

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Ambitious MTA Capital Program Would Rebuild and Expand NY's Transit System

While attention to MTA budget matters last week focused heavily on pending fare increases, the MTA released an ambitious five-year capital budget which, if fully funded by **Governor Pataki and the state legislature**, would make major strides toward linking the Long Island Railroad to Grand Central Terminal and building the Second Avenue Subway without sacrificing the ongoing rehabilitation of NYC's vast mass transit system.

The \$25 billion MTA program would represent a nominal **43% increase** over the \$17.5 billion 2000-2004 program, and a roughly 33% real boost if inflation from 2000 to 2004 is considered.

Funding the whole program will be a big lift in Albany and City Hall. After anticipated federal funding is counted, the MTA will need to find \$11.3 billion for its "core" system repair and maintenance program, and another \$4.2 billion for the system expansion projects. The \$3 billion-plus per year would have to come in the form of new MTA revenues or support from state and local governments. Under the Pataki administration thus far, the MTA has relied on **fare increases and borrowing** to fuel its capital programs. New York City is also making its lowest contribution to transit capital improvements since the rebuilding programs began in the 1980s.

The program was criticized in Friday's papers by State Senator Dean Skelos, the NY Senate's point person on MTA capital spending. Skelos called it a "Cadillac" plan whose scale is "unsustainable and ill considered."

The MTA staff delivered a strong presentation on the importance of funding the core program of system repair and replacement of ageing infrastructure, describing the "**slippery slope**" created by neglected maintenance and declining conditions in the transit system. The 2000-2004 capital program devoted \$14.7 billion to spending on the core (with the rest of the program going to LIRR East Side Access and other projects). The new proposal calls for \$17.2 billion, with \$12.1 billion of that for NYC Transit. This core program also contains \$22 million for "first phase" NYC bus rapid transit projects, \$203 million for the **LIRR Main Line third track** project and \$500 million for new security investments.

The rest of the money would go to the system expansion projects, with \$4.6 billion total for LIRR East Side Access and \$2.8 billion for the Second Avenue subway. \$2 billion is also listed for the #7 subway extension, but it is expected to be fully funded by New York City (we do not include the \$2 billion in any of the MTA totals reported here). \$400 million would be devoted to the LIRR-downtown Manhattan link. However, it's unclear in the wake of Thursday's announcement that the Bush administration will recommend the payment of \$2 billion in cash for NY transportation needs in lieu of post 9-11 tax credits that the MTA would still have to fork up this money during the 2005-09 period.

All told, the \$25 billion program is not far off of the \$26 billion recently recommended by the Regional Plan Association (*MTR #466*). It devotes more than RPA expected to the LIRR East Side Access project, slightly less for the Second Avenue subway, and about \$1.7 billion less for core repair and replacement work. ❖

MTA 2005 Budget: More for Less

— Straphangers: "the George E. Pataki Fare Hike" —

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority board will likely hold hearings this fall for a 2005 budget that includes fare increases and service cuts that would take effect early in 2005. The agency released its 2005 preliminary hearing at its board meeting Thursday.

It shows a **\$436 million gap**, driven in part by heavy debt service payments on prior capital programs. The gap projection has indeed come down somewhat in recent weeks due to better-than-anticipated receipts for taxes dedicated to transit operations. However, it remains considerable, and is slated to balloon to \$1 billion in 2006. The "gap closing actions" listed here would yield a budget \$31 million in the black by 2005's end, according to the MTA:

- Monthly NYC fare card— up \$6
- Weekly NYC fare card—up \$3
- NYC express buses—\$2 fare hike, to \$6
- Commuter rail fares up about 5%

- 25-50 cent bridge and tunnel toll hikes
- New \$1 monthly fee for E-ZPass
- Close 49 full-time, 115 part-time token booths
- Off peak bus cuts
- Shorten weekend and night G-train service
- Eliminate conductors on the G and L lines
- Cut some night LIRR service and call off planned commuter rail service increases
- Reduce commuter rail train and station cleaning
- Internal administrative “belt tightening”

The 2006 \$1 billion-in-the-red doomsday scenario could trigger more radical steps, like closing some LIRR branches, according to *Newsday*.

The 2005 budget would not affect the \$2 base fare or the 6-for-5 bulk fare purchase. Use of the one-day “fun pass” had been all but wiped out by the \$3, 42% hike (to \$7) imposed on it by the MTA in 2003, and its price would not increase under the plan released yesterday. The one-day card accounted for about 5% of fare sales prior to the 2003 increase, but is around 1% now.

The MTA said the average NYC fare would rise from \$1.26 to \$1.33. Still, the rise in the monthly fare pass from 2002 to 2005 would be significant — 20.6% from the \$63 cost before the 2003 fare increase to the proposed \$76 in 2005. The weekly pass would see a 41% hike over the same period, from \$17 to \$24. That could trigger a shift from the weekly to the monthly cards. Monthly cards account for about 27% of NYC Transit fare sales now.

The Straphangers Campaign called on **Governor Pataki** and **Mayor Bloomberg** to step up and find the money to **stave off fare hikes** and service cuts, and to fund the 2005-2009 transit capital program. Straphangers pointed out that the absence of any state government contribution to the MTA’s current capital program drove the MTA to record levels of borrowing. That debt is now rebounding on transit riders in the form of a high level of debt service in each year’s MTA operating budget.

Straphangers’ Gene Russianoff testified: “The MTA’s interest payments on the bonds are doubling — from \$800 million in 2003 to \$1.6 billion in 2007. That’s the leading cause of looming deficits and threats of service cuts and fare hikes.”

Russianoff also noted that Mayor Bloomberg has cut \$90 million in city aid to the current MTA capital program, leaving the city at its smallest level of aid for fixing the subways in at least 25 years. The mayor is also pressing the MTA to hand over valuable land above the West Side yards for the

Jets/Olympic stadium “so football fans can have luxury boxes with views of the Hudson River.”

Bloomberg largely sat out the 2003 fare hike, declining to criticize the MTA or offer an alternative financing plan. He may be less inclined to do so this time around, since fares went up just last year and he faces reelection in 2005. His MTA board appointees voted against holding budget hearings, and he made several statements since Thursday urging the MTA to look elsewhere for revenue. But the mayor did not comment on the capital program or city contributions to transit.

The **fare increase would be the third under Governor Pataki’s MTA leadership**. The governor has not developed any new non-fare revenue sources for mass transit, though his implementation of free bus-subway and discounted MetroCards reduced fares in the mid-1990s. ❖

Express Tolls Proliferate

High-speed toll collection continues to develop. The region saw these developments in recent weeks.

- **Governor McGreevey** is making “Express E-ZPass,” the high-speed lanes now in operation at five sites on the NJ Turnpike, Garden State Parkway and Atlantic City Expressway, a keystone of his claim to have fixed New Jersey’s long-troubled E-ZPass system. Radio ads and other official communiqués feature the benefits of Express E-ZPass.
- The NJ Turnpike recently delayed the opening of high-speed tolls at **Exits 16E-18E** from May 2005 until 2006 or 2007. Volume and complexity at the plaza apparently require construction of additional standard toll booths while the high-speed lanes are under construction. Meanwhile, the dismantling of two Garden State Parkway plazas and their replacement by one-way/double toll plazas with high-speed lanes will be completed this summer.
- Three weeks after a *Journal News* editorial urged the Thruway Authority to increase speed limits at the Tappan Zee toll plaza, Thruway officials announced speed limits would be hiked from **20 to 35 miles per hour** starting today. Authority engineers studied the mid-speed lanes and determined the faster speed would be safe.
- The Port Authority is expected to approve plans for high speed toll collection at the **Outerbridge Crossing** in the near future, allowing implementation of that project by 2007.
- The **MTA’s draft capital program** devotes funding for rebuilding Whitestone and Verrazano bridge toll plazas, and the agency’s 2005 budget calls for 50-cent toll hikes at major bridges, but has **no plan** for higher speed toll plaza operation. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Thinking Outside the Big Box

At the NYC City Planning Commission's public hearing on the proposed Red Hook IKEA last week, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign emphasized that the company must offset the traffic impacts of locating on a relatively car-dependent site.

Brooklyn is host to recent developments that have successfully promoted mass transit – like the Atlantic Center Mall, which is sited near major subway lines and charges for parking. While Red Hook is not as transit-friendly as Atlantic Terminal, IKEA should acknowledge that it wants to build in Brooklyn, not along the NJ Turnpike or in the middle of Long Island, and avoid transplanting sprawl development's worst features into the city.

Both opponents and supporters of the project voiced concerns about its traffic impacts, many agreeing with the Campaign that transit enhancements would reduce customer car trips.

The Campaign's suggestions are:

- Implement **smart parking policies**, like reducing overall supply and charging for customer parking, with revenue dedicated to transit improvements; change curbside regulations near the store to discourage free parking.
- Build a **passenger elevator** at the elevated Smith-9th Street subway station.
- Daily IKEA shuttle bus and ferry service, with a shuttle route connecting Smith-9th Street, Borough Hall, and Atlantic Avenue subways and city bus transfer points.
- Bus route improvements within Red Hook.
- Add bus shelters at busy area stops.
- Implement "leading pedestrian intervals" at intersections surrounding IKEA, to give exclusive crossing time to pedestrians (particularly along Lorraine Street).
- Bus priority signals to speed buses through traffic, particularly for the B61 route.
- Sheltered bike parking near the store entrance and waterfront promenade.
- "**Cash in lieu of parking**" that allows employees to trade a free parking spot, if provided by the company, for its cash equivalent, which can be used for transit or other forms of non-auto commuting (with the worker pocketing any savings as an incentive).

Apparently, the company is considering offering the TransitChek program to its Brooklyn workforce. The measure reduces transit commute costs by allowing purchase of fares with pre-tax income.

There won't be any word on whether the City Planning Commission agrees with such recommendations until September, when members are expected to vote on the project. ❖

A 21st Century DOT ?

NY State Transportation Commissioner Joseph Boardman's panel on transportation policy came downstate last week, holding hearings in Suffolk County and Manhattan. The panel is to consider elements of transportation policy as the state transportation department considers a new transportation master plan, looking out to 2025. The panel includes a good mix of former transportation officials, some with strong mass transit backgrounds, and including James Tripp, general counsel for Environmental Defense and a Tri-State Campaign board member.

Transportation reformers at the meetings stressed new 21st Century missions for the NY State DOT:

- Taking the lead to better **unite transportation and land use planning**. First by better educating municipalities about the transportation consequences of locating development, and thereafter working with receptive towns and cities on transportation plans that complement transit and pedestrian oriented, mixed-use plans for growth
- Taking on an even greater role to **promote rail freight**, including making public investments in key rail projects a larger portion of the state DOT capital budget. Forecasts of truck traffic growth in coming decades warrant a major public commitment to increasing the railroads' share of total goods movement. More freight moved by rail will lessen traffic congestion and truck damage to highways.
- Using **tolls innovatively**. Bringing new tolls to freeways will remain a heavy lift for some time to come. But the federal government may liberalize some of the rules that make such action problematic on highways that receive federal aid, and toll facilities themselves are becoming less of a blockage to traffic flow (see item on non-stop toll progress in the region, page 2). An early implementation project in New York State would be to permit solo drivers to use the Long Island Expressway HOV lane (supposed to be completed by 2005) in exchange for an E-ZPass paid toll. To the extent traffic volumes become intolerable during future economic upturns, new tolls could control demand on key roadways while raising money to invest in transit and rail freight projects. ❖

L.I. Freight Rail Yard Takes Key Step

The environmental review process for the Long Island Truck-Rail Intermodal Facility (LI TRIM) in Suffolk County finally got started this month with the first public scoping meeting.

The LI TRIM facility would sit on the former Pilgrim State Hospital site in Suffolk County and allow more freight trains to serve Long Island. Currently, only **1% of freight tonnage** on the Island is handled by rail. The facility would reduce truck traffic, pol-

lution and noise, and would ensure that Long Island reap the benefits of the Cross Harbor Rail Freight Tunnel, if it is built. NYSDOT found that the project is economically feasible with or without the tunnel.

Options to connect the site with the nearby Long Island Expressway include opening a portion of the car-only Sagtikos State Parkway to trucks, new service roads along the Sagtikos, or using local streets like Campus Road, Commack Road, and Long Island Avenue.

The community of Brentwood is already expressing concerns over the project, worried that it will increase truck traffic in the neighborhood. It should be noted, however, that the Pilgrim intermodal facility fits in quite well with nearby land uses. Just south of the site sits the soon-to-be-expanded **Heartland Business Center**, which includes large-scale distribution centers and office facilities, and an expansion of this development is planned. The closest residential unit to the truck-rail facility site is one fourth of a mile.

Somewhat less consistent with existing development is the proposed Heartland Town Center Project, still waiting approval by the Town of Islip, which would lie just north of the proposed facility. Using 450 acres of the former Pilgrim Hospital site, the development would create a densely developed "downtown" type area, with and 27,000 parking spaces, 9,000 apartments, and millions of square feet for stores and offices. Last year, (MTR 426), the Campaign expressed concern that new residents at the Heartland Town Center (a high end development) would try to stop the rail freight facility.

Scoping documents also clearly lay out the **benefits of rail freight** over trucks. Rail freight is four times more efficient, half the cost, and has less than half the fatalities of truck freight. Rail freight also has a six-fold capacity advantage: one track can serve 216 million tons of goods per year, whereas trucks can only carry 37.8 million tons annually on

	Fuel	Infrastructure	Cost	Safety
Rail	455 ton-miles/gallon	216 million annual tons per track	2.7 cents per ton-mile	.61 fatalities per billion ton-miles
Diesel Truck	105 ton-miles/gallon	37.8 million annual tons per lane	5.0 cents per ton-mile	1.45 fatalities per billion ton-miles

Chart adapted from NYS Department of Transportation LI TRIM Scoping Documents

one highway lane.

According to project documents, the EIS will be completed in 2006, with construction then taking place between 2008 and 2010. ❖

Calendar

August 4, 6:30pm. Manhattan Community Board 4 Land Use Committee special meeting on Hudson Yards proposal. Location: John Jay College, 899 10th Ave., 6th Floor (58th / 59th Streets). 212-736-4536, www.manhattancb4.org.

August 5, 3-5pm. Application workshop - proposing projects for the 2006-2010 Poughkeepsie-Dutchess transportation improvement program. Dutchess County Planning Dept., 27 High Street, Poughkeepsie. 845-431-7921.

August 5, 6:30-8:30pm. Envisioning the West Side: NY State Senator Tom Duane, NYC Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff, Councilmember Christine Quinn and others — the future of affordable housing, development, transportation on the far West Side. 119 9th Avenue, Manhattan. 212-268-1049.

August 12, 12:15pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council, monthly meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, 10th floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

August 19, 5:30pm. NJ Transit "Access to the Region's Core" meeting on draft environmental impact statement for new commuter rail tunnel between NJ and Manhattan. 1 Penn Plaza, Manhattan. Parsons Brinckerhoff, 2nd floor. 973-491-8912 www.access-to-the-regions-core.com.

August 24, 6pm. Walking tour — "Towards an Auto-Free Lower Manhattan." Auto Free NY. Meet at NYPD downtown Center, 104 Washington St. (north of Rector), Manhattan. www.auto-free.org, 212-475-3394.

September 28, 6-8pm. Auto-Free NY lecture: "Promoting safe walking and cycling to improve public health." Prof. John Pucher, Rutgers Univ. Conference room, NYPD downtown center, 104 Washington St., Manhattan. www.auto-free.org, 212-475-3394.

more calendar entries at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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