

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Traffic is Back

In 2004, traffic reached record levels on Port Authority crossings, according to a recent article in the *Bergen Record*. 2004 marked the first year traffic entering New York City via Port Authority cross-Hudson bridges and tunnels reached pre-Sept. 11, 2001 levels, setting an **all time high** of 126.5 million vehicles. The previous record was 126.3 vehicles in 2000.

New York and New Jersey residents remember the extreme congestion our region saw prior to 2001—if 2004 is an indicator and traffic-busting policies linger mainly as good, unimplemented ideas, we could be in for years of gridlock.

The Port Authority's booming traffic numbers highlight the need to expand the regional transit system and implement other means to curb congestion.

The Port Authority itself, along with most other toll regional toll roads, is bringing high speed E-ZPass to the Outerbridge Crossing and other bridges. The Port Authority also levies **higher tolls at rush hour**, and is seeking to expand Lincoln Tunnel bus capacity (see article next page). The MTA, on the other hand, refuses to consider any toll policy innovations — in recent years, it has rejected both time-of-day pricing and non-stop tolls for its bridges and tunnels.

Booming traffic also reinforces the great need for for regional **rail freight** investment — diverting cargo from trucks to trains is another anti-congestion strategy the region needs to catch up on. Truck traffic throughout the region is expected to grow about 50% over today's levels by 2020.

### Emerging Albany Plan Signals Transit Retreat

#### - Shrinking program dooms expansion plans for now -

The general obligation bond act the NY State Legislature is considering to bolster Governor Pataki's plan for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's **2005-2009 capital program** will increase the overall transit budget, but not by nearly enough to meet the needs outlined by the MTA, regional planners, transit advocates and the elected officials who have supported transit system expansion for the past half-decade.

If adding \$1.6 billion to the governor's \$19.2 billion MTA capital program proposal (see *MTR #487*) is all that is going to happen regarding transit funding in Albany, the state's leaders will need to admit they are not going to see the Long Island Railroad connected to Grand Central or a new Second Avenue subway line anytime soon.

The bond measure, according to the *NY Times*, would provide \$1.6 billion for the MTA and another \$1.3 billion for the state department of transportation. As a general borrowing measure, backed by NY State rather than MTA revenues, it would have to be approved by voters in November.

The NY State Senate has also recently proposed an tax surcharge on unincorporated businesses as an **alternative** to Governor Pataki's proposal to levy **higher DMV fees** to help fund transportation, but reports have been unclear as to whether the Senate's plan would raise any more money than the governor proposes.

If the governor's proposed program comes to pass, and the bond act is approved, it would give the MTA a five year program of \$20.8 billion. \$2 billion of that would be new New York City money for the extension of the #7 subway line to the West Side of midtown Manhattan. That project's financing plan also remains in doubt.

The remaining \$18.8 billion compares to an original **2000-2004 program of \$17.4 billion** (that program was later amended and increased, primarily with funds for rebuilding lower Manhattan after Sept. 11, 2001). In today's dollars, the \$17.4 billion program would be worth \$19.27 billion, so the MTA would face an actual **2.4% loss in purchasing power** at a time it was expected to begin the system's first major expansion projects in several gen-

### Regional Plan Association's 15th Regional Assembly

#### Beyond Red & Blue:

The Tri-State Region in a Changing National Context

— Friday, April 29, 8 a.m. —

#### Transportation panel:

"Financing transportation: a national and regional crisis"

- Thomas Downs • Emil Frankel • Louis Gambacinni
- Katherine Lapp • Janette Sadik-Kahn

[www.rpa.org/ra2005/](http://www.rpa.org/ra2005/)

erations. Without the bond money, Governor Pataki's proposal would represent a 10.7% real drop in MTA capital spending (spending on the #7 subway project aside).

The MTA's proposal for the 2005-2009 program was for \$27.8 billion, including the \$2 billion #7 extension. It would have put the agency on track to complete the LIRR-Grand Central connection by 2012 and make a strong start on the first phase of the Second Avenue line. Spending on those two projects would cost \$7.4 billion, while core spending for repair, modernization and improvement of the existing system would be \$17.2 billion.

With \$18.8 billion, the MTA could pay for its **entire core program** and the half-billion in security investments it says it requires. But it will not be able to take either of its big expansion projects very far with the remainder. If it pushes more of the total into one of these projects, the project will still likely be well off of its stated timetable, and the agency will **risk declining conditions** in the existing transit system. However, it should also be noted that the governor's budget did not identify all of the funding sources needed to make up his capital program proposal, so the bond act could in fact simply be gap-filler in an even smaller overall pie.

### Lincoln Tunnel: Finding More Room for Buses

The Port Authority has kicked off the first of a set of related studies designed to increase bus capacity in the Lincoln Tunnel.

The tunnel's rush hour exclusive bus lane (XBL) is **operating at capacity**, but demand for bus access to Midtown Manhattan is expected to continue to rise. The XBL in fact accounts for more daily passenger trips to Manhattan than NJ Transit trains.

The first study the PA is undertaking will look at infrastructural issues that limit tunnel bus lane throughput. Since widening the tunnel is not really an option, this work is likely to focus on operations and infrastructure west of the tunnel, where the bus lane extends 2.5 miles back to the NJ Turnpike.

A second study will look specifically at **toll pricing** possibilities. One key element here is likely to be dedication of a second rush hour tunnel tube for buses, carpools and single-occupant vehicles whose driver is willing to pay a toll premium.

The third study will seek to improve bus operation efficiency at the Port Authority bus terminal. It may recommend a bus "staging" area on a platform over the Manhattan-side Lincoln Tunnel access roads.

### Court Hears Stadium Traffic Case

Lawsuits challenging the traffic and transportation analyses for the proposed West Side stadium now rest with a NY State Supreme court judge. The suits, alleging faults in the project's environmental impact statement (EIS), were filed in December (*MTR #485*) and were presented in courtroom oral arguments on Thursday.

The lawsuit by the Tri-State Campaign and NY Public Interest Research Group argues that the stadium study **underestimates the traffic and related impacts** of the proposed stadium. The suit was heard alongside a similar complaint filed by Madison Square Garden and West Side residents.

Although the Madison Square Garden suit raises other environmental issues, argument in court last week focused almost exclusively on transportation. The main complaint is that if the city's estimation of how many stadium patrons will arrive by mass transit is wrong, traffic, air pollution, noise and other impacts will be far greater than what the EIS admits. The transit share predicted by the city is 68% prior to the extension of subway service to the area, and this was largely arrived at via **surveys of Jets fans**. Madison Square Garden, directly atop Penn Station and adjacent to numerous subway lines, generally sees about 50% of patrons arrive by transit. The TSTC/NYPIRG suit presents a detailed critique of this method of predicting mass transit use.

MTA and city attorneys argued that once the #7 extension is built, mass transit use will be even higher (the EIS predicts 75% will use transit to go to football games after the line reaches the far West Side). Judge Herman Cahn said he had read about the **MTA's budget woes** in the newspapers and questioned whether the project would ever be built. The plan is for the project to be funded with future city revenues from the anticipated West Side development. However, the scheme is risky and costly, and is still a topic of serious debate. Moreover, the MTA is currently on the hook for any **cost overruns** the project may experience. The way the transit capital program discussion is going in Albany, the agency would do well to avoid that responsibility.

The lawsuits also argue that the stadium/#7 plan makes over-ambitious assumptions about completion of multi-billion-dollar mass transit projects elsewhere in the city that will be required to integrate the #7 subway extension and high levels of passenger traffic to the Far West Side into the city's mass transit network. The MTA claimed in its reply that the Second Avenue subway first phase and LIRR connection to Grand Central would be **completed by 2010**, but the statement is absolutely incredible to anyone reading the papers these days.

Generally, the lawyers for the MTA and city relied on **assertions of agency and consultant expertise**

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

and pointed to the scale of the huge 8-volume EIS. They said that their traffic analysis went beyond football fan surveys, but that appeared to be primarily a review of other stadiums' mode shares. Even arenas directly served by multiple rapid rail lines see a **smaller transit share** than the city's planners predict for the West Side site, which is over half a mile from Penn Station but directly adjacent to the West Side Highway.

### NJ Pedestrians: Still at Risk

A new report released last week by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign documented a four percent rise in New Jersey pedestrian deaths in 2004. The report, *Still at Risk: Pedestrian Safety in New Jersey* looks at preliminary data from the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety as well as data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to find that a total of 153 New Jersey pedestrians were killed in traffic collisions in 2004, up from 147 in 2003.

With pedestrians comprising more than 1 in 5 traffic deaths, New Jersey is the third deadliest state for walkers by that measure, behind New York and Hawaii. *Still at Risk* finds that pedestrian deaths have held steady at about 150 per year over the past ten years, 1995 to 2004. This despite efforts to make New Jersey a state where "residents and visitors are able to conveniently walk and bicycle with confidence and a sense of security in every community."

New Jersey counties with the most pedestrian deaths in 2004 were in the **denser areas of north Jersey**. In terms of the percentage of total traffic deaths that were pedestrians, counties in both north Jersey and along the Jersey shore ranked at the top. Southern Jersey counties ranked near the top of the list in terms of pedestrian fatalities per capita.

Unfortunately, New Jersey's ambitious goals to make the state more walkable and bikeable haven't been embraced everywhere in the state. Some local officials continue to **blame the victims** for pedestrian deaths. "It's not so much the engineering, but the individuals who are making the wrong decisions when they're crossing these major arteries," Atlantic County Office of Highway Safety Director Michael Schurman told the *Press of Atlantic City*. An odd statement given that major arteries are notoriously dangerous for pedestrian precisely because they've been engineered to move as many cars as possible as fast as possible.

Despite the funding crunch, New Jersey needs to do more to protect pedestrians. *Still at Risk* recommends that New Jersey **increase bicycle and pedestrian funding** via the Transportation Trust Fund, create a dedicated funding source for the state's "Safe Streets to School" program, identify and im-

### Bus Lane for Clogged Suburban Route

The New Jersey DOT recently announced it would develop a reversible bus lane along **Route 9** in Middlesex County. The lane will operate north-bound in the morning rush period, and south-bound in the evening. It will help buses reach or exit the limited access highway system north of the Raritan River, generally speeding up bus commutes.

The approximately four-mile project will also build new sidewalks and median pedestrian refuges. It is a promising sign that New Jersey's roadways are becoming **multi-modal corridors**, accommodating the specific needs of mass transit and pedestrians, as well as motorists. We hope it is the first of many projects designed with New Jersey's hundreds of thousands of daily bus riders in mind.

DOT aims to have the project done in 2006 as part of a new initiative to complete construction work according to rigorous deadlines.

prove the most dangerous roads and streets for pedestrians, encourage the implementation of traffic calming to make walking safer, and fully fund the Transportation Enhancements program.

NJ DOT **Commissioner Jack Lettiere** concurred with these recommendations in the *Bergen Record*, telling the paper, "I wish we could double or triple the [school pedestrian safety] program, because we get an enormous number of requests, and unfortunately you just run out of money. The pot's got to get bigger."

### U.S. House Turns Back Plan to Limit Tolls

One of the bright spots in the various bills seeking to replace the 1998 TEA-21 federal funding law has been a general **liberalization of thinking about road tolls**. For years, a goal of Federal highway legislation has been to push states to eliminate tolls, and there has been a long-standing prohibition against investing federal transportation funds in state-managed toll highways.

The dawning realization that the United States has given short shrift to its infrastructure over the past several decades has changed that attitude in a relatively short span of time. Experiments with tolls, both for congestion relief and for transportation revenue were encouraged on a limited basis in the 1991 ISTEA law and in TEA-21.

Draft legislation to succeed TEA-21 has accelerated the trend. The eventual "TEA-3" bill could give states close to blanket **authority to levy tolls** on highway systems that receive **federal aid**, and to use the resulting revenue for a wide variety of needs. An amendment proposed in the U.S. last Thursday, as Representatives worked to finish their overall transportation funding bill, sought to counter the

trend. Rep. Mark Kennedy of Minnesota offered an amendment that would have restricted authority for new tolls on Interstate highways to new capacity, such as “high occupancy toll” lanes and may have actually eliminated many agencies’ ability to move toll revenue to non-highway uses, such as the use of bridge and tunnel tolls to support mass transit in our region.

The amendment was soundly defeated (265-155), thanks largely to a wide coalition of interests that favors a broadening of state powers to raise transportation revenue. Opponents ranged from the American Road and Transportation Builders Association to metropolitan transportation reform groups around the country.

“We agree with the President that these decisions need to be made on a state and local level,” said American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Executive Director John Horsley. AASHTO is the “trade association” of state transportation departments. President Bush’s transportation proposal would significantly increase states’ authority to levy tolls on the Interstate highway system.

“The Kennedy amendment would reverse a growing trend in which **states are experimenting with tolls to cut congestion** and air pollution,” said Michael Replogle, Transportation Director for Environmental Defense. “We can minimize new pavement by doing more to price and manage the pavement we’ve already got.” he said.

### Nassau Hub Study Wraps Up

The last public meeting for the Nassau Hub Major Investment Study will be April 5th. The meeting will present design themes, the results of the ridership demand forecasting analysis for the various mass transit options studied — including light rail, commuter rail, bus rapid transit and automated guideway trains — and information on their capital and operating & maintenance costs.

The Nassau Hub study team will be seeking public approval in order to take a few of the transportation options **through a full environmental review**. The Nassau Hub plan is one of the most ambitious smart growth efforts in the region, and seeks to densify and provide new transit service to central Nassau County.

The meeting will take place from 7-9 p.m. at the Nassau County Department of Social Services Auditorium, 101 County Seat Drive, Mineola. For information, call 516-571-0431.

## Calendar

**March 22**, 6-8pm. *Financing the MTA Capital Program - Past, Present, and Future*. Auto-Free NY with Peter Derrick, Bronx Historical Society. NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington St, Manhattan. 212-475-3394. [www.auto-free.org](http://www.auto-free.org)

**March 23**, 3:00pm-6:30pm. Regional Plan Association Fundamental Tax Reform Series: *Roundtable Three Should Land and Buildings Be Taxed Differently?* Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies, Rutgers University, Newark. 732-828-9945. [www.rpa.org](http://www.rpa.org)

**March 24**, 10am-12pm. NY Metropolitan Transportation Council approval of the Mid-Hudson South Transportation Improvement Program. 4th Fl., Adler Rm., Palisades Center, West Nyack. 914-431-5768. [www.nymtc.org](http://www.nymtc.org)

**March 29**, 10am-12pm. NY Metropolitan Transportation Council Metro Mobility Network Meeting. 199 Water St, Manhattan. 212-383-7251. [www.nymtc.org](http://www.nymtc.org).

**March 29**, 5pm. Voorhees Center presents “Transforming Transportation” with Ann Canby, president Surface Transportation Policy Project. Civic Square Bldg, Rutgers U., 133 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick. 732 -932-6812 x700.

**April 2**, 8am-5pm. NJ Environmental Federation's Annual Conference: Getting NJ Back on the Right Track. Jackson Mem. HS, 101 Don Conner Blvd, Jackson. \$30/person. 732-280-8988. [www.cleanwateraction.org/nief/](http://www.cleanwateraction.org/nief/)

**April 11**, 10am., 2pm., & 7pm. Three Public Meetings by NJ Meadowlands Commission & NJ DEP: scoping for Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Project. 1 DeKorte Plaza, Lyndhurst, NJ. 201-460-8330. [www.njmeadowlands.gov](http://www.njmeadowlands.gov)

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

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

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