

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Fortunes Building for One Mega-Project

Things are looking up for the proposal to build new commuter train tunnels between New Jersey and Manhattan. The chair of the Port Authority is publicly talking the project up, seemingly wherever he goes, and New York City's top business group is now also on board. The project is a **critical** one for the **region's mass transit system and economy**. Its improving prospect is a rare piece of good news as projects like the Second Avenue subway and Long Island Rail Road connection to Grand Central hang in limbo.

Port Authority chair Anthony Coscia says his bi-state agency could commit up to \$2 billion for the new tunnels. Coscia told the *Bergen Record* that supporting the project "is completely consistent" with the Port Authority's mission to sustain and improve transportation across the Hudson.

New Jersey's congressional delegation has been united behind the project for some time. New backing by the NYC Partnership adds to the project's momentum. Presentations by Coscia and NJ Transit chief George Warrington make a compelling case that New Jersey's growing commuter population needs viable connections to Manhattan, and that the existing tunnel and tracks between NY Penn Station and Secaucus are at capacity. NJ Transit recently told the *NY Times* that the agency has doubled the number of trains it runs into Manhattan since 1994. New Jersey is expected to shoulder the lion's share of the NJ-Manhattan train tunnel's cost.

NYC Partnership director Kathryn Wylde told the *Times* that New Jersey and New York should work together to get the project done. The Partnership's position represents a rare moment of rationality in infrastructure politics in the region. The most vocal business lobbying for a big regional transit project is for a new connection between lower Manhattan and the stagnant Long Island commuter market, even though the MTA already plans a new LIRR connection to Grand Central terminal.

**New Jersey's outreach** to New York for the project is also a **regional model** the city would do well to emulate for plans like the proposed freight rail link and the city's garbage export plan, which will require access to New Jersey's freight rail lines.

On-line: [accesstotheregionscore.com](http://accesstotheregionscore.com). ❖

### The Trucks Are Coming

New Jersey will face a crush of new truck traffic in coming decades according to an analysis of Federal Highway Administration data released last Wednesday by the Campaign. The report, "What Growing Truck Traffic Will Mean for New Jersey's Quality of Life," finds that the Garden State's truck traffic could grow **80 percent** over 1998 levels by 2020.

An increasingly global economy and expanding U.S. economy, together with the continued reliance on trucks to move freight will drive truck traffic up to 15.7 million miles daily by 2020. While every part of the state will see more trucks on their roads, some counties will bear more of the burden than others. **Sussex County tops the list**, with truck traffic forecasted to more than double, growing 107 percent over 1998 levels. Passaic County fares only slightly better with a projected growth in truck travel of 93 percent. Cape May, Atlantic, and Mercer counties follow, with 86, 85, and 84 percent truck traffic growth respectively.

This surge in truck traffic could have dire consequences for the state's traffic safety, congestion, road and bridge conditions, and air quality. Per mile traveled, trucks are 20 percent more likely to be involved in a fatal collision than cars. Statewide, trucks were involved in 82 traffic deaths in 2002. But with truck mileage expected to increase by 80 percent, that figure could rise to as high as 133 by the year 2020.

The NJ Dept. of Transportation agreed with the report's findings: "The concern is very real," DOT spokesman Mark Lovorgna told the *Asbury Park Press*. "The department is working with all interested groups looking at all possible solutions to move goods through the state in the 21st century."

With the average truck taking up as much road space as 3 to 4 cars, and truck traffic growing much faster than background levels, trucks will add disproportionately to New Jersey's already horrendous traffic congestion. By 2020, the annual delay on New Jersey's major roads will grow to more than 4,500 hours, an eight-fold increase over 1998 levels.

Trucks also do far more damage to roads and bridges than cars, with the average truck causing as much wear and tear as 2,000 to 3,000 cars. The projections of skyrocketing truck traffic are especially

bad news for New Jersey, which currently has some of the worst road (7<sup>th</sup> worst) and bridge (8<sup>th</sup> worst) conditions in the nation. An 80 percent increase in truck traffic could cost the state billions in extra repair costs.

Finally, trucks will further pollute the Garden State's air. New federal regulations on diesel engine technology may hold the promise of reducing truck emissions significantly. But as we noted in *MTR #484*, many trucking firms may step up truck purchases dramatically before the new regulations go into effect in 2006. Since truck engines can last up to 30 years, this strategy could delay emissions reductions by decades. Even in the best case, huge increases in truck travel could push off appreciable emissions reductions for the foreseeable future.

The Campaign's report offers several recommendations to help take the edge off the expected surge in truck traffic. First and foremost, the state needs **more investment in rail freight** to help improve, modernize and expand the state's existing freight network. Other possibilities include the development of "shuttle trains" to move freight between the ports and major distribution centers, truck tolls to help keep trucks off of problem corridors, and the creation of a statewide plan to cluster distribution centers near ports or consumer markets to avoid multiple movements of products.

#### Project Truck Travel Growth Across New Jersey

County	Growth in Daily Truck Mileage
Sussex	106.5%
Passaic	92.8%
Cape May	85.7%
Atlantic	84.8%
Mercer	84.4%
Middlesex	83.5%
Monmouth	82.0%
Ocean	80.6%
Warren	80.5%
Morris	80.5%
Somerset	80.2%
Camden	79.1%
Essex	77.6%
Bergen	77.6%
Burlington	74.7%
Gloucester	73.1%
Salem	73.0%
Union	72.0%
Hudson	70.1%
Hunterdon	70.1%
Cumberland	67.2%
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>79.6%</b>
Source: TSTC analysis of FHWA "Freight Analysis Framework," 2002.	

One trucker attempted to paint the Campaign as "anti-truck" and argued against routing rules or rail investment in a *Star-Ledger* op-ed last week. The label is a mis-read of the Campaign's point of view on the future of freight, not to mention simply irrelevant. Many more trucks are coming no matter what policy-makers do. The question is whether we can reduce their impacts with more balanced public investment and smart planning.

The Campaign's full report, along with county impact fact sheets, is available at [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org). ❖

#### Experts Agree: the Trucks are Coming

Wide news coverage of the Campaign's report on projected truck traffic in New Jersey found sympathetic commentary from a variety of sources:

**Assemblyman Alex DeCroce**, NJ State Assembly Minority Leader, told the *Morris Daily Record* the truck projections seemed on the mark "You've got to remember, this is the heartland. This is where everything happens in the Northeast."

**Somerset County Freeholder Peter Palmer** (and chair, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority) sees "truck traffic getting off I-95 [and] going up Route 31 to Route 202 to I-287," as a major concern, according to the *Home News Tribune*.

**New Jersey DOT Spokesman Marc Lavorgna** told the *Press of Atlantic City* that large truck traffic projections are "very serious."

**Middlesex County Planning Director George Ververides** said the truck boom has already hit central New Jersey: "We're seeing it already with development, especially around New Jersey Turnpike (Interchange) 8A and Raritan Center," he told the *Home News Tribune*.

**NJ Police Traffic Officers Association President Anthony Parenti** bemoaned trucks that "are bigger and heavier than ever." "There's got to be a better way," he said to *The Press of Atlantic City*. ❖

#### Mapping NYC's Bus Rapid Transit Possibilities

NYC Transit and the city and state departments of transportation are stressing improved intra-borough travel in their study of potential bus rapid transit projects in New York City.

Participating citizens seem to agree with the goal. At public meetings, there was general agreement that a strong role for rapid buses was connections between subways and local bus lines. Once participants learned the key differences between BRT and express bus service, they expressed increased optimism about the project's success, although issues like bus lane enforcement were consistently raised.

There is no lack of suitable candidate routes for

rapid bus service. The study project has identified several corridors in each borough. Most cut against the grain of the subway system to speed travel in poorly served corridors, such as **east-west Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn routes**, and north-south corridors and areas beyond the rail system in Queens. (Borough maps will be available via the project website: <http://mta.info/mta/planning/brt/>). The project team anticipates paring down the list to one corridor per borough for pilot implementation by summer 2005, and has noted that bus rapid transit elements may be added to some existing routes.

Program costs are still undetermined. Consultants indicated that their instructions were first to determine need, with a budget to follow. The MTA's 2005-2009 proposed capital budget provides \$22M for a BRT pilot program, but it's unclear whether this will survive into an approved program. ❖

### Codey Supports Gas Tax Increase

In a radio interview in the last week of 2004, Acting Governor Richard Codey suggested that an increase in the state's gas tax would be legislated in the lame duck session after November's gubernatorial and Assembly elections. The announcement prompted newspapers to editorialize on the state's soon-to-be-empty transportation fund, with the *Star Ledger* calling a higher gas tax "the logical solution" to raising new transportation funds.

New Jersey's mayors also recently showed surprising support for a gas tax increase. In response to a survey about the League of Municipalities, **72% of mayors** said they would support a **higher gas tax**, as long as it supported the Transportation Trust Fund. (42% of mayors answered the survey.) A few elected officials, like Assembly Transportation Committee Chair John Wisniewski, have also vocally supported a gas tax increase, but most have been quiet about the issue, likely waiting until after the November election to take a stance. NJ's current gas tax of 10.5 cents per gallon is the third lowest in the country. (Last year, Governor McGreevey's Blue Ribbon Commission on transportation supported a 12.5 cent hike.)

In his State of the State address, Governor Codey alluded to the need to raise the gas tax. "The long term needs of the Transportation Trust Fund must be addressed," he said. The other transportation issue he mentioned was his plan to widen the NJ turnpike. With an expiring trust fund, a boom in truck traffic in the coming years, and an expectation that fares for New Jersey Transit are about to be raised, the Governor has a busy year ahead of him when it comes to transportation. Codey's proposed budget will be submitted to the legislature next month. ❖

### Brookhaven: Politics and Smart Planning

Last Thursday, dozens of Suffolk County residents gathered at Brookhaven Town Hall to ensure that the upcoming race for Town Supervisor, between incumbent John LaValle and likely challenger Edward Hennessey, does not interfere with smart growth planning in the town.

"In a politically charged atmosphere, John LaValle has been attacking visioning and sustainable development issues which are spearheaded on the board by his perceived Republican challenger Ed Hennessey," said a spokesperson for the event's organizers, which included Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Organization, Longwood Alliance, Lake Ronkonkoma Neighborhood Network, Middle Country Road Renaissance Project and the Middle Island Civic Organization.

Hundreds of residents have been engaged in visioning processes in Mastic/Shirley, Coram and Middle Island, and Lake Ronkonkoma. The sessions bring developers, architects, traffic experts, and planners together to develop a consensus view of future development. They have brought out overwhelming support for the **transformation of sprawling strip roads** into more attractive and safer, village business districts.

Hennessey has been the main proponent of county land use and road plans that would create a more pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use main street design for the Montauk highway in Mastic/Shirley.

The plan was developed through a community visioning process a few years ago, but unfortunately, other locals worried about change and increased government control have opposed it. Insiders say LaValle may be using the project for leverage in the Supervisor race this November.

Citizens report LaValle has made statements denigrating community visioning as "just pretty pictures on the wall" and saying "planning should be left to planners," in both cases likely referring to Hennessey's support of the Mastic-Shirley visioning project and land use plan. ❖

### NASCAR Looks to Light Rail

International Speedway Corp. is continuing its development plan for a NASCAR speedway on Staten Island. In addition to talking to NYC elected officials and business and civic groups, the company has recently approached NJ Transit about a light rail link from Bayonne, New Jersey to the complex, sited on Staten Island's West Shore. News reports said ISC officials plan to use some of the track's profits to fund the link, although no dollar figures or other details were released.

For years, Staten Islanders have asked for a transit

connection to New Jersey, but various proposals have gotten nowhere. Even a bus link to the Bayonne terminus of the Hudson-Bergen line has been shot down by the MTA, which has trouble thinking outside the state border (MTR #271). Staten Islanders have had a mixed reaction to the NASCAR plan, predictably expressing concern about traffic congestion problems. However, the NASCAR plan would limit car access to the site, requiring most fans to ride buses or ferries. A light rail link funded through the project could give Staten Islanders a longed-for amenity. If the dialogue makes any progress, a connection would not be active until 2009 at the earliest. ❖

### Calendar

**January 19, 10am.** Meeting of the Board of Directors of NJ Transit. Board Room at NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, Newark, NJ. 973-491-7000, [NJTBOARD@NJTRANSIT.COM](mailto:NJTBOARD@NJTRANSIT.COM)

**January 19, 10:30 am.** *Working to Improve Public Transportation: A Statewide Transportation Rally.* Room 2B, Legislative Office Building, Capital, Hartford, CT. 203-255-0565. [www.ct-ctl.org](http://www.ct-ctl.org)

**January 20, 12pm.** Metro-North Commuter Council Meeting. 10th Floor Conference Rom, 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 Kosciuszko Bridge Project Meeting. Jennings Hall, 260 Powers St, Greenpoint, Brooklyn. 718-482-6319. [www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/kosciuszkohome.html](http://www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/kosciuszkohome.html)

**January 25, 6-8pm.** *Bus Rapid Transit for NYC by Auto-Free New York with Norman Silverman, Sr. Director of Bus & Rail Planning, NYC Transit.* Conf. Rm., NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington St, Manhattan. 212-475-3394. [www.auto-free.org](http://www.auto-free.org)

**January 28, 9am-12:30pm.** *The Parking Structure and the Train Station* by NJ School

### Suffolk's Crash Maps

Suffolk County has created online maps that track traffic crashes that cause injuries and fatalities. The map shows the locations, dates and times of each crash.

"There are approximately 35,000 traffic accidents in Suffolk County each year...The purpose of the site is to provide residents, government agencies and policy makers equal access to information that will allow them to improve the decision making process regarding traffic safety issues," says the county's website.

The site shows strip highways with many driveways, such as **Route 110, Route 27 and Route 25 with the most accidents.** This is consistent with federal data compiled by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign last year that found Route 25, Route 27, and the LIE as the most dangerous roads in NY State. <http://gis.co.suffolk.ny.us/accident.htm#>. ❖

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

**February 22, 6-8pm.** *Freedom from Car-Dependent-the Key to Livable Cities* by Auto-Free NY with Prof. Hermann Knopflacher, Institute for Transport Planning. Conf. Rm., NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington St, Manhattan. 212-475-3394. [www.auto-free.org](http://www.auto-free.org)

**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)**

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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