

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Transit Funding Spotlight on Governor Pataki

Mayor Bloomberg has said he will oppose the fare increases the MTA board is slated to vote in favor of Dec. 16, even if he has declined to wage a real campaign in favor of sensible mass transit funding.

Governor Pataki seems ready to let the increases happen. Last week, the governor's office attempted to deflect an *amNY* reporter's queries to the MTA, and then to the state budget office. **The governor seems determined to duck the issue.**

Worse, with only a short time until the governor releases his executive budget for the next NY State fiscal year, there is no indication about what his administration intends to do to realize the MTA 2005-2009 capital program. Today's fare crisis is the di-

### Sources for MTA Capital Programs (billions of dollars, % of total)

Years/ fund source	1982- 1991	1992- 1999	2000- 2004	2005-2009 proposal
<b>Federal</b>	5.1 (32%)	5.6 (33%)	6.2 (32%)	8.2 (33%)
<b>New York State</b>	2.4 (15%)	.104 (1%)	0	0
<b>New York City</b>	1.9 (12%)	1.4 (9%)	.451 (2%)	2.0 (7%)
<b>MTA debt restructuring</b>	0	0	4.5 (23%)	0
<b>MTA bonds (new money)</b>	4.6 (29%)	6.3 (37%)	7.0 (36%)	--
<b>MTA non-bond</b>	.3 (2%)	2.2 (13%)	.651 (3%)	1.4 (5%)
<b>Other sources</b>	1.4 (9%)	1.3 (8%)	.541 (3%)	--
<b>Funding gap</b>	0	0	0	16.2 (58%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	15.8 (100%)	16.9 (100%)	19.3 (100%)	27.8 (100%)

Source: NYC Independent Budget Office

rect result of massive MTA borrowing to fund the capital programs it has executed on Gov. Pataki's watch. Ballooning debt service from the borrowing is causing big operating budget deficits, which are pressuring the fare. Without a firm and ambitious funding proposal by the governor, NY's transit system is facing a **permanent financial crisis**. ❖

### Turnpike Plan Would Add \$1 Billion to Jersey's Transportation Tab

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign urged New Jerseyans to approach Governor Codey's announcement that he would seek to add lanes to the New Jersey Turnpike between Middlesex and Burlington counties with caution. Although the bottleneck where the highway's truck lanes end between Exits 8 and 8A represents a tremendous traffic problem, the Turnpike will have to explain why such an extensive project — comprising 40 to 80 miles of new lanes — will be needed to provide some relief for it.

Such a large-scale and costly proposal certainly should be subjected to **an extensive environmental impact statement**, which should examine potential sprawl-inducing effects in Burlington County and a variety of toll policy scenarios for their effects on truck routing. Governor Codey more or less acknowledged that the project would likely trigger Turnpike toll increases.

The proposal also raises several other key policy questions and issues:

- The Federal Highway Administration estimates that **movement of freight tonnage** in New Jersey will **increase by 72% by 2020**, and much of the impetus for the governor's proposal seems to be accommodation of more truck traffic. Will the Codey Administration make an investment in rail freight projects commensurate with the spending it anticipates on the Turnpike so that some of the projected truck traffic and its impacts on New Jersey's roads and communities is avoided?

- New Jersey has exhausted most of its sources of transportation construction funding and is going **deeper into debt** to keep NJ DOT and NJ Transit work going this year. The state's bridges and highway pavement are among the worst in the country, while NJ Transit is forced to neglect key repair work in order to fund day-to-day operations. Is a \$1 billion highway expansion plan the state's most pressing transportation need?❖

### Route 92 on the Back Burner

It is possible that setting the Turnpike Authority the task of extending new lanes southward from the truck lane merge near the Middlesex-Mercer county border will change the focus of transportation plan-

ning in central New Jersey away from the Turnpike's proposed and hotly contested Route 92 plan.

Route 92 is a new-alignment, limited access highway that would cut across southern Middlesex County between the Turnpike and Route 1. The Route 92 environmental impact statement in fact demonstrated that the main road congestion in that part of New Jersey stems from north-south rather than east-west traffic.

Governor Codey told the *NY Times* that Route 92 is "not off the table but is not on the front burner."

Probably only coincidentally, the Turnpike Authority has withdrawn the applications it had made to the NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection for permits to build bridges and retaining walls for Route 92 project. While the applications were withdrawn on October 13, the information was first reported in the November 25 *South Brunswick Post*. The reason the agency gave to the newspaper was changing stormwater regulations. Apparently, the Turnpike cannot resubmit the permit requests for one year. ❖

### Land Use Key to Transport Planning

In an interview with the *NY Transportation Journal*, NY State transportation commissioner Joseph Boardman says that "one of the important things we found in the statewide master plan hearings we conducted this summer (*MTR #467*) was the level of interest and discussion on land use planning in every community." The commissioner discussed how transportation assets can become overwhelmed by unintended consequences — not a bad way to characterize the region's many roads inundated by traffic generated by car-dependent development.

We hope NY State DOT will follow the example now being set by **Commissioner Jack Lettiere and New Jersey DOT**, which is aggressively looking at future land uses in many corridors in the Garden State, and moving away from the idea that reflexively widening congested roads will lead to sustainable traffic relief. Lettiere is making an address at the Voorhees Transportation Center on integrating transportation and land use planning on Monday (Dec. 6) in New Brunswick at 1 p.m. (see <http://policy.rutgers.edu/vtc/>). There are certainly many road corridors on Long Island, in the Hudson Valley and elsewhere in NY State that would benefit from coordinated, forward-looking planning.

Commissioner Boardman also said NY's master plan hearings heard much on the need for inter-city passenger services and on shifting as much **freight** as possible from highway to **rail**. The master plan panel's recommendations to NYS DOT and other state agencies are not yet public. The *NY Transportation Journal* is published by NYU's Rudin Transportation Center. ❖

### NJ Transit's Achilles Heel

New Jersey Transit is the only mass transit system of comparable size in the United States that does not enjoy some form of dedicated tax revenue to support its operating budget.

New Jersey Transit plans to **hike bus and rail fares** next year as operating expenses rise. The agency already diverts a significant portion of its capital budget to operations just to keep pace with the demands of moving its passengers every day. The transfer is the second largest share of the operating budget, coming after fares (which make up about 40 percent of the total). Governor McGreevey's blue ribbon transportation panel identified this transfer as a major problem for NJ Transit's infrastructure, and others agree. Legislation proposed by State Assembly transportation committee chair John Wisniewski would phase out the practice over a number of years, but such a mandate would require the state or transit riders to take on another significant portion of the operating budget.

A dedicated funding source to support operating expenses is standard practice for most of the country's larger transit systems. For example, Los Angeles' Metropolitan Transportation Authority currently **gets about 54%** of its operating budget from a dedicated local sales tax. Fifty-four percent of Boston's MBTA operating funds are derived from a dedicated portion of the statewide sales tax. NY's MTA agencies, Philadelphia's SEPTA, San Francisco's MUNI, the LIRR, and the Chicago Transit Authority all receive significant operating support from dedicated state or local taxes, or a combination of both.

### State and Local Dedicated Funding for Transit Operations in 2002 (millions)

	State Dedicated Taxes	Local Dedicated Taxes	Total Operating Funds
MTA New York City Transit	\$963.8	\$178.7	\$4,001.3
L.A. County Metropolitan Transportation Authority	\$27.2	\$476.9	\$884.2
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority	\$543.0	\$0.0	\$1,003.2
Southeastern PA Transportation Authority	\$170.1	\$2.0	\$804.2
San Francisco Municipal Railway	\$70.3	\$16.8	\$441.1
MTA Long Island Rail Road	\$206.0	\$0.0	\$787.8
Chicago Transit Authority	\$0.0	\$256.4	\$919.9

Source: Federal Transit Administration

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## Transportation Department's Transparency Tested

NYS Department of Transportation was one of the government agencies that passed **NYPIRG's recent open government test**. NYPIRG sent Freedom of Information letters to various agencies and tracked timeliness of responses. Under the state Freedom of Information Law, agencies are required to respond in five days.

We wish we could report the same satisfaction.

We often struggle to get even basic information – such as the status of projects – from the New York State Department of Transportation, particularly its Long Island (Region 10) office.

Region 10 routes every request for information through its freedom of information office and is known for sending a form letter in response to every request that says, “we are currently processing an unusually high volume of FOIL requests. ... Therefore, it will take approximately **six weeks** to inform you of the availability of the information ...”

The NYSDOT has also thwarted attempts by *Newsday* and the Campaign to get information on the most dangerous sections of road in the state.

NYSDOT recently appealed a July state appellate court opinion that held that *Newsday* is entitled to a copy of a list of the state's most dangerous intersections and highway locations compiled by the NYSDOT in compliance with the federal highway Hazard Elimination Program. The NYSDOT argues that a provision of the federal law that prohibits disclosure of the data to parties who seek the information for litigation purposes applies to a request from a newspaper. In the earlier opinion, Albany County Supreme Court Justice George Ceresia held that the

records in question are of “clearly significant interest to the public.” The NY State Court of Appeals is expected to hear arguments on the case in the next few months.

NYSDOT has denied the Campaign's request for the information because a final decision in the case has not been reached.

The “Access Denied: The State of NY Government's Openness” report can be obtained from NYPIRG's Albany office: 518-436-0876. ❖

## Ferries Affordable ?

NY Waterway announced this week that it is cutting three routes in Jersey City and Hoboken. The company said that if it does not receive assistance soon, there will be more cutbacks followed by a possible shutdown next winter. Last week, *MTR* reported that NY Water Taxi and the Hudson County Improvement Authority have shown interest in taking over some NY Waterway routes. It has also been reported that the company hoped to be taken over by the Port Authority.

Now the focus has turned from buyouts to government support for operations.

With the exception of the Staten Island Ferry, no ferry service receives a public operating subsidy. A recent *New York Times* editorial, and an opinion piece in the *NY Times* by NYU's **Lee Sander and Rutgers' Martin Robins** called for public funding to help keep ferry service afloat. The *Times* also suggested that the city could stop charging the ferry companies a docking fee, which would save them about \$1.5 million a year, and start charging fares again on the Staten Island Ferry to recoup some of the outlay there. The *Times* noted that most mass transit in the region – subways, commuter trains and buses – began as private enterprises that failed and were transformed into government services.

The obvious problem is that these days, currently subsidized modes of mass transit which move far, far more people than ferries are in **dire budget straits**. The MTA is planning another fare hike and service cuts, and will have to do so perennially until a major financing mechanism is created. NJ Transit also suffers from a big structural operating budget problem and plans to raise fares in 2005. It is possible that big transit rescue packages, which are far from assured -- could include a small element for ferry operation, though the same case could be made for other often-ignored elements of regional transit, like New York's suburban bus agencies. Fairness issues (such as how the Port Authority would allocate subsidies across ferry routes and the PATH system, if it were directed to step in) and competing priorities may work against an easy answer. ❖

## NYC BRT Work Underway

Though information about the meeting was poorly advertised and therefore few citizens attended, NYC DOT and Transit held the first public meeting – on Staten Island – for their joint bus rapid transit study last week. The work is intended to plan and develop several BRT corridors in the city.

Currently the proposed corridors for Staten Island are **Forest Avenue, Victory Boulevard, Hylan Boulevard, and Richmond Avenue**. On transit-poor Staten Island, these corridors may in fact be good candidates for an interconnected network of BRT routes rather than just a short list for one trial route. Most in the room agreed that any implementation of BRT will require adjustments in local and express bus service and routing as well.

Our calendar section lists upcoming meetings for other boroughs. The agencies say a website for the BRT project is in development. Keep checking [www.mta.info/mta/planning/brt](http://www.mta.info/mta/planning/brt). ❖

## A Special Request from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Dear Reader,

As a subscriber to *Mobilizing the Region*, you recognize that the NY-NJ-CT metro region is the ideal place for a truly modern, customer- and environment-friendly transportation system.

Together, we witnessed major strides forward during the last decade — large gains in transit ridership, new rail lines and connections, the spread of traffic calming, the advent of congestion pricing and growing interest in rail freight.

*Mobilizing the Region* and the work of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign have been an important part of this progress. Today, I ask you to consider a **tax-deductible year-end gift** to support our work — and continued publication of *MTR* — in 2005. Just send a check to the address below or donate online at [www.tstc.org/fundraising/donate.html](http://www.tstc.org/fundraising/donate.html).

From the feedback we get, we know decision-makers read *MTR*. It is an effective vehicle for raising questions and keeping a spotlight on opportunities to better balance transit, walking and driving.

A spokesperson for a large transportation agency once wrote to tell us "The Campaign does the best transportation reporting in the city." *MTR* provides information about transportation projects or trends that often ends up in the papers weeks later.

Without sustained outside pressure, it's doubtful we would have congestion pricing programs in place at the NJ Turnpike and the Port Authority crossings. So too NJ DOT's new approach to land use issues in congested corridors or the virtual halt to new road expansion projects in downstate New York.

But much remains to be done. Transit gains in NY and NJ are imperiled because they were paid for by borrowing too heavily. CT failed to invest altogether and its transit system is falling apart.

We need NY and CT DOTs to engage municipalities over sprawl development that fuels gridlock. The entire region faces huge increases in truck traffic.

Your contribution will help us keep up the pressure on these key issues, and continue *MTR* as the drumbeat for better transportation.

Sincerely,  
  
Jon Orcutt  
Executive Director

P.S. You can donate online at [www.tstc.org/fundraising/donate.html](http://www.tstc.org/fundraising/donate.html) or send a check to the address below. Please make the Campaign one of your year-end tax deductible contributions. Thank you!

## Calendar

**December 6**, 1pm. NJ Transportation Commissioner Jack Lettiere on *Land Use and Transportation*. Voorhees Center special event, 33 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick, 732-932-6812.

**December 6**, 5pm. MTA Public Hearing on the proposed increase for the CityTicket Metro-North and LIRR fare. 5th Floor, 347 Madison Ave. Manhattan. 212-878-7483. [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info)

**December 6**, 5-8pm. Public Meeting: NYC Bus Rapid Transit Study, NYC Transit. Bronx Borough President's Office, 198 E 161 St., 2nd Floor, Bronx. 917-339-0488. [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info)

**December 7**, 4-8pm. Meeting on proposed NJ Transit West Trenton line. Hillsborough Township Municipal Complex, 379 South Branch Rd., Hillsborough, 800-955-2321

**December 9**, 5-8pm. Public Meeting: NYC Bus Rapid Transit Study public workshop—NYC

Transit. 347 Madison Ave. 5th Floor, Manhattan. 917-339-0488. [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info)

**December 14**, 6-8pm. "Vision 42-Auto-Free Light Rail Blvd. for 42nd Street." Preliminary results of technical studies. Lecture. NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington St. Manhattan. 212-475-3394. [www.auto-free.org](http://www.auto-free.org)

**December 16**, 9 am. MTA board meeting. Vote on 2005 MTA operating budget, including proposed fare and toll increases. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7440.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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