 25) in the hamlets of Coram and Middle Island. The master plan is still in its initial stages, and thus an extension of the moratorium is essential to completion of the community visioning process. The town has also extended the study area for the corridor into Selden and Centereach.

One of the big stumbling blocks for civic and municipal leaders attempting to forge pedestrian friendly, village-like development in the area is a NY State DOT plan to **widen Route 25 to five lanes**. The community proposals have called instead for traffic calming, and want the area treated as a place rather than as a corridor. DOT has at times sent observers to community planning meetings, but has so far refused to put its project on the table and contribute in a collaborative way.

Governor Pataki called on DOT to do just that in his “Quality Communities” smart growth initiative (MTR #306), but that program hasn’t carried a lot of weight into the transportation process.

Despite the DOT’s obstruction, the Middle Country Road Renaissance project has blossomed into one of Long Island’s **most promising** planning initiatives. See www.middlecountryroadproject.org ❖

Sprawl and the City: Episode 2

Death of a Mall: Time for a Change?

The *Daily News* and *NY Post* reported recently that **Wal-Mart** is considering the **former K-Mart site** in the Caesar’s Bay shopping center on the Shore Parkway for its first NYC store.

Wal-Mart told the *Daily News* that it is considering a smaller “urban” store of 99,000 square feet, rather than the normal size of 200,000 square feet. Besides the former Kmart, the company is looking at Coney Island’s former thunderbolt roller coaster site, Manhattan’s Pier 40, the renovated Farley Post Office, the East Harlem Washburn Wire Factory, and Sunset Park. Despite these communities’ proximity to mass transit, previous plans for big-box stores in some, such as a Costco and Home Depot at the Washburn Wire Factory site, have been **car dependent**. Nothing indicates that Wal-Mart’s plans will be any different.

The Caesar’s Bay Kmart (at the intersection of Bay Parkway) closed last year, along with 13 other “underperforming” stores in NY State. It looks like a traditional strip mall surrounded by a **sea of park-**

ing, though is located directly on the waterfront.

It's interesting that while Caesar's Bay and other Kmart's went under, their Manhattan counterparts remained very much in business. The successful stores are on Astor Place in the East Village and at Penn Station.

This is not surprising. Caesar's Bay is inaccessible by public transit. The site is also far away from office buildings and cut off from easy pedestrian shopping by the Shore Parkway, whereas the Manhattan K-Marts are close to many transit lines and workplaces. In fact, the Astor Place store continues to be one of Kmart's most profitable, according to a recent *Detroit Free Press* article.

Instead of encouraging companies like Wal-Mart to take over vacant big box stores on the city's car-dependent edge, NYC planners may want to think about redeveloping such sites for other uses.

Planners and architects have become increasingly interested in "adaptive reuse," or redesigning buildings or sites for another use. This type of thing is common in New York, where, for example, old industrial buildings are transformed into residential lofts. How about adaptive reuse for the Shore Parkway Kmart store? Perhaps the other stores could remain, but alongside a new marina or recreation center. How about increasing density, filling in a portion of the underused parking lot (or putting it underground) and adding restaurants to take advantage of the waterfront views?

There are already plans to continue the Shore Parkway bike path past Bay Parkway and through Coney Island, according to the Dept. of City Planning. Why not build a wider bikeway and park closer to the waterfront?

A city of 8 million people provides a huge retail market. If a store can't survive in a certain location, it's time to reevaluate the site and learn from mistakes. Stores like Wal-Mart should locate in truly urban sites: near transit, with multiple floors, and consistent with community design. Instead of widening off ramps to accommodate traffic drawn to strip malls — NYCDOT recently proposed adding a right turn lane on the Caesar's Bay Shore Parkway exit — the city should resist the urge to allow bad suburban design to weigh on its scarce parkland and already congested neighborhoods . ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Calendar

Feb. 9, 5:30-7:30pm. American Planning Association, Municipal Art Soc. & Women's City Club's panel: "The Economic Vision for NYC and the Physical Redevelopment of the Far West Side." Manhattan. RSVP 212-935-3960.

Feb. 10, 2-5pm and 7-9pm. Public Hearing on Proposed reduction in Bee-Line bus services. Westchester County Center, Central Ave. & Tarrytown Rd., White Plains. 914-813-7777, beeline@westchester.gov.

Feb. 10, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](http://www.nytc.org) regional plan update. Supreme Court Bldg, 198 East 161st Street, Bronx. 2nd Floor. 718-472-3197.

Feb. 11, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](http://www.nytc.org) regional plan update. Polytechnic University, 5 MetroTech Center, Brooklyn. 718-472-3197 or nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us.

Feb. 12, 8:30-3pm. Imagining the Future, Making it Happen: The kickoff of "New York 2050." New School University, 65 W. 13th Street. 212-817-8471, www.newyork2050.org.

Feb. 12, 12:15pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor. 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org.

Feb. 12, 3:30-5:30pm, 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](http://www.nytc.org) regional plan update. Courthouse, 40 Gleneida Ave., Carmel. 718-472-3197, www.nytc.org.

Feb. 18, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](http://www.nytc.org) regional plan update. Staten Island Borough Hall, 10 Richmond Terrace, 2nd Floor. 718-472-3197, [nymtc.org](http://www.nytc.org).

Feb. 18, 5-7pm. NYC Transit Riders Council President's Forum: Subway Issues with Lawrence Reuter, MTA NYC Transit. 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room. Info: (212) 878-7087 or www.pcac.org.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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