

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Most Agree: Xanadu Will Create Traffic Hell

Traffic congestion is one of the complaints in the NY Giants' recently filed lawsuit to stop construction of Xanadu, the proposed recreational and commercial center in the NJ Meadowlands. The Giants' is one in a growing parade of suits — by environmental organizations, a private developer and a local municipality — that consistently argue that the project's traffic impacts will be unbearable.

The Giants fear that Xanadu-spawned traffic will make access to the rest of the sports site so intolerable that it will affect fans' desire to attend games. They have asked the State not to allow Xanadu to open on game days.

There is **still no general mass transit plan** for the mega-recreational center. All of the project planning so far has emphasized road access, with the exception of a Pascack Valley line spur for which little information about likely ridership has been offered.

Xanadu construction, specifically the filling of wetlands for parking and office construction, is already underway. So far, none of the petitioners has succeeded in winning an injunction to halt construction, but two requests are still being considered by New Jersey courts. ❖

RALLY FOR SAFE NYC BICYCLING!

Transportation Alternatives is holding a rally to honor the bravery and skill of bicyclists who use the New York City's four East River bridges — and especially our friend and fellow advocate, Noah Budnick — by bestowing Olympic medals for "Bravery while Bicycling." Noah was seriously injured in a bike accident on March 29th and remains in the hospital.

Monday, April 11th, 5:30pm, Brooklyn-side entrance/exit to the Manhattan Bridge.

For more information, see www.transalt.org or call T.A. at 212-629-8080. ❖

An Era of Transportation Reform?

We have written previously about the profound changes underway in the New Jersey Department of Transportation's approach to transportation planning (MTR #'s 477, 482). In brief, the Dept. is revolutionizing its response to traffic congestion by beginning to work with municipalities on siting future development in **transportation-efficient locations** and recommending subtle strategies like the reconnection of older street grids to move traffic more efficiently than the hierarchical "traffic sewer" approach favored by engineers in the second half of the 20th Century.

This development is an extremely hopeful one for transportation planning and the future of smart growth strategies in the United States. Perhaps even more positive is the attention NJ's example is already getting around the country, at least here in the northeast where states face tight budgets and old methods have not improved transportation.

A conference convened in March by the New Jersey and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation explicitly to explore and promote new transportation planning methods saw attendance by nearly every northeastern state DOT (and a few of their Canadian provincial counterparts). Commissioners of the New Hampshire and Delaware DOT's joined NJ and PA transportation chiefs Jack Lettiere and Allen Biehler, while Massachusetts sent an official from Governor Romney's office. New York State DOT sent a delegation of five or six from its Albany headquarters.

The content of presentations was remarkable by state DOT standards — presentations pointed out the **unsustainable nature of road expansion**, the relationship of highways and sprawl development and the fact that street grids contain more traffic capacity than hierarchical road systems with equal numbers of lane miles. Principles like these were espoused in comments by Lettiere, Biehler, New Hampshire commissioner Carol Murray and FHWA Administrator Mary Peters. No one at the session publicly gainsaid this direction, though there likely are some misgivings within the DOTs, which have been bastions of traditional traffic engineering and paving approaches. It also seemed clear that some state agencies have more political room than others to

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

expand their strategic repertoires, with New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and perhaps Delaware leading the way.

New Jersey Department of Transportation is reportedly preparing a formal announcement of its new planning strategies, to be accompanied by an explanatory web-site.

Connecticut DOT the Only No-Show

ConnDOT lived up to its reputation as the least reconstructed, least responsive state transportation agency around with its failure to attend the New Jersey/Pennsylvania DOT conference. Inquiries made in Connecticut before the event received a response about state government's ban on out-of-state travel, but the event organizers said they offered to pay

Planning to Fail in Williamsburg ?

There is **no evidence of any serious collaboration** between the New York City Dept. of City Planning and any transportation agency in the city's drive to rezone and densify the northern Brooklyn neighborhoods of Greenpoint and Williamsburg.

The area's L-train subway riders already understand the problems involved in using a transportation system that has been outpaced by development. The line's jam-packed trains are one of the city's most unpleasant rush hour experiences. The city's rezoning plan calls for large scale residential development that could add tens of thousands of residents to a relatively small area.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign recently wrote to the NYC DOT urging that it undertake a transportation capacity study similar in scope and purpose to the recently-launched "Downtown Brooklyn Transportation Blueprint." Its goal would be to understand what sort of transportation system — including mass transit, street design and parking — Greenpoint-Williamsburg will need under the rezoning's build-out potential.

Transportation considerations seem a particular blind spot for the Bloomberg administration in its strong efforts to drive development around New York City. Transportation is also a weak link in the city's Far West Side development planning and in its attempts to site big-box stores around town.

Most of the 200 speakers at the recent New York City Council hearing on the Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning proposal last week, protested the administration's refusal to guarantee affordable housing in the plan. However, several also criticized City Planning's lack of transportation planning in its environmental impact study. The Dept. claims to be a proponent of "transit-oriented development" but has not made transportation a strong aspect of its recent work. ❖

It's the Tunnel, Stupid!

First, every community interest in Lower Manhattan came out in opposition to the idea of a West Street tunnel opposite the World Trade Center site. Now Goldman Sachs is so against it that it has said that it will abandon its planned \$2 billion, 40-story headquarters building at the northwest corner of Vesey and West Streets.

The plan crafted by NY State DOT would locate a tunnel portal in front of the Goldman Sachs entrance on West Street. The state has another plan, which would **omit the tunnel**, save a lot of money and create a perfectly good urban boulevard along that lower Manhattan portion of West Street. But Governor Pataki and the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. are bent on imposing the tunnel option that no one else wants.

According to the *NY Times*, Goldman Sachs officials say the tunnel portal "would send traffic racing past the building's entrance, making it too perilous for pedestrians, and too daunting and forbidding for clients or visitors." This has been the root of opposition to the plan in the community as well, because if the portal is moved a block or two, the same conditions will potentially be imposed in front of other buildings.

The Goldman Sachs project is the **only major new private project** moving toward construction in the nearby the World Trade Center site. It would be a big blow to downtown's recovery if Goldman Sachs decides to locate its headquarters elsewhere. Why is the governor micro-managing West Street's design to the point of jeopardizing large private investment? ❖

New Beginnings for Greenwich Street

New York New Visions, a collaboration of architecture, planning and design organizations convened by the Regional Plan Association after September 11th has crafted a plan for a new "Greenwich Street South" neighborhood, bordered by Liberty Street and Battery Place, Broadway and West Street. The plan, still in early stages, contains ambitious ideas to manage bus parking, create open space and ease traffic jams.

Commuter buses from across the region create a big traffic and parking problem in lower Manhattan, because they don't have dedicated parking areas. One solution suggested at the event is construction of a state-of-the-art bus storage facility for 160 buses, although the multi-level vehicle lifts envisioned have only been used for smaller vehicles. Pedestrian improvements on Washington Street, pedestrian bridges across West Street, and extensions of Edgar and Morris Streets to West Street are also elements in the proposal. ❖

Thruway Tolls Should Help T-Z Transit

In a letter sent last week to the NY State Thruway Authority, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign urged the agency to use some of the additional revenue it will reap from this year's planned Thruway toll increase to bolster the operating budget for commuter buses operating between Rockland and Westchester Counties.

"It's time for the Thruway Authority to become a transportation agency rather than simply a highway operator. Investing some of the new toll revenue in more frequent Tappan Zee bus service would be a good mobility investment in the Hudson Valley's most congested section of road," the Campaign's Jon Orcutt said in a release.

It is possible that the Thruway's authorizing law may not permit the Authority to directly fund transit bus operations. If that is the case, a good first step would be a **toll exemption** for Thruway tolls collected at the TZ Bridge and Spring Valley **for Tappan Zee Express buses**, paratransit vehicles and commuters participating in vanpool programs.

The Thruway Authority will conduct a hearing on its toll increase plan tonight, April 11th, in Rockland County. See last page calendar for details. ❖

CityTicket Successful, Still Temporary

CityTicket, the program that provides a discounted fare for weekend riders who travel within New York City on the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad will continue to run only as a pilot program in 2005 despite encouraging ridership trends. After pressure from transit advocates, the MTA implemented the program in January 2004, at which point it said the program would become permanent if successful (*MTR #*'s 442, 451).

CityTicket offers areas poorly served by New York City Transit an affordable opportunity to travel to city destinations, especially Queens and the Bronx. The fee for a single ride ticket was \$2.50 and has increased to \$3 due to the recent fare hike, but can still save riders \$2-\$3 per ride. LIRR has another discount fare of \$2.50 for travel within Queens; Metro-North has a discount fare of \$2.25 for trips inside the Bronx.

According to research by the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, overall Metro-North Cityticket purchases in 2004 fell in summer and peaked in the fall, while the LIRR numbers grew each season. Simultaneously, the total CityTicket market share (of all tickets sold) went up in each period. The increase shows more riders became conscious of the program, which **bodes well for its future**. It would obviously skyrocket in popularity if available during the week. ❖

New Jersey's Rail Future ?

New Jersey Transit says the cost of constructing the \$5 billion **Trans-Hudson Express Tunnel (THE Tunnel)** — a second commuter rail tunnel between New Jersey and Manhattan — is dwarfed by the expected \$10 billion it would pump into the region's economy.

NJ Transit's analysis says the tunnel has potential to add \$480 million in tax revenue over the next 20 years by attracting development to the West Side of Manhattan and across northeastern New Jersey. It would create 44,000 new jobs; 16,000 in New Jersey and 28,000 in New York. A new study estimates 7,450 new jobs in Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Passaic counties; 4,400 in Middlesex, Somerset and Union; 2,150 in Morris, Sussex, Hunterdon and Warren; and 1,800 in Monmouth and Ocean.

"THE Tunnel" would meet NJ Transit's needs for rail capacity to New York City for the next twenty years. The economic study was done as part of the project's ongoing environmental review, which will be released in full this summer.

Apparent Decision on M.O.M.

NJ Transit's Draft Environmental Impact Statement for a new rail line connecting the Jersey Shore and parts of Middlesex County to Manhattan (the Middlesex-Ocean-Monmouth study) appears to favor a route that would connect **Lakehurst to Matawan**.

The Lakehurst to Matawan route would include stops in Freehold Township, Perth Amboy, Woodbridge, Newark and points in between. The DEIS estimates the alignment would cost \$730 million to build, and \$45 million a year to run. It would serve 10,900 people per day.

But the Matawan Line already faces fierce opposition in Monmouth County, especially Marlboro Borough, because it would destroy the Henry Hudson Trail, a pedestrian trail being built on an old freight line. Assemblymembers Michael Panter and Robert Morgan are spearheading a citizen's committee to fight the proposed line.

There is **no timetable** for either of the new lines, and the state will need to refinance its overall transportation programs in order for spending and construction schedules to become clearer. NJ Transit's operating budget crisis (*MTR #491*) raises a further question about how the agency can afford to running new rail lines. ❖

Byram Looks for New Approach

Although the New Jersey Department of Transportation is rapidly transforming its planning processes, there are some residual "old way" projects still emerging from the project pipeline and causing local battles. Byram Township, a small municipality in the southern part of Sussex County, is trying to

blunt one such project by asking DOT to bring its new approach to an old widening project.

NJ DOT's plan to for a roughly one-mile stretch of Route 206 would widen the road from two lanes to five through the center of Byram (see *MTR #'s 374, 382*). The township has asked DOT to scrap the expensive project, and give Byram a more innovative, pedestrian-friendly plan that connects local land uses and reconnects its street grid. DOT is not sure the town is ready for a complete planning overhaul, but should give it a chance before proceeding with the new lanes. ❖

New Bike Trails for S.I. Miss Critical Path

New York City has decided to build six miles of bike paths that run through the 2,800 acre Staten Island Greenbelt this summer, but the network will not include the 5.5 mile Amundsen Trail along the unbuilt Willowbrook Parkway right of way. Borough President James Molinaro told the *Advance* the trail was not included because the route could be needed to construct streets later on, inciting criticism from some advocates.

The new paths will be funded with \$2.5 million in federal Transportation Enhancements funds, originally slated for the Amundsen Trail. For years, local civic organizations such as the Richmondtown and Clarke Avenue Civic Association have asked that the Willowbrook Parkway be officially demapped, so that the Amundsen Trail could link the waterfront and Great Kills Park to the Greenbelt. ❖

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/

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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Calendar

April 11, 6-8pm. New York State Thruway Authority Toll Hike Hearings. Ramapo Town Hall, 237 Route 59, Suffern, Rockland County. 716-847-3403. www.thruway.state.ny.us

April 11, 10am., 2pm., & 7pm. Three Public Meetings by NJ Meadowlands Commission & NJ Department of Protection on a scoping document for the proposed Meadowlands Railroad and Roadway Project. One DeKorte Plaza, Lyndhurst, NJ. 201-460-8330. www.njmeadowlands.gov

April 11, 5:30pm, Rally for Safe NYC Cycling, Brooklyn-side entrance/exit to the Manhattan Bridge. For more information, see www.transalt.org or call 212-629-8080

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, www.njcost.com.

April 18, 3:30-5:30pm & 7-9pm. Public Meeting on Draft Regional Transportation Plan and Regional Emissions Analysis. Westchester County Center. Route 199, Central Park Ave, White Plains, NY. 212-383-7260. jwilson@dot.state.ny.us

April 19, 3:30-5:30pm & 7-9pm. Public Meeting on Draft Regional Transportation Plan and Regional Emissions Analysis. Suffolk Community College, Western Campus, Captree Commons, Rm 114, Crooked Hill Rd, Brentwood, NY. 212-383-7260. jwilson@dot.state.ny.us

April 20, 8:30am-12:45pm. The NYU Rudin Center presents: Planning and Design with Communities in Mind: Context Sensitive Solutions in Our Region. Registration Info: 295 Lafayette St., 2nd Fl., Manhattan. 212-998-7545. www.wagner.nyu.edu/rudincenter

April 21, 3:30-5:30pm & 7-9pm. Public Meeting on Draft Regional Transportation Plan and Regional Emissions Analysis. NYMTC Offices, 199 Water St, 22nd Fl., Manhattan. 212-383-7260. jwilson@dot.state.ny.us

more calendar entries at www.tstc.org