

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## SPORTS EXTRA

*Alien visitors to our region might be initially heartened to learn that our elected leaders have laid to rest so many basic social, economic and environmental problems that they are able to devote considerable time, energy and public resources to the problem of locating and housing professional sports teams. Stadium mania has indeed gripped the metropolitan region, with no fewer than eight major venues proposed for construction or overhaul, in addition to New York City's bid for the 2012 Olympic Games. Most of these projects will have major transportation consequences. We survey them in this edition.*

### **NASCAR's Plan to Beat Gridlock**

International Speedway Corp. recently purchased a 675-acre former industrial site in Staten Island to develop its newest NASCAR speedway. The choice seemed ironic at first, given Staten Island's legendary traffic problems and high degree of car dependence. But unlike any other large-scale entertainment or other type of developer in the city, NASCAR has worked out an **innovative plan** to bring 80,000 fans per event to its chosen site.

While NASCAR might not be everyone's speed, the company has proposed a smart plan that uses computerized ticketing and strict site control to link ticket sales and travel method. **Event tickets will come with a mode of travel** to the site built in, and modes will be nontransferable. The site will have 8,400 parking spaces, with preference given to Staten Islanders. Anyone who doesn't reserve one of those spaces will be required to take buses or ferries. A new ferry slip will be constructed on the Arthur Kill. A bus lot close to the speedway will accommodate approximately 950 buses. NASCAR has plans to subcontract "park-and-ride" and "park-and-sail" arrangements at sites like Belmont Race-track and NJ Transit station lots, and rent buses and ferries from government and private entities. The EIS for the project will show whether the regional boat and bus supply is large enough.

Approximately 35% of attendees are expected to ride ferries, 44% will take buses, and 21% will drive (at an average rate of two people per car). Race track officials say on-site enforcement of travel rules will be strict.

If this ambitious plan can be shown to work, some may consider the 620,000 square foot **retail aspect** of the NASCAR site plan **more controversial** transportation-wise than the speedway itself. In contrast to the three big race events per year, the new mall near West Shore/Staten Island Expressway interchange will create a 365-day traffic impact. ❖

### **Transportation Watchdogs Sue Over Jets Stadium Plan — Cite Weak Traffic Study**

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign filed a lawsuit in NY Supreme Court against the City of New York and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority over their approval of the environmental impact statement for the Hudson Yards project, which includes the proposed West Side Jets stadium.

The suit argues the strong likelihood that the study **underestimates** the traffic, and related impacts such as congestion and air and noise pollution, of the proposed stadium. The study relies only on an opinion survey of Jets season ticket holders to predict how many stadium patrons will use mass transit to travel to games. Surveys asking about future behavior in hypothetical situations are often unreliable. The groups argue that the city should use more solid analytical tools for a critical question like transportation for a major new development. Transportation analysis for other land uses in the Hudson Yards rezoning plan used a variety of more objective methods for estimating mass transit and car trips.

Bloomberg administration officials have been dismissive of any critique of the stadium plan since its inception and throughout the curtailed public process the proposal has undergone. The Jets have not proposed any sort of unified ticketing system that builds transit fares into stadium tickets, as NASCAR and Madrid Olympic planners have proposed (see stories elsewhere in this issue).

Transportation experts told the *NY Times* that the city's **survey methods produced inaccurate transit numbers**. Jose Holguín Veras, a transportation modeling expert at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, said the Jets had failed to inform survey respondents of extra costs and walking distances: "The results need to be analyzed with caution," he told the paper, "because the questions aren't specific enough to

gauge respondents' behavior in the future."

The environmental study says the proposed stadium will attract a much greater share of patrons using mass transit than does any other U.S. urban stadium. Even before the #7 subway extension is brought into service, the city claims that 68% of stadium-goers will arrive by transit. That is a far higher share than Madison Square Garden sees, despite being directly atop Penn Station, with its multiple commuter rail and subway lines.

If city numbers about the transit share are wrong, even by a small amount, it could mean **far worse traffic impacts** than those forecast in the city's EIS, and terrible West Side gridlock on event days.

The environmental impact study also makes **broad assumptions** about the completion of multi-billion transit projects. The environmental review notes stadium patronage will have a significant impact on the transit system in Manhattan (in the form of crowding at stations), and assumes that the problems will be addressed by major additions to the transit network such as the Second Avenue subway and the Long Island Railroad connection to Grand Central Terminal. It also calls for a number of Midtown Manhattan subway station renovations that are not currently in the MTA capital budget. Everyone knows the MTA is facing tremendous funding problems, and the public is owed a look at how the stadium and #7 subway projects will impact the system in case these projects are delayed or cancelled.

Madison Square Garden also filed a suit with similar transportation arguments, and goes into other areas of the environmental review.

The *NY Sun* recently reported that Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg, in anticipation of an upcoming visit by the Olympic Committee, are putting a "full-court press" for the Public Authorities Control Board to approve the Jets stadium. The authority, which includes governor representatives, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, must approve the state's \$300 million contribution to the project. ❖

### **New Transit Ties in Yankee Stadium Plan**

The NY Yankees have proposed a new \$700 million stadium in Macombs Dam Park across the street from their current Bronx home. The *NY Post* reports the plan includes a Harlem River ferry terminal and a new Metro-North Hudson Line station.

In the current MTA capital plan there is \$20 million allotted for the Metro North station "once the lease discussion between the City of New York and the Yankees is complete." The MTA Commuter Relations Department reported that the station is only in its **negotiation stage**, and has not even begun planning. ❖

### **Can Hockey Rebuild Newark ?**

The NHL is still locked out, but plans to build an arena in Newark for the New Jersey Devils are among the most advanced stadium plans in the region — a construction management company should begin work very soon.

The stadium site is in the heart of downtown, at the corner of **Market and Broad Streets**. That is two long blocks from Penn Station. Today, it is an unpleasant, desolate walk from the station to the arena site, though the city has launched plans to improve the pedestrian environment on Broad Street. It is possible these could extend to Market and the Devils site plan. The 18,000 seat venue will be accompanied by a 1,600 space garage in the city's first phase of its downtown development plan, and early versions of the latter called for 3,500 new parking spaces within one block of the arena.

On the other hand, the new Broad Street-Penn Station light rail project will link both Newark trains stations to the arena, and the city subway and buses serve the area.

Officials in Newark are reportedly pushing for a **widening of Route 21** running south from the city center to provide easier access for hockey fans from outside of Newark. It is not known in fact whether a wider road would help more people get to games or if rapid motor access and egress will promote urban redevelopment. Planning for the Route 21 project has yet to get underway, but the NJ DOT has pledged \$30 million to fix roads surrounding the arena and others that are part of the redevelopment plan, including Mulberry Street, Lafayette Street and Edison Place.

The Devils project is estimated to cost \$310 million, over two thirds of which will be paid for by the City of Newark. The Devils plan on completion for the beginning of the 2007-2008 season. ❖

### **No Transit Gains Tied to NYC 2012**

What happened to the notion that attracting the Olympic Games is supposed to provide long-term benefits for the host city? At least as far as transportation, there isn't much there for New York, according to the latest version of NYC 2012 bid.

Where the original "Olympic X" plan spoke glowingly of trains connecting the Meadowlands and central Queens and new ferry routes (see *MTR* #414), the scheme now smacks more of Atlanta, 1996 — rented buses and reserved highway lanes.

Olympic cities frequently try to leverage national-level investments in Olympic "legacy" projects like new transit lines. It's unclear whether the Bloomberg Administration has gone to Washington or Albany to get additional transit funding commitments to help make the city's Olympic case. To be

fair, our federal system makes such an appeal more difficult than it may be in a strong central government system.

In New York, the proposed extension of the #7 subway line is in part bound up with the plan to build a new stadium on the West Side, but the subway and stadium projects are separate from any public or private financing directed at the Olympic

### **Atlantic Yards Must be Slam Dunk for MTA**

Seventeen community groups and four prominent elected officials recently wrote to NYC City Council Speaker Gifford Miller and NY State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver to urge that the MTA receive **fair market value** for the development rights over the MTA-owned Atlantic Yards property.

Developer Bruce Ratner's proposal to build an NBA arena and giant mixed use development along Brooklyn's Atlantic Ave south and east of its intersection with Flatbush Ave will **add thousands of new riders** to the NYC Transit and LIRR systems. The MTA will have to find a way to provide service for these new riders and pay to relocate the yard. The agency has promised an appraisal of the land, but there is no guarantee Ratner will pay for transit improvements or full value development rights.

The letter noted that the MTA, in its time of fiscal crisis, is looking to its real estate holdings to raise capital resources. The Atlantic Yard site could provide the agency with hundreds of millions. (The West Side Hudson Yards development rights have been valued at over one billion dollars). The money is desperately needed to fill the gaping holes in the MTA's 2005-2009 capital program proposal, including infrastructure improvements in Brooklyn, like a connection between the Jay Street/Borough Hall and Lawrence Street subway stations.

Ratner has been talking to Brooklyn Community Boards 2, 6, and 8 about signing a community benefits agreement (CBA). To date the CBA only includes negotiations with three organizations to address affordable housing and jobs. It **does not consider transportation and traffic**. Ratner is trying to nail down the CBA and co-opt some groups before the environmental review process has begun. Many civic leaders, elected officials, and community boards are calling for the project to undergo the city's land use review process, rather than the less thorough state review.

Ratner's proposal would build 17 high rises and a 19,000-seat basketball arena for the Nets that would cover 11 acres of MTA rail yards. The community, local architects and planners and Councilwoman Letitia James have another plan. Their "Unity" proposal achieves 700,000 square feet of retail space, almost double what Ratner is proposing, while creating a public greenway. ❖

bid itself, and rely on **shaky financing schemes**. Rather than offering tangible long-term benefits for New York, the Olympics bid seems to have another function here — as a club for flogging opponents of the controversial stadium plan.

Competing 2012 bids seem to promise more in the way of lasting transportation benefits.

**London 2012** would construct a new transit hub and links at the Stratford Olympic Centre. The **Paris** bid boasts that "The Games' legacy in terms of public transport infrastructures will be significant, including complete overhaul of the RER B line, extensions to a number of Metro and Tramway lines and the construction of the Eole-Evangile station."

Meanwhile, **Madrid's 2012** bid asserts the aggressive promise to organize the "**first car-free games**." In preparation, the bid says the city and nation are expanding inter-city and suburban rail systems, extending the subway with new lines and stations, trains and even creating a bikeway system that will serve the city and connect most of the Olympic venues. Madrid will also build the cost of public transit tickets into Olympic venue tickets to promote bus and train use during the events.

The Institute for Transportation & Development Policy reports **Beijing** will implement 100 kilometers of new bus rapid transit lines prior to the 2008 Olympics. The city is also at work on major subway system expansion, in addition to constructing a specific subway system to serve Olympic venues. ❖

### **Traffic a Sticking Point for New Giants Stadium**

The NY Giants have proposed building a new stadium with the team's money in the New Jersey Meadowlands, but have not sealed the deal with the state because of **concerns over game day traffic**. The Xanadu entertainment complex could generate huge quantities of weekend car trips and snarl lower Bergen County and adjacent areas when combined with football traffic.

The New Jersey Sports Authority has tried to essentially buy off the team's concerns by offering to pay down the Giants' debt on the existing stadium, but the team has reportedly not relented on the traffic problem. The Sports Authority money (\$117 million) would come from the first fifteen year lease on Xanadu, and would take up 78% of those funds.

A **better bet** for New Jersey would be to immediately launch a **major transit access plan** for the entire Meadowlands complex. The Port Authority has already agreed to pay for a Xanadu spur from NJ Transit's Pascack Valley Line, and NJ Transit has included a light rail connection from the Hudson waterfront in its plan for Bergen County. But ridership from these efforts is unclear and the light rail link has no funding or schedule. Bus service has not been seriously considered, nor has site planning that

could make transit an attractive option for visitors.

Giants plans for the new stadium also fail to address transit. The main transportation element for the team is the addition of 2,500 parking spaces to the 27,000-space lot.

Traffic studies for the Xanadu project were grossly inadequate and that problem is cited in a lawsuit brought against the project by the NJ Sierra Club, Environmental Defense and NJPIRG. Promised follow up work required by the Meadowlands Commission has not been released. ❖

### Coliseum Plan — Nassau Hub Phase 1

New York Islanders owner Charles Wang has proposed redeveloping the Nassau Coliseum and its surroundings with the Lighthouse, a 60-story hotel and condo building, along with retail and recreational uses. **Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi** has supported the proposal as part of his ambitious plan to densify and provide transit service for the Nassau Hub area, generally the area from EAB Plaza in Uniondale to Roosevelt Field Mall.

The 77-acre project involves two phases. The first, reconstruction of the Coliseum to add seating, restaurants and bars and build an athletic club; the second, redeveloping the 70 acre site around the arena with the Lighthouse, a plaza with restaurants, shops, and an amphitheatre, a conference center expansion, and a sports technology center.

While Wang's project takes a bold step towards a mixed use cultural center, his plans (seen on *Newsday's* website) should promote pedestrian friendly designs and easy transit access. It is unclear from the current plans how transit will serve the site, or whether visitors will enjoy walking through large, open plazas between buildings.

Nassau Hub project consultants are narrowing down transit alternatives, and many stakeholders believe that bus rapid transit or light rail will be the preferred circulator mode for central Nassau. How will Wang's plans **promote transit use**? Will transit service be in place by the proposed 2009 Coliseum transformation? Will it be in place in eight to ten years for those living and visiting the Lighthouse? If development comes before transit service, the traffic congestion in the area could skyrocket, dampening any economic benefits of the project.

In October, Wang signed a Memorandum of Understanding with County Executive Suozzi that will keep the Islanders on Long Island until 2025, and redevelop the Coliseum area. But details of the financing scheme are still being worked out, and town governments must still approve the project. ❖

## Calendar

**January 11**, 5-8pm. Public Meeting: NYC Bus Rapid Transit Study Public Workshops by New York City Transit. York College, Faculty Dining Room, 94-20 Guy R. Brewer Blvd, Jamaica, Queens. 917-339-0488. <http://mta.info/mta/planning/brt/index.html>

**January 13**, 12:15pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council Meeting. 10th Floor Conference Room, 347 Madison Ave btwn 44th & 45th Sts., Manhattan. 212-878-7087. [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**January 20**, 12pm. Metro-North Commuter Council Meeting. 10th Floor Conference Room, 347 Madison Ave btwn 44th & 45th Sts, Manhattan. 212-878-7087. [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**January 20**, 6:30pm. Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members on the Kosciusko Bridge Project Meeting. Jennings Hall, 260 Powers St, Greenpoint, Brooklyn. 718-482-6319. [www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/](http://www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/)

**January 28**, 9am-12:30pm. *The Parking Structure and the Train Station* by NJ School of Architecture, Rutgers University, and Urban Land Institute. The Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, 33 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, NJ. RSVP by 1/21/05 to [anne.guiney@njit.edu](mailto:anne.guiney@njit.edu), 917-292-9597

**February 7**, 8am-12pm. NJ Alliance for Action 3rd Annual NJ Transportation Conference. The War Memorial Building, Trenton, NJ. RSVP by 1/28/05, \$95, [www.allianceforaction.com](http://www.allianceforaction.com) 732-225-1180

**April 11, 12, & 13**. NJ Council on Special Transportation presents *TransAction: 29th Annual NJ State Transportation Conference and Expo*. Tropicana Resort & Casino, Atlantic City, NJ. RSVP: Frank T. Reilly, 908-903-1077, [FTR4444@hotmail.com](mailto:FTR4444@hotmail.com), [www.njcost.com](http://www.njcost.com).

**April 29**, 8am-2:30pm. Regional Plan Association's 2005 Regional Assembly: *Beyond Red and Blue: The Tri-State Region in a Changing National Context*. The Waldorf-Astoria, 301 Park Ave, Manhattan. 212-253-2727 x 317. [www.rpa.org](http://www.rpa.org)

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

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