

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Connecticut's New Rail Cars: Addressing the Real Issue?

Governor John Rowland and House Speaker Moira Lyons announced a week ago that **\$60 million** in state funds would be made available for replacing some of Metro North's dilapidated rail cars.

The deal will replace 20 of the line's 400 cars. It is to be financed by the accelerated use of \$35 million in transportation capital funds scheduled by the state's **Transportation Strategy Board** for spending in 2005-06. The remaining \$25 million will be borrowed. Speaker Lyons seemed to attest to the difficulty of paying for mass transit in Connecticut, stating to reporters: "For the folks who are riding the rails, this is a major plus for them and not an easy thing to have succeeded in doing."

Nonetheless, the move does not give the New Haven line means to **weather another tough winter**. First, the expected arrival time of 18 months to 2 years for the new cars puts them out of reach for the 2004-05 winter. Second, at this rate of replacement, the vast majority of the line's rolling stock will get older and creakier, not more reliable.

Governor Rowland has reportedly requested a plan to finance the replacement of the line's entire fleet. In fact, he already has one. The Strategy Board was established by the governor and legislature in 2000 — its study found that Connecticut would need a **series of gas and sales tax increases** to meet the state's transportation repair and capacity needs. The state's leaders have ignored the issue ever since, and it remains to be seen whether the current rail car purchase is a symbolic move in response to crisis, or a first step toward a **more comprehensive approach**.

Even without raising new revenue, CT receives significant amounts of flexible federal funding that it could put into mass transit infrastructure. Rowland administration and ConnDOT policy, however, has directed these funds to highway projects.

The March 7 parting of a New Haven Line power cable, stranding hundreds of passengers, only underscored the decrepitude of CT's rail infrastructure. Parts of the line's overhead power system date to the Woodrow Wilson administration. They are being replaced, but only very slowly thanks to Connecticut's anemic transportation budget. ❖

McGreevey Says Transit Fares Will Not Rise in 2004

Governor Jim McGreevey recently made it official that NJ Transit riders would not see higher bus and train fares during 2004. Statements made around the release of transportation spending figures a few weeks ago indicated that fares would likely **remain stable** this year, but a release from McGreevey's office sealed the matter last week.

"Public transportation must **remain affordable** for the hundreds of thousands of hard-working New Jerseyans who commute to work every day," the governor said.

According to the release, confirmed by a comparison of budget documents, McGreevey's proposed budget allocates **\$85 million** in additional operating funds to NJ Transit. Some of that will run the soon-to-open "River Line" between Camden and Trenton and some is for service enhancements occasioned by the Secaucus junction station.

The rest of the increase, according to the release, is to allow NJ Transit to "**freeze** the level of capital dollars it uses to offset operating costs." It states that this development is the first step toward reversing this practice, as the governor's Blue Ribbon Transportation Commission recommends.

The legislature should approve the increased appropriation, and work with the governor toward the goal of further increasing it next year.

Transit advocates had been concerned that transit fares seemed to remain on the table after the governor ruled out a gas tax increase in December. ❖

In NY: Trains, Buses, and a Veto

The NY State Assembly's veto of an **MTA capital program** amendment to accelerate purchase of 120 Metro-North train cars for the railroad's New York lines heralds conflict as the MTA assembles and prepares to submit its 2005-2009 capital program.

The Assembly veto, exercised via the Capital Program Review Board, was made without explanation at the end of February. **Mayor Bloomberg** had urged the move, hoping to bring the MTA to the table regarding his desire to transfer responsibility for the NYC franchise bus system to the transit authority. **Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver** is not a strong Bloomberg ally, though whether the Assem-

bly had other motives in vetoing the Metro-North action is unknown — it cannot have pleased Hudson Valley Assembly members. Speaker Silver reportedly has concerns about a project to rebuild the South Ferry #1 train station (in his district) and a funding measure for that project was packaged with the Metro-North car purchase. The Assembly may have believed the MTA would withdraw the amendment under threat of a veto. Perhaps astutely, the MTA proceeded, understanding that the Assembly would be the party looking bad after a public veto.

Meanwhile, Mayor Bloomberg, already under fire from transit advocates for trying to pull city funding out of the franchise bus system, is managing another public headache now that reporters understand that the city, like other public bodies managing bus systems, **regularly receives federal and state capital aid** for buses and depots. The city has not released the funds since deciding to hand the system to the MTA several years ago. It says NYC Transit has different bus specifications than the city has used, though it is unclear why the city can't buy buses now that are made to NYC Transit specifications. The franchise companies say their buses are now about twice the age of NYC Transit buses. ❖

NJ Lets Route 92 Permit Lapse

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection will not renew a certification for the proposed Route 92 highway before reviewing a forthcoming federal environmental impact study of the project, according to news reports.

The project requires a **state water quality certification** that has a five-year limit. It was originally issued in 1999.

Route 92, the largest new-alignment highway under consideration in New Jersey, would directly destroy **14 acres of wetlands** and expose additional areas to chemical run-off. The Army Corps of Engineers will decide whether to issue a wetlands fill permit despite these impacts. It is expected to release its draft environmental statement this spring.

NJ DEP's refusal to automatically re-certify the project may be a sign that the McGreevey administration will keep its promise to **end New Jersey's sprawl subsidies**. Route 92 foes hope the administration will more firmly oppose the project when the environmental study is released. In any case, the permit's expiration will force the administration to take clear action either for or against the project.

Last month, NJ DOT tabled plans to build the unnecessary and sprawl-inducing **Millstone Bypass** through West Windsor Township, opting instead for operational improvements to existing roads. Similar options are available in the area where Route 92 would be built. ❖

NYC Will Look to Speed Buses

NYC Transit has indicated that a joint Transit-NYC DOT study of **bus rapid transit** options for NYC will begin in the fall of 2004. It should identify corridors where bus rapid transit would work well, as well as develop specific techniques for speeding bus travelers through traffic congestion.

Transit advocates have urged the MTA to include specific funding for bus rapid transit projects in its 2005-2009 capital program. ❖

Suozzi: Hub Plan "Key" to Nassau's Future

In his state of the county speech last week, County Executive Thomas Suozzi called for a major overhaul in economic growth rules and said that the Nassau Hub project is "the key to the future" of the county. Stating that the mature Nassau suburb was approaching a "mid-life crisis," he presented a vision of "New Suburbia" that focuses on **growth in certain areas**, open space preservation, transportation improvements, congestion reduction, and more affordable housing.

The Nassau Hub project seeks to densify land uses in central Nassau and develop a more intensive mass transit system to serve them than presently exists. The project, which would essentially create a Nassau downtown in the Hub area, has the potential to become one of the most ambitious smart growth ventures in the region (MTR # 433).

Suozzi said that a new commuter system that links LI residents to both the Hub and NYC is necessary for Nassau's future economic growth. "If we do not start planning and implementing such a system now the growth we need will not happen. The current traffic simply will not allow it," he said. ❖

Many West Side Stories

Recently, reports surfaced that the city wants the MTA to give it the **air rights** over the Hudson rail yard in exchange for construction of the 7 line subway extension. According to *Newsday*, the Bloomberg administration is relying on future tax proceeds from development above the yards and transferred development rights to pay for the subway. The swap for the \$2 billion subway project seemed to get a cautious nod from **MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow**, who has generally insisted on fair market value for MTA properties. But many transit advocates worry that if the city's financing plan doesn't work, the MTA's over-stretched capital program will be left holding the project's bag.

The news is the latest on **heavily-debated** plans for the West Side. Along with the subway, the city's rezoning plan calls for at least 28 million square feet of new commercial space, a new Olympic/Jets stadium, and an expansion of the Javits Convention

Center. The total public cost of the transportation and arena/convention center projects is about \$5 billion.

A few weeks ago, the **Hells Kitchen/Hudson Yard Alliance**, a coalition of elected officials, including Congressman Jerrold Nadler, State Senators Tom Duane and Eric Schneiderman and City Councilmember Christine Quinn, community groups, and business owners, came out with an alternative to the city plan. It excludes a Jets stadium, but supports expansion of the Javits Center, modified commercial development (20 million square feet), more open space and affordable housing, and a 33rd street bus shuttle service instead of the 7-line subway extension. They say the shuttle was a NYC Transit plan from the 1980s, to link Penn Station and the Javits Center. They say it would cost \$110 million annually (in 1987 dollars).

But not everyone thinks the West Side is ready for this type of development. The **West Side Coalition**, a group of 37 Manhattan community groups, opposes both plans, claiming that the development will cause an avalanche of traffic, displace residents and destroy the neighborhood. The West Side Coalition also says that the plan's cost, including the new MTA-city land swap deal, may eventually rely on city residents' pockets. They claim that there is no guarantee that the "tax-increment" financing plan – which relies on bonding against anticipated future revenue – will raise the funds needed to pay for the proposal. Various elected officials have also voiced concerns about the financing plan, and a potential \$600 million in city and state funds that may go to the stadium.

The **Regional Plan Association** has also recently issued several reports on Far West Side issues. RPA's transportation study finds that the #7 subway extension will not have enough capacity to meet transportation demand for most Far West Side development scenarios starting in the 2020's. On the other hand, unless development in the area is on the high side of expectations, heavy demand may not materialize for the Far West Side subway until about 2025. RPA says the project is probably needed as a catalyst for the district's development, but suggests the construction time frame could be extended somewhat (the report leaves aside the Olympics issue). It also explains that extension of the #7 to new Far West Side developments will create problems in other parts of the subway system, as riders destined for the area ride other lines and switch to the #7 in Manhattan. These include crowding in the Grand Central subway station and on Lexington Avenue subways. RPA argues that **Second Avenue subway** construction would help alleviate both issues. The group also says Far West Side development will be

hampered unless more rail capacity between New Jersey and Midtown is developed.

Although it says the stadium issue warrants further study, another RPA report calls the Hudson Yards plan the city's "best opportunity to provide a new district that will accommodate new growth in high-value office activities" and supports the #7 extension for that reason. However, the analysis also notes that it will probably **take eight to ten years** for the New York City office market to fully use its existing supply.

Parking plans for the area also raise eyebrows. Building in Manhattan, rather than car-dependent suburbs, is obviously smart planning. But **huge increases in the parking supply** in the Hudson Yards area will induce more people to drive, and make Midtown streets and arterials even more congested than they are today. According to NYC's Planning department, zoning for the Hudson Yards requires one space per 2,000-3,000 square feet of office development. In contrast, the rest of Midtown has no parking requirements. Planners say the City's environmental review process (CEQR) requires that the parking spaces displaced as a result of new development be replaced, and they anticipate increased parking demand as a result of the rezoning. According to city records, there are currently 23,000 parking spaces in the study area, and **8,000 will be created as a result of the rezoning**, for a total of 31,000 (the figure does not appear to include stadium parking).

Jets officials told *Newsday* on Friday that 70% of West Side stadium attendees would use public transit, and that a stadium would generate about **7,000 auto trips** on event days. They say the current Jets location in the NJ Meadowlands generates 30,000 auto trips. But Manhattan Community Board 4 says only 40% of those attending events at Madison Square Garden — directly atop Penn Station — use public transit. RPA says the traffic demand Far West Side development could generate would make Midtown streets and highways untenable, an effect that would only be worsened by stadium construction.

The Regional Plan Association's **April 16 Regional Assembly** will be devoted to Far West Side development issues — www.rpa.org. ❖

Bronx Study Nears Completion

The NY State Dept. of Transportation has held two forums over the last month to wrap up its several-year conceptual analysis of future construction projects along the **Cross-Bronx and Major Deegan Expressways**. As a "major investment study," this work will not automatically translate into construction projects. DOT would have to decide to develop the ideas into specific capital projects and then com-

mence environmental reviews for them. Some of the study's proposals would also fall under the purview of other transportation agencies.

The study presents three "package deals" that combine series of projects, and estimates transportation benefits for each. The basic set of highway options consists of ramp improvements along the Cross-Bronx and Deegan, including some in the notoriously difficult Highbridge interchange where the two highways meet.

Packages two and three add "auxiliary" lanes along portions of the Cross-Bronx, a new interchange complex over East 177th Street between the Cross-Bronx, Sheridan Expressway and Bronx River Parkway and a variety of options to further improve the Highbridge area, from a new Harlem River bridge to reactivation of unused east-west tunnels in Manhattan near the George Washington Bridge. These packages would also **deck over** some sunken portions of the Cross-Bronx and upgrade and link service or connector roads along the two highways.

A recent study technical memo also lists a variety of bicycle, pedestrian, bus, subway, ferry and Metro-North Railroad projects. It includes most of them (excepting bus improvements that service road improvements would facilitate) in all three packages, though the memo has almost no discussion of them. Many of them would have to be undertaken by agencies other than NY State DOT, and thus pursued separately from whatever DOT is planning. It is unclear whether the impacts of these non-road options were even included in the traffic modeling NYS-DOT carried out for each of the project packages.

Transportation reformers and Bronx community organizations are enthused at the prospect of **recovering land by decking parts of the Cross-Bronx**, and at the notion of **bus rapid transit service** along Cross-Bronx service roads. Construction of the 177th Street interchange complex was opposed by these groups when it was first introduced as part of DOT's Sheridan Expressway project (see MTR #'s 192, 291) in the late 1990s. The groups are likely to be neutral to supportive of the highway operational improvements, though, as above, it may be some time before the concepts are developed into concrete project proposals that can be evaluated in more depth. ❖

Calendar

March 16, 3:30-5:30, 7-9 Long Island Sound Waterborne Transportation Plan public review meeting. Spector Hall, 22 Reade Street, NYC, 631-952-6115, www.nymtc.org/waterborne_plan.index.htm

March 16, 4-7pm Mid-Hudson South Transportation Coordinating Committee Workshop, Rockland County Planning Offices, 50 Sanatorium Road, Bldg T, Pomona. Info: dcoots@dot.state.ny.us, 845-431-7930

March 18, 11am. NY Metropolitan Transportation Council annual meeting. New York University, Kimmel Center for University Life, 4th Floor Auditorium, 60 Washington Square South. Info: www.nymtc.org. R.S.V.P. 718-482-3046/3293

March 18, 6:30-8:30pm. [Kosciuszko Bridge](#) Stakeholders meeting, Jennings Hall, 260 Powers Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Info: 718-482-4683, kosciuszko@gw.dot.state.ny.us.

March 20, 8am to 5pm. NJ Environmental Federation Conference, Princeton University Friend Center. <http://www.cleanwateraction.org/njef/>

March 23, 3:30-5:30, 7-9 Long Island Sound Waterborne Transportation Plan public review meeting. City hall Annex, Conference Room "C" 999 Broad Street, Bridgeport, CT, 631-952-6115, www.nymtc.org/waterborne_plan.index.htm

March 23, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](#) Regional Transportation Plan Update. County Center in White Plains. Info: 718-472-3197 or nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us.

March 23, 6-8pm. Institute for Rational Mobility & [Regional Plan Association](#) discussion: "Auto-FEE New York" NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington Street, Conference Room. Info: 212-475-3394; www.auto-free.org

April 16, 2004. Regional Plan Association, 2004 Regional Assembly, Waldorf-Astoria, NYC. 212-253-2727 x317; www.rpa.org/ra2004.

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

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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MTR#450 Contributing: Tyler Burke, 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