

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 490

February 14, 2005

## NEWS

### **NY Coalition: "Fund Highways and Transit!"**

Last week, the **Empire State Transportation Alliance** (ESTA), a coalition of business, transportation, labor, and environmental groups, joined former MTA and DOT commissioners in Grand Central to urge state leaders to fully fund the MTA's 2005-2009 capital program and provide adequate funding for road and highway projects. Governor Pataki's proposed 2005 budget falls \$8 billion short of what is needed to fund the \$27 billion MTA Capital Plan, and would leave the New York State DOT budget unfunded in its fourth and fifth years.

Members of the diverse alliance of over 30 groups warned that conditions on our trains and roads would only get worse if we did not fund our maintenance programs. They stated that Governor Pataki's budget would push needed transportation construction projects, such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave subway and East Side Access, further into the future, and jeopardize federal funding. State and local governments must provide matching funds to receive federal allocations (see federal story, next page).

Recent data on road conditions may also be warning signs of more problems to come. According to NY State DOT data, pavement conditions in the state improved from 42.8% in "poor" and "fair" condition in 1995 to 30.2% in 2000. But now they are beginning to worsen again. By 2004, 36.6% of the state's roads were rated "poor" or "fair," a decline of 21% since 2000.

The event marked ESTA's launch of an aggressive **statewide campaign** to build public support for increased funding for New York's roadways and rails. The group handed out hundreds of postcards for citizens to send to Gov. Pataki, Mayor Bloomberg, and state leaders, asking for adequate transportation funding. Among other advocacy efforts, ESTA plans to raise \$500,000 for a print and radio advertising campaign to run in all regions of the state. ❖

### **NJ Transit Fare Hike Hearings Begin**

Don't miss your chance to tell elected officials to stop hiking fares on NJ Transit riders, and start finding a **source of dedicated funds** that NJ Transit can count on every year. See calendar on last page for a full list of hearings. For fare hike details, see [www.njtransit.com](http://www.njtransit.com). ❖

### **Rell's Budget Heavy on Transportation, But Not Sprawl**

Improving the state's lagging transportation system was a focus of Governor Rell's budget proposal last week. Outlining an ambitious transportation plan, she said "We have talked about transportation long enough. It is time to deliver for the passengers and drivers of Connecticut."

Rell proposed a **\$1.3 billion** investment in transportation infrastructure over the next seven years, including \$667 million for 342 new rail cars, \$300 million for new rail maintenance facilities, and millions for new CT Transit buses. Hundreds of millions will be used for operational improvements to I-95, I-91, and I-84.

The improvements will be paid for with a six cent **gas tax increase** over eight years to 31 cents, a New Haven Line \$1 service charge each way starting in 2008, and monies from the Transportation Strategy Board's existing project account. At its peak in 2014, the gas tax will still be lower than it was in 1997 at 39 cents.

The proposal will raise an additional \$39 million in the first year, with \$24 million coming from the Transportation Strategy Board. Each one cent gas tax increase will raise about \$15 million. The additional gas tax revenue allows the state to increase the amount it borrows, allowing it to pay for the rest of the Governor's proposal. (State covenant allows no more than 50% of annual operating budget payments to pay off debt, so new revenue increases bonding authority.) If the legislature approves the budget, CT's multi-million investment in the New Haven line would also allow the state to receive \$350 million from the MTA and NY.

Rell's transportation proposal was generally popular with legislators of both parties, especially those representing Fairfield County. However, some Democrats, editorial boards, and transportation advocates voiced concern that the budget, although a good start, did little to address the truly tough issues, like sprawl, that face the state. The *Hartford Courant* said Rell "took the easy way out by ducking important issues such as the overdependence of municipalities on the property tax and the **need for a comprehensive attack on sprawl** and bad land-use decisions that are spoiling the face of CT." ❖

## Support Grows for Higher NJ Gas Tax

"Increase New Jersey's gas tax," was the consensus in New Jersey last week. At an Alliance for Action forum focused on refueling the Transportation Trust Fund, which will zero out in 2006, Assemblyman John Wisniewski, Assembly Transportation Committee Chair, the Utility and Transportation Contractors Association, and AAA New Jersey expressed support. Later in the week, the *Star Ledger* said that even a "12.5 cent increase would provide little more than basic repair." The paper called for a Trust Fund renewal that provides sufficient transportation dollars for at least 10 years, and suggested **indexing the gas tax to inflation**, so drivers get predictability, rather than large, sudden increases. The *Trenton Times* expressed the need for bipartisan support for a higher gas tax.

At the Alliance for Action forum, U.S. Senator and gubernatorial candidate Jon Corzine called for an honest dialogue that educated voters up front on how and where the new gas tax revenue would be spent. Acting Governor Codey has indicated he would deal with the issue in the fall's lame duck session.

### New York's funding still a question

With transportation leaders railing on Governor Pataki, he may also propose another method to raise transportation revenue, other than the small tax hikes listed in his January budget. Transit advocates, planning groups, and MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow have suggested a range of possible sources, including increasing the gas tax, raising various business taxes, or implementing East River bridge tolls or a commuter tax. ❖

## Bush Budget Provides Funds for NYC Projects

The Bush Administration released its \$2.57 trillion 2006 Budget last week. The budget slashes a range of domestic programs from home heating assistance to Medicaid to student loans. But surface transportation programs make out fairly well, with the Federal Highway Administration enjoying a 2.9 percent increase over estimated 2005 levels, and the Federal Transit Administration budget also potentially growing. The White House budget proposal would give FHWA \$34.7 billion in 2006, and FTA \$7.8 billion, with \$6.8 of that guaranteed.

The Bush budget contained some good news for NY and NJ's transit riders, setting aside **\$390 million for the East Side Access** project, almost four times what the project received in the previous year, and \$100 million for extensions to the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail. President Bush also signed off on the Pataki-endorsed proposal to convert \$2 billion in unused 9/11 tax credits to fund a rail link

from lower Manhattan to JFK Airport. The Second Avenue subway will share a pot of \$158 million in federal funds with several other transit projects.

One of the biggest losers in the Bush budget is Amtrak. Under the Bush proposal for 2006, Amtrak would receive just \$360 million for operations, a drastic cut from the \$1.2 billion Congress gave the railroad in 2005. Bush's budget explicitly states that the \$360 million would push Amtrak into immediate bankruptcy. If that were the case, the Northeast Corridor would be spun off into a separate railroad, with very limited support from the federal government and the Northeast states left to foot the bill. The White House Amtrak proposal was met with sharp criticism from NY and NJ lawmakers. Ultimately, it will be up to Congress to decide Amtrak's allocation, and lawmakers will likely give more than Bush requests.

TEA-21 reauthorization also makes an appearance in the Bush budget proposal. Defying expectations, the White House upped its **SAFETEA proposal** for a six-year transportation bill to **\$283.9 billion**. This represents a 30% increase over TEA-21 (though only 20% once inflation is taken into account, see chart below) and is on-target with last year's Congressional bill, indicating that the chances for reauthorization in 2005 may not be as grim as previously believed. And on Wednesday of last week, the House T&I Committee released their proposal, also for \$284 billion. But don't start holding your breath just yet. Senate Environment and Public Works Chairman James Inhofe (R-OK) has publicly stated that \$284 billion is not enough, and is still talking about pushing through a five-year bill. ❖

### TEA-21 and SAFETEA Funding Levels

	Federal Surface Transportation Funding over Six Years (billions)
TEA-21	\$217.9
TEA-21 (adjusted for inflation, in 2004 dollars)	\$236.6
SAFETEA	\$283.9*

\*Note: Because this amount is distributed over 6 years, the actual value in 2004 dollars will be less than \$283.9 billion and even closer to the inflation-adjusted value for TEA-21.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

### Transit Benefit for Nassau Employees

Nassau County is looking for a company to run its Commuter Benefits Program. The program, known as TransitChek for NYC employees, allows employees to purchase transit passes with pre-tax income, potentially saving them hundreds of dollars year. County Executive Thomas Suozzi first promised the benefit when he ran for office in 2001.

According to federal data, 70% of Nassau residents drive alone to work, 16% take transit, and 9% carpool. Nassau County alone employs approximately 8,000 employees; it is unclear what percentage of the County's employees commute by transit. The county hopes the program will encourage transit use and lead to a cleaner environment. ❖

### New NJ Smart Growth Appointee

Patrick M. Gillespie, the deputy director of the NJ Senate Democrats, will serve as state's next smart-growth ombudsman, the Governor's office announced last Tuesday. The cabinet-level position was created by last year's controversial "fast-track" development legislation to help oversee smart growth efforts in the departments of Community Affairs, Environmental Protection, and Transportation. Its power includes the ability to review any regulations proposed by the agencies for their impact on the State Plan, among others.

Despite the larger controversies surrounding the Permit Streamlining in Smart Growth Areas Act—which was rammed through the legislature last summer in four days with little public debate—Gillespie is widely viewed as a **popular choice for the position** due to his experience with environmental and land use issues. Gillespie is a veteran of the NJ Senate Democrats and has served as a councilman in Old Bridge. ❖

## Calendar

### NJTransit Fare Hike Hearings

All hearings are from 5:30 to 8:30pm, unless otherwise noted. Call 973-491-7453 or log onto [www.njtransit.com](http://www.njtransit.com) for more information.

**February 15**, Passaic County Administration Building, 401 Grand Street, Paterson

**February 15**, NJ DEP Public Hearing Room, 401 East State Street, Trenton

**February 16**, Camden City Hall, City Council Chamber, Room 201, 520 Market Street, Camden

**February 16**, John Wiley & Sons, 2nd Floor, Cafeteria, 111 River Street, Hoboken

**February 17**, NJ TRANSIT Headquarters, Board Room, One Penn Plaza East Newark

**February 17**, Somerset County Administration Building, 20 Grove Street, Somerville

**February 22**, Summit City Hall, Council Chambers/Courtroom, 512 Springfield Avenue, Summit

**February 22**, Monmouth County Library, 125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan

**February 23**, Atlantic City Convention Center, Meeting Room #301, One Miss America Way

**February 24**, Freeholders' Public Meeting Room, One Bergen County Plaza, Hackensack

**February 24**, Toms River Park & Ride, 400 Highland Parkway South, Toms River

**February 23**, NJ Transit Additional Info Session, Port Authority, Times Square Hall, 625 8th Ave

**February 26**, 1-4pm. NJ Transit Info Session, Bloustein School, Rutgers, Civic Square Building, 33 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick

### Other calendar items

**February 16**, 8-10am. NY New Visions, Transportation and Infrastructure Open Meeting Concerning the Lower Manhattan Accessibility Framework. Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Place, Manhattan. [www.nynv.aiga.org/index.shtml](http://www.nynv.aiga.org/index.shtml)

**February 16**, 5-7pm. Permanent Citizens Advisory Council to the MTA, Metro North Railroad Resident Peter Cannito, 5th Floor Board Rm., 347 Madison Ave., 212-878-7087, [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**February 17**, 12-2pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council Meeting. 10th Fl. Conference Rm., 347 Madison Ave., 212-878-7087. [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**February 17**, 5:30pm. Regional Citizen's Liaison Committee Meeting on ARC. NYMTC, 22nd Fl., 199 Water St., Manhattan. 1-877-ARC-0999 or [www.accesstotheregionscore.com](http://www.accesstotheregionscore.com)

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

### TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

MTR#490 Contributing: Michelle Ernst, Menaka Mohan, Damien Newton, Jennifer Siegel Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kate Slevin

350 West 31st Street #802, New York, NY 10001 tel. (212) 268-7474 fax (212) 268-7333 [tstc@tstc.org](mailto:tstc@tstc.org)