

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

The Stadium and the MTA

MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow is right that finding funding for New York's mass transit capital program is a lot more important than the fight over Mayor Bloomberg's West Side stadium. But there are several intersecting issues worth keeping in mind, aside from the obvious fact that the more money the MTA can get for its Hudson Yards air rights, the more it will be able to devote to its 2005-2009 repair and construction plan.

One is how the city's transit system will look and function in 2012, when the city aims to host the summer Olympic games. Mayor Bloomberg and Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff probably didn't tell visiting International Olympic Committee members this week that at current budget levels, the region's critical mass **transit systems face nearly a decade of disinvestment and decay** between now and the start of the games. But it should matter to the Olympic decision makers. The city's fortunes and quality of life depend on a thriving transit system, and if it has become less reliable and more repellent, the 2012 games could find a host city in decline. Kalikow warned in a December letter to state and city leaders that the transit system faces a "second great decline" if the MTA capital program is forced to limp along with greatly reduced funding.

Another is the fact that Bloomberg's favored #7 subway extension will cause disruptions in the Midtown subway system unless other projects complement it. Rush hour transfers between the #7 and other lines at Grand Central, for instance, will create huge daily stairway clogging problems. #7 planning documents say the solution for this is creation of the Second Ave subway, but that project is obviously by the state's and city's weak transit funding stances.

Mayor Bloomberg is one leader who could make the transit capital program a leading issue. Don't expect anyone in Albany to call attention to it. The mayor remarked on the problem of Governor Pataki's underfunding the transit program a day or two after Governor Pataki's budget was released, but it has been **sports mania** ever since. ❖

NJDOT Says Local Aid Intact

Despite news reports last week, NJDOT officials told *MTR* last week that there are **no plans to cut local aid** in the fiscal 2006 transportation capital program. However, transportation watchdogs note that the 2007 capital program could see major cuts if the Transportation Trust Fund is not renewed at current or increased funding levels. NJDOT will not release the official proposal for next year's capital program until March 15.

Nonetheless, news reports today noted that aid to municipalities would decline \$16-17 million under the budget Acting Governor Codey announced today. But it is unclear whether these funds cut from transportation or some other area. In 2005, about \$290 million in state and federal dollars was spent on transportation local aid.

Amid the various signals, NJDOT continued its solid, if underfunded, work with municipalities. The department designated two new transit villages (*MTR* #491), a program funded through \$1 million in local aid money. Local projects such as bicycle and pedestrian facilities, local street repair, safety improvements, transportation studies and the popular "Safe Streets to Schools" program are all funded through DOT's local aid program. ❖

MTA Confronts Funding Crisis

At the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's February board meeting, MTA Executive Director Katherine Lapp's made sobering comments about the possible future of the transit system. Noting a capital budget gap in the billions, said that "hard choices" would soon have to be made.

Lapp spelled out an economic domino effect that a weak capital program could create, emphasizing that cuts particularly would impact city, state and MTA workers – many of whom are employed through capital projects – and also hurt private-sector workers upstate, where thousands are employed in plants where rail and subway cars are manufactured.

Ms. Lapp reported that she is currently preparing a list of recommendations for further cutbacks, saying it will be available soon.

New York magazine's cover story last week, "The Coming Subway Crisis," had similar reflections on where New York transit system is headed. It ana-

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

lyzed the state of the NYC subway system and the need to find funding not only for expansion projects, but critical behind-the-scenes expenses, like upgrading antiquated signal systems and power substations. Citing the recent Chambers Street fire, it noted that bringing the subway to modern technological standards has been a challenge for the MTA, and utterly necessary as current equipment has become obsolete, with replacement parts increasingly harder and more expensive to come by. The incident forced the MTA to dip deeply into its reserve of extra signal relays; another major fire would seriously cripple the system while new relays are manufactured on special order.

Ironically, these warnings came at the same time as news that **subway ridership** had hit a **50-year high** in 2004. NYC Transit carried 7,043,240 passengers on an average weekday, for an annual ridership of 1.4 billion. *Newsday* reported that the last time ridership was that high was 1953, and that the peak was in 1947, a year when over two billion people entered the system.

The MTA attributed the increases to its aggressive work improving stations, trains and buses – in other words, the capital program.

With fares rising this week and probably in 2006 as well, and increased crowding being one result of higher ridership, it may be a challenge for NYC Transit and the MTA to match the same level of achievement during the next few years. But the impacts of a feeble capital program will not likely be felt at the level of ridership and system conditions for a few years yet. ❖

NY and NJ Top Air Pollution-Cancer List

A report released this week by the Boston-based Clean Air Task Force finds that **New York and New Jersey rank 1st and 2nd** respectively in cancer risk from diesel soot per capita (Connecticut ranked 13th). Using US EPA data and methodology, the report quantifies the health risk from diesel exhaust, concluding that inhaled diesel soot contributed to more than 2,300 premature deaths in NY State and nearly 900 premature deaths in New Jersey in 1999, the most recent year with available data. Diesel exhaust contains smog-forming pollutants and as many as 40 hazardous air pollutants (including 15 known to cause cancer), and has been linked to asthma, heart attacks, cancer and birth defects.

Data from the FHWA indicates that NYC truck traffic is likely to grow roughly 51% from now until 2020. Estimates for NJ are similar. Managing freight traffic and its environmental and other consequences is clearly a job state and big-city transportation and environmental agencies need to make central to their missions in the 21st Century. ❖

CT Spending Focused Heavily on Highways, Says Report

A new report that provides an overview of transportation institutions, policy and funding in Connecticut shows, among other findings, that the Connecticut DOT is overwhelmingly emphasizes highway travel and investment, even though it has the institutional and funding flexibility to pursue a more balanced course. Transportation news in Connecticut for the past year has been dominated by the problem of failing mass transit infrastructure, which has been starved for investment.

The report, “*A User’s Guide to Transportation Policy in Connecticut*,” was prepared by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign for All Aboard!, a Hartford-based mass transit advocacy organization. The report serves as a primer to educate state residents about how transportation policy and funding decisions are made, what key documents and procedures citizen advocates need to follow in order to meaningfully participate in transportation decision-making, and identifies means to better fund transportation other than highways, such as directing more federal flexible funding away from big road projects and toward mass transit capital needs.

Findings of the report include:

- ◆ Analysis of budget documents shows that the great majority (78%) of the capital funds in Connecticut’s transportation program go to highway projects.
- ◆ At 25 cents a gallon, Connecticut’s gas tax is currently the lowest it has been in the past two and a half decades (adjusting for inflation).
- ◆ Connecticut currently **uses only 8% of its flexible federal dollars** for transit and bicycle/pedestrian projects.

To view the full report, see www.allaboard.org. ❖

Transit Says U.S. Selling NJ Short

As time ticks down to a serious transportation finance crisis in New Jersey, NJ Transit’s website has sprouted a new feature – a dollar ticker that shows the agency’s calculation of how much transportation aid **New Jersey has lost** because Congress and President Bush have **failed to enact** new transportation funding legislation. The last federal transportation bill (“TEA-21”) expired in 2003 and has been renewed on an ad hoc basis several times since, but transportation agencies say funding levels authorized in 1998 aren’t keeping up with costs and inflation. “Had Congress passed a new bill (Senate Bill 1072), New Jersey would have received approximately \$752,000 more in federal funds each day since October 1, 2003. Every second that Congress

fails to pass a new version of TEA-21 costs New Jersey taxpayers federal funds," Transit's web site says. The total was in excess of \$390 million as of Tuesday afternoon.

President Bush's draft 2006 budget appears to attempt to re-start the transportation authorization process, increasing its 6-year spending level to \$284 billion from an earlier \$256 billion proposal. But predictions that a final deal was in the works have been wrong for the last year and a half. www.njtransit.com ❖

Smoother Sailing for Williamsburg Bridge Cyclists ?

Members of **Transportation Alternatives** and other cyclists have created a big stink over the difficult and dangerous riding surface on the Williamsburg Bridge bikeway, and NYC DOT now says it will review ways to fix the problem.

Part of the path on the Brooklyn-Manhattan span is marked by 26 high-profile, sharp-edged metal expansion joint covers that have a jarring speed-bump effect on bicyclists. At best, they make it difficult for cyclists to get into a rhythm climbing from Delancey Street toward Brooklyn. At worst, they throw cyclists descending into Manhattan **off of their bikes**.

The city had dismissed T.A.'s previous requests that the problem be fixed, but is now paying more attention thanks to growing media interest. The *Daily News* has run a number of stories on the issue, as well as numerous letters from cyclists telling additional stories about the bumps' hazards. One of the *News* stories chronicled the **mounting number of personal-injury cases** being filed against the city by riders who have crashed on the path. Community papers have followed up.

Cyclists packed a recent Manhattan community board #3 meeting to complain about the bumps, and the board's transportation committee voted unanimously to request remedies for the path's surface.

New York City has improved cross-East River bicycle and pedestrian access tremendously in the last 10 years, but the problem on the Williamsburg path remains a sticking point. ❖

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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Calendar

March 2, 3:30-5:30pm. NYMTC Coordinating Committee Meeting on the Transportation Improvement Program for the Mid-Hudson South Project Listings. 4th Fl., Adler Rm., Palisades Center, West Nyack, 431-431-5768, www.nymtc.org

March 3, 12-2pm. Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA meeting. 5th Floor Board Rm., 347 Madison Ave., btwn 44 & 45th Sts., Manhattan. www.pcac.org 212-878-7087.

March 9, 2:30-4pm. NYMTC Coordinating Committee Public Meeting on the Transportation Improvement Program for Nassau/Suffolk. Basement, NY State Office Building, 250 Veteran's Memorial Highway, Hauppauge. 631-952-6112, www.nymtc.org

March 9, 3pm-6:30pm. RPA presents Fundamental Tax Reform Series: *Roundtable Two: How Can Property Tax Reform Ensure Sufficient School Funding and Attainable Housing? The Municipal Land Use Center at The College of New Jersey*, Ewing, NJ. 732-828-9945. www.rpa.org

March 9, 5-7pm. Permanent Citizens Advisory Council to the MTA present MTA Long Island Railroad President's Forum Featuring James Dermody President MTA Long Island Railroad. 5th Floor Board Rm., 347 Madison Ave., btwn 44th & 45th Sts., Manhattan. 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org

March 10, 4-6pm. NYMTC Transportation Coordinating Committee Executive Approval Meeting on the Transportation Improvement Program for the NYC Project Listings. 1st Fl., Spector Hall, Department of City Planning, 22 Reade St. 718-482-4559. www.nymtc.org

March 23, 3pm-6:30pm. RPA presents Fundamental Tax Reform Series: *Roundtable Three: Should Land and Buildings Be Taxed Differently?* Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ. 732-828-9945, www.rpa.org

March 24, 10am-12pm. NYMTC Executive Approval Meeting on the Transportation Improvement Program for the Mid-Hudson South Project Listings. 4th Fl., Palisades Center, West Nyack. 431-431-5768. www.nymtc.org

more calendar entries at www.tstc.org