

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### **Pataki to Announce Options for Disputed Downtown-LIRR Plan**

In a letter sent last week, lower Manhattan civic and mass transit advocacy groups urged Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg not to use the remaining \$1 billion in post-September 11 federal aid as a “down payment” on a new LIRR link to Lower Manhattan.

The groups said the funds would be **better used as an investment in job-creating development** downtown, including affordable housing, new community services and cultural institutions.

Governor Pataki is expected to announce the early results of a Lower Manhattan Development Corp. study of bringing LIRR trains into lower Manhattan. The plan has attracted **significant opposition** because most of the options under consideration would use a portion of one of the downtown subway tunnels, reducing subway capacity and diverting service. The LIRR and JFK Airport markets to lower Manhattan look very small in comparison to the subway services the project may disrupt.

The letter from groups such as the **Straphangers Campaign, Rebuild Downtown/Our Town** and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign notes that a variety of civic forums and public opinion polls downtown have indicated very little support for the LIRR project versus other needs downtown. Regarding transportation, bringing the Second Avenue subway to Lower Manhattan and creating a better downtown pedestrian environment have ranked ahead of the LIRR plan. Last summer, Manhattan Community Board 1 voted that the grants be used for a range of non-transportation needs, and not for the rail link. Only the Governor, Mayor and a few outspoken downtown business leaders favor it.

Any study documents that are released about the project will be very interesting. Transit officials had earlier distanced themselves from or even criticized the project. MTA and Port Authority managers used to running high-volume urban transit operations are likely to be unhappy behind the scenes if they are made to support an expensive project that promises weak ridership. Documentation of any rider estimates for the line will be the first thing reporters and observers of the issue will look for. ❖

### **Building a Road to Build a Road**

The hearing for the controversial Route 92 project is still a month away, but officials at the Army Corps of Engineers and NJ Turnpike already seem anxious to approve the new highway. While the project’s draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) is supposed to give equal weight to a number of congestion relief measures, it starts by assuming that the creation of an “alternative travel route” for through-traffic is the purpose of the project.

This is akin to stating, “**We want to build a road,**” and then making the various options answer the questions: “What and where should we build?”

By defining the project’s purpose narrowly, the Turnpike Authority and Army Corps are trying to skirt the federal Clean Water Act and state regulation. Because Route 92 would destroy wetlands, these laws require proof that that no “practicable alternatives” exist to the new road. However, if the purpose of the project is defined as building a new road, it’s harder to identify alternatives. In 1998, the Turnpike Authority tried to change its project purpose after the EPA ruled that other alternatives exist. The Tri-State Campaign and others have repeatedly urged a **broader purpose and need** for the project, and in 1998 asked the agency to “set the record straight” on the real purpose of the project. If it’s to reduce local congestion, then an “alternative travel route” for through traffic is beside the point. If it’s to address regional traffic, then a number of other policy, project and operational changes could also be considered.

In this round, the Army Corps asserts that regional traffic is the problem and claims a new highway will reduce local congestion by diverting regional traffic bound for the NJ Turnpike. But only **16 percent of current traffic on local roads is through-traffic**, and this number will rise only 9 percent by design-year 2028, according to the DEIS itself. The area’s real source of congestion – low-density development that is expected to house an additional 87,000 jobs by 2028 – goes unaddressed. Even as the agency promises to work with state agencies and communities to ensure Route 92 is not overrun by unplanned sprawl, it acknowledges that, “proposed Route 92 might accelerate zoned devel-

opment near its interchanges.” In other words, **Rt. 92 will undoubtedly create more sprawl**. We expect many citizens will point to this problem at the upcoming hearings in Princeton on May 20<sup>th</sup>. ❖

### Hearing Punches Holes in Xanadu Traffic Study

Last Tuesday, during a transportation and air quality public hearing for the New Jersey Meadowlands Xanadu project, representatives from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign testified that the traffic analysis associated with the project’s draft environmental impact statement is terribly inadequate.

One glaring omission is the complete absence of information on Xanadu’s impact on the **morning peak hour traffic volumes**. Xanadu is likely to generate a significant number of jobs, as well as customers, and Route 120 and Route 3, two notoriously congested roads, will undoubtedly be affected by the Xanadu project during the morning rush hours. Yet nothing regarding the morning impact on these roads was included in the project’s DEIS.

The Campaign also urged a broader roadway network study that will look at impacts on everyone on the road, not just those driving to Xanadu. The current Xanadu study fails to look at key nearby congestion spots on key routes such as the **Turnpike and Route 3**.

The evening peak hours analyzed by the developer appear to be biased. The study defines afternoon rush hour as 4:30-5:30 pm. Placing it in such an early, and narrow time frame is absurd given that Route 3 westbound traffic originates from the Lincoln Tunnel and New York City, and from Hudson County, and extends far beyond 5:30. The Port Authority, for instance, defines the Lincoln Tunnel rush period as 4-7pm. The weekday evening “event” peak is placed between 7:15 and 8:15 pm, which is also questionable, given that Meadowlands sports events generally begin at 7:30. These time frames are conspicuously separate, and seem designed to show Xanadu will have little influence on the already tough rush hour traffic situation in Hudson, Essex and southern Bergen counties. The present analysis also makes arbitrary assumptions suggesting that customers will avoid Xanadu entertainment attractions during major events.

Traffic projections for hotel and office developments were based on a 1990 Hackensack Meadowlands Transportation study. Traffic patterns in that work are obviously extremely dated and unreliable for a realistic evaluation today.

No information about parking management and the allocation of built parking among various uses and travel markets at Xanadu was available in the DEIS.

The Campaign concluded by noting that traffic impacts will be worse because **Mack-Cali**, Xanadu’s developer, is **not contributing to mass transit** infrastructure. NJ Transit has plans to serve the site, but it’s unclear why taxpayers should foot the bill. Bus access plans for the site are unclear.

In response to the criticism of the study, the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority announced at its monthly board meeting Wednesday that the traffic study for the project will be expanded, especially to include a morning rush hour analysis, and plans for proposed rail service for the complex will be further evaluated. ❖

### New Jersey — Transportation Funding Faces Political Gulf

At April’s TransAction conference — NJ’s annual statewide transportation gathering — an attempt by Martin Robins of Rutgers’ Bloustein School to identify common ground during a panel on NJ Transportation Trust Fund reauthorization entitled “**No Money! Now What?**” ended unsuccessfully. Leaders from each side of the aisle disagreed vehemently (though politely) on the question of raising the New Jersey gas tax. **Assemblyman John Wisniewski**, head of the transport committee, gave a rousing stump speech for hiking the tax. He cited the state’s urgent needs, transportation’s role in NJ’s economy, mounting debt from bonding and the need for bi-partisan support.

**Assemblyman Alex DeCroce**, former transportation committee chair and now Minority Leader, said he wasn’t so sure a gas tax hike is needed. He doesn’t want to ask “John Q. Public” to pay more without fully investigating opportunities to **trim the budget**, or moving money from other places. He said he would not call on his members to support a tax increase when Governor McGreevey’s web page states that he will not sign a gas tax increase, and until the governor and treasurer stop “stealing” money intended for the state Transportation Trust Fund from statutorily dedicated taxes (from the toll roads and other fees), from the NJTransit fare increase and from excess gas tax revenue which goes into the General Fund.

Echoing Tri-State’s position for a decade, DeCroce said, “I am not going to ask my 33 members to vote for a tax unless I know **how it is going to be spent**.” To Wisniewski’s call for bi-partisan support, DeCroce told him to start by persuading the Democratic governor of the need for an increase, and then to “put 41 votes on the board.” ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

## Brooklyn Transportation Study Closer

New York City's study of transportation implications of future downtown Brooklyn development could get under way in **late spring or early summer**, and come to a conclusion later this year.

The work will reportedly take a broad look at future subway capacity issues, but will probably devote more detail to areas the city directly controls, such as bus movement on streets, parking policy and pedestrian capacity. It's unclear for now whether the work will lead to more specific policy analyses or discuss ways to pay for some of the improvements likely to be needed if projected growth in Brooklyn pans out. But if it gives subway capacity issues and future transit capital needs short shrift, it will likely feed more opposition to downtown rezoning and development.

**East River tolls** would likely have a big effect reducing the through traffic downtown Brooklyn experiences because of the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, and could provide revenue for improvements, though we doubt this particular study will revisit the issue. **Development impact fees** would be another way to support more intensive and frequent mass transit in the area. To lay the ground work for such an approach, the study needs to be explicit about the transit and roadway demand that various types and scales of development will generate. ❖

## Sidewalks Save Lives in Rockland County

Rockland County residents are the latest of the region's citizenry calling for a retrofit of streets designed with only cars in mind. After a 48 year-old Pearl River woman was killed last week trying to cross Middletown Road, citizens and police agreed that sidewalks and crossing facilities need to be extended and upgraded.

The **National Highway Safety Administration** blames two out of every three pedestrian fatalities on the victim. But Rockland residents feel dangerous roads are to blame, and want more sidewalks and crosswalks.

Safety proponents know simple changes like sidewalk installation save lives and limbs. "In the 1990s, we had a rash of pedestrian accidents down there, with two that turned into fatalities," Stony Point Police Lt. Patrick Brophy said. "After the state put in sidewalks, it's been much better." But with sidewalk construction costing about \$100 per foot, county officials are struggling to implement additional projects. State DOTs and county public works budgets need to do more for pedestrians. ❖

## Calendar

**May 4**, 12:00pm-1:00pm. NY State Bar Association presents: NY's Transportation Problems: Lessons from London.-Speakers Steven Polan, Jeffrey Zupan, Prof. Philip Weinberg. 42 West 44<sup>th</sup> St., Manhattan.

**May 5**, 5:30pm. Voorhees Distinguished Speaker Series, "Filling the Trust Fund Pothole: New Jersey's Transportation Financing Challenges," NJ Assemblyman John Wisniewski. Bloustein School, New Brunswick. 732-932-6812, ext. 472 or [vtc@policy.rutgers.edu](mailto:vtc@policy.rutgers.edu)

**May 5**, 7:00pm CT Shore Line East fare increase hearing, Old Saybrook Middle School, 60 Sheffield St. 860-594-2000.

**May 11**, 8:00am-12:45pm. NYU Rudin Center forum: Partnerships in Transportation Technology: Building on Success. Eisner Auditorium, 60 Washington Square S., Manhattan. RSVP by May 3, 212-998-7545, [bella.pierson@nyu.edu](mailto:bella.pierson@nyu.edu)

**May 14**, 9:30am-12:00. Visiting Scholars Seminar: "The Automobile in the City: New Views of an Old Problem." Baruch College, 151 E. 25th St, #750. [seminars@utrc2.org](mailto:seminars@utrc2.org) or 212-650-8374.

**May 18**, 6:00pm. South Ferry subway terminal project public meeting 126 Stuyvesant Place, Staten Island. Register to comment @ 718-694-5160, [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info)

**May 20**, 6:00pm. South Ferry subway terminal project public meeting 2 Broadway, 20th Floor, Manhattan. Register to comment @ 718-694-5160 [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info)

**May 20**, 2:00pm-5:00pm, 7:00pm-Midnight. Army Corps of Engineers, Route 92 D.E.I.S. Public Hearing. Radisson Hotel Princeton, 4355 U.S. Route 1 South at Ridge Road. 212-264-3813. To submit comments on Route 92, email [nan.route92eis@usace.army.mi](mailto:nan.route92eis@usace.army.mi)

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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