

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 497

April 18, 2005

NEWS

Lettiere Brings Down the House

Speaking at to an audience of transportation experts at the state-wide TransAction conference in Atlantic City last week, NJ Transportation Commissioner Jack Lettiere delivered a fiery keynote address outlining DOT's embrace of transportation reform principles and the need to refinance the state's transportation system. His words brought the room to their feet for what organizers said was the **first standing ovation** in the 30-year history of the conference.

Lettiere said transportation agencies have failed to make the connection between transportation, land use, and quality of life, yet complacency has prohibited more innovative thinking until now. "We have a new mission," Lettiere added, "to build better communities, places where people want to live and build futures for their children."

DOT will no longer make up for local plans that create sprawling, congestion-inducing development, the commissioner said. "Every highway that DOT has recently widened has been re-filled with cars in three years," Lettiere said. He argued that the DOT cannot continue to chase the consequences of bad development policy.

Lettiere closed by arguing that **New Jersey risks its economic future and quality of life** by allowing its transportation systems to flirt with bankruptcy. He delivered a stirring moral case for reinvestment in economy-sustaining infrastructure, saying that continued neglect will put our region and nation behind other developed and developing countries. He urged the hundreds in the room to go to work on the state legislature to ensure a **full-scale reauthorization** of the state Transportation Trust Fund.

NJDOT Capital Program Continues Positive Trend

For the third straight year, NJDOT's fiscal 2006 capital program demonstrates a strong commitment to repairing infrastructure, with money for highway capacity expansion at less than 3% of the total, down from 4.2% last year and much higher levels in the 1990s. Most spending is for road and bridge repair, local aid and small scale congestion fixes. The share of funding for local aid drops in the 2006 program compared to the 2005 program, from 19% (\$284 million) to 15% (\$247 million). ❖

Groups Take MTA to Court; Ask for New West Side Yard Process

Four groups today filed a lawsuit seeking to have the Metropolitan Transportation Authority rebid its Hudson Yards property to get more funding for the transit system.

The groups argue that the **MTA violated its statutory and common law duties** to secure the most beneficial terms possible for the sale of this valuable asset and did not proceed through a process that insured fairness to all potential bidders.

The suit makes no claim that one bid was superior to another, but asks as relief that the MTA begin the bidding process again with the aim of achieving an appropriate price for its property.

The groups are the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign; Common Cause/NY; Transport Workers Union Local 100; and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. The case was filed today in New York State Supreme Court.

The groups are represented by Tom Shanahan of the law firm Shanahan and Associates; Daniel Bright of the law firm of Kennedy, Schwartz and Cure; Nancy Christensen of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign; and Eric Schneiderman, NY State Senator for the 31st District. Schneiderman represented the Straphangers Campaign in a 1995 civil rights lawsuit against the MTA, objecting then to a 25-cent fare increase.

"The MTA was too quick, played favorites, and violated its own rules," said Rachel Leon, executive director of Common Cause/NY. "Common Cause cannot let their flawed process stand."

"The MTA **cannot act like a rogue agency**," said Senator Schneiderman. "It has a legal duty to maximize the benefit of the sale of its assets."

"If we don't get a fair price for the Yards, the loss will be taken out on the riding public in fewer new trains and buses, less repairs and eventually higher fares and poorer service," said Gene Russianoff, staff attorney for the Straphangers Campaign.

The Straphangers Campaign and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign are already in New York State Supreme Court suing the MTA and the City over the adequacy of the traffic section of the West Side rezoning Environmental Impact Statement. ❖

Construction Crowd Beguiled by the Mayor's Stadium

Where were the construction unions, numerous city elected officials and Al Sharpton when the Second Avenue Subway was sinking in Albany over the past several months?

These characters have come out in force to back the West Side stadium plan and Mayor Bloomberg's claims that the project will mean a big boost to employment in NYC. The mayor has changed his stadium tune recently from "Olympics" and "tax revenue" to "jobs." "Keep in mind that what this is about is jobs, jobs, jobs," the mayor told reporters the day the MTA approved the sale of West Side yard development rights to the NY Jets.

But the Second Ave Subway and its companion project, the connection of the LIRR to Grand Central Terminal, would be **far greater economic engines**. Yet they were quietly de-funded in Albany during this year's NY State budget negotiations with barely a whimper from the construction-jobs crowd.

The *NY Times* recently compared the mayor's assertion that the stadium would create 7,500 new permanent jobs with those put out by NYS (3,110), the NYC Independent Budget Office (3,791) and the Jets (6,791). The article noted that the Jets figure is more than the combined job rolls for Giants Stadium, Javits Center and Madison Square Garden. The city says the discrepancy is due to methodology and differing estimates of special events to be held at the new facilities.

Estimates of the project's construction jobs also differ. The Jets say 4,500 per year over a few years; the state 3,188; and the IBO puts the figure at 2,880.

The Second Ave Subway and LIRR-Grand Central link are bigger projects that would mean far more construction jobs than the stadium, but **their future is now in doubt**. The MTA said it needed close to \$8 billion in 2005-2009 to move the projects forward, but Albany has only authorized \$2.5 billion — not enough to advance either project very far, let alone both of them — and even that is partially dependent on voter approval of a transportation bond act this fall. Bloomberg said next to nothing about this colossal deferral, which could drag on into terminal delay and large-scale failure.

The projects would also mean far more for the city and regional economy than the stadium.

A 1999 report for the American Public Transit Association found that in the short run, 314 jobs are created for each \$10 million in mass transit capital expenditure. In transit-dependent NY, the number

could be even higher. Other studies also show that business efficiency and profitability increases when corporate locations are near mass transit. A Federal Transit Administration study shows that a 1% increase in "mass transit presence" results in \$3 billion in annual economic benefits.

MTA studies for LIRR-Grand Central and the Second Ave. Subway show that the regional transit system does not have the capacity to accommodate the region's forecasted job, population and travel growth. In other words, by letting these projects slide, the city is shooting itself in the foot by failing to create transportation capacity needed to support economic growth. The Regional Plan Association estimates the completed Second Ave. subway would create 70,000 general and construction jobs and add \$14.4 billion yearly to the gross city product. ❖

West St. Tunnel Unmourned

Most downtown-watchers greeted last week's announced demise of the plan to put West St. in a tunnel adjacent to the World Trade Center memorial site as the end of a conflict that distracted from broader site planning issues. They hope that the decision to move ahead with the at-grade West St. plan will clear a variety of hurdles to finalizing the overall WTC site plan, and allow the pace of downtown redevelopment to quicken.

The local Coalition to Save West Street thanked Gov. Pataki for ultimately favoring the at-grade option, and said it would remain vigilant in order to develop West St. into an attractive, pedestrian-friendly boulevard.

Transportation debate downtown may focus in the future around the proposed idea of **linking Lower Manhattan to the Long Island Rail Road** system via the Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn. A concept-level study released last year by the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. asserted huge potential ridership, but did not document it and transportation experts found the claim difficult to credit. It's unclear how funding for mass transit expansion projects likely to be authorized in the 2005-2009 MTA capital program will be allocated. Studies for the LIRR-downtown project may be able to get through the five year period with Port Authority funding already allocated and from money saved by the cancellation of the West Street tunnel. ❖

Good News for Chinatown

More good news downtown is the announced reopening of Park Row, alongside NYPD headquarters, to pedestrians and buses. Mayor Bloomberg announced last Thursday that by mid-May, barricades on the street would be eased, citing a reduced

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

level of terrorist threat.

Bus traffic on the route would only return to about **one-third of its normal level**, according to the *NY Times*, and buses will be subject to search and moveable barriers.

Chinatown businesses and advocates have held for several years that the closure has hurt them by walling off the neighborhood from lower Manhattan government and business centers. ❖

New York New Visions

Last week, in describing plans for new street grids envisioned for the World Trade Center site area, we wrote that New York New Visions was a group “convened by the Regional Plan Association.”

The group in fact is a collaborative of 21 architecture, planning and design organizations that coalesced following the September 11 attacks. RPA is listed as one of the organizations but is not the coalition’s coordinator. www.nynv.aiga.org ❖

MTA Grants Stay for Station Booths

NY1 News recently reported that the MTA has decided not to physically demolish the 164 subway station booths it is in the process of closing.

Originally the agency planned to move booth operators to work with customers on subway platforms, and remove the booths altogether. Under the revised plan, the agents will still roam the stations to provide customer assistance, but the booths will remain functional so they can be used in case of emergency and as places for transit employees to store personal belongings during work.

Transit advocates are pleased that the decision might allow for the possibility of the **booths’ reactivation in the future**, if MTA budget woes ease and the closure of staffed station booths proves to have major safety and transit accessibility impacts. ❖

MOM Not Ready

New Jersey Transit contacted *Mobilizing the Region* in response to the last edition to say that **no firm decision has been made** on an alignment for the Middlesex-Ocean-Monmouth commuter rail project, and that the environmental impact statement for the project still has significant ground to cover before a draft is completed around the end of 2005. ❖

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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Calendar

April 18, 6-8pm. Informational Meeting on: VISION42's plan for a light rail transit mall on 42nd Street. New York Marriott Marquis. 1535 Broadway @45th St., 5th Fl. 212-957-0550. www.vision42.org

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. 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

April 26, 6-8pm. Auto-Free New York hosts: *Why does this look this way-what autos have done to NYC*, with John Tauranac writer and mapmaker. Conf. Rm., NYPD Dtown Center, 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394. www.auto-free.org

April 27, 5-7pm. The Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission Meeting for organizations on the I-95/Scudder Falls Bridge Improvement Project. Trenton Marriott, Lafayette Yard, 1 West Lafayette St., Trenton, NJ. 267-790-1006. www.drtjbc.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

additional calendar entries at www.tstc.org