

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Wanted: Meadowlands Transit Study

The New Jersey towns of Carlstadt, Lyndhurst and Wallington have all **recently passed resolutions** calling on the state to launch a study of mass transit needs and opportunities at the Meadowlands Sports Complex, where construction of the Xanadu entertainment center and new Giants Stadium are pending. The resolutions call for an examination of options in addition to the planned NJ Transit rail connection from the Pascack Valley Line, including light rail, bus and bus rapid transit. Most of these options probably have greater ridership potential than the Pascack Line, which generally connection runs to low density suburbs. It is possible that a light rail connection to the urban areas served by the Hudson Bergen line, for example, would be more successful in forestalling car trips to the site.

Nonetheless, the NJ Sports Authority, in coordination with NJTransit, are moving ahead with the proposed Pascack Valley rail project. A "scoping" meeting for it was held earlier this month. While it may be good news that train service will be coming to the Meadowlands, transit advocates still believe that the traffic impacts of Xanadu is going to be so large that New Jersey must do all it can provide additional travel options for the project.

Preliminary study documents do not provide any data on ridership or capital and operating costs for the Pascack spur. NJTransit officials say the number exist, but *MTR* wonders why they have never been released in any of the many debates over Xanadu.

Major questions about travel to the Meadowlands seem to be growing in number, not shrinking. Will the new Giants stadium expand parking? What is the market for the additional restaurants, training facilities, and museum now proposed to accompany the stadium by Acting Governor Codey? Can anything be done to reduce the **sea of pavement on the site** and improve the pedestrian environment enough to encourage walking between its various venues?

Not only nearby towns are alarmed at the prospect of Xanadu and related traffic. The NFL Giants refuse to relinquish their lawsuit against Mills/Mack-Cali that cites the potential traffic impacts of the Xanadu complex on game days. The Giants still want the recreational mega mall to close down on Sundays to reduce game day traffic. ❖

NJ Transit Fares Increase, Long Term Problems Still Loom

On Thursday, New Jersey Transit approved an average fare increase of 11.5%, down from the 15% increase originally proposed by the agency.

Now it is up to NJ state legislators to finish the job by **dedicating a revenue stream** to help fund NJ Transit's operating budget in the years to come. NJ has the largest transit operating system in the country that doesn't have a tax of some sort dedicated to subsidizing its operating expenses.

Transit has seen relatively flat allocations from the state in recent budgets, while it has incurred new costs associated with operating Secaucus Junction, the new station in Ramsey, the River Line, the extended Hudson-Bergen Light Rail and increased 'Mid-Town Direct' service. Now is the time for NJ lawmakers to ensure that fare hikes do not become an annual rite of spring for N.J. Transit riders.

That is in all of NJ's interest. Every person that chooses to take a train or bus to get where their going is one less person on crowded roadways. ❖

Dumb Growth, City-Style?

Leading planning experts say the City Planning Commission and NYC Dept. of City Planning could be serving New Yorkers better. Amid the Bloomberg administration's breakneck efforts to spur development around town, city government is doing little to accommodate the needs of a broad spectrum of citizens or consider the **effects of development**, like **traffic and transportation**.

At a recent CUNY/AIA forum on the city's future, Michael Sorkin, a noted NYC architect, denounced low levels of affordable housing from the proposed Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning and the lack of objective planning consideration in the city's backing of proposals for new sports arenas in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

Robert Yaro, Regional Plan Association president, mentioned the city's down-zoning around the Forest Hills transit station as an irrational step that removes growth opportunities from the transportation infrastructure best able to support it.

Of course, city government's obsession with a West Side stadium versus its failure to aggressively champion projects essential to the city's economic

future, such as the 2nd Avenue subway, LIRR East Side Access and an additional NJ Transit tunnel to Manhattan, came up as another sore spot.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign has recently challenged the City Planning Commission's failure to negotiate better transportation concessions from IKEA in the company's plan to locate in Red Hook, Brooklyn, has urged the city to undertake a transportation capacity study to examine the traffic and transit implications of the Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning (see *MTR #468*) and sued the city over the shoddy transportation analysis in the West Side stadium environmental study.

Sprawl in the City

Meanwhile, while Borough President James Molinaro told *Crains New York Business* that transportation must be part of the City Planning Commission's study to rezone 5,700 acres of industrial land on Staten's Island's West Shore, it is likely that this and other projects on the Island will only fuel Staten Island's legendary traffic jams.

The \$150,000 study, to be completed by 2006, is being funded by the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council. 3,200 acres are currently being used for industrial purposes and the other 2,500 acres are vacant. The site could be rezoned for residential and business development.

Staten Islanders may be thinking about smarter transit options as part of new development, but it is hard to imagine more construction on the West Shore being **anything but car dependent**. The densest parts of Staten Island are only very weakly served by transit, Island officials resist any notion of growth zones that could make more intensive transit investment more viable and even supplementary ferry services along the congested South Shore are routinely shouted down.

Staten Island's best option for decent transit service is to transform the local and express bus system into a bus rapid transit network. That will require tough choices like reassigning road space, and concerted leadership and vision to achieve.

Last week, Mayor Bloomberg and others broke ground on the **Bricktown Centre in Charleston**, near the Outerbridge Crossing. The big box development, with 1,700 parking spaces, is on one of the largest city-owned plots of open land. To push it through, the city agreed to preserve half as open space, and provide 20 acres for senior housing, a garden and community center. Yet environmental groups said the project could have been located somewhere else, like the slightly less car-dependent Lucent site in Richmond Valley, and the open space protected.

The same officials who opened Bricktown Centre will undoubtedly be decrying congestion again next week. ❖

More Transit Savings ?

Last week, the Senate Finance Committee passed an increase in the monthly transit benefit, known as TransitChek in much of our region, **from \$105 to \$155 dollars**. The program allows employees to use pre-tax dollars to buy transit passes, potentially saving them hundreds of dollars a year.

The National Transit Benefit Association, along with other transit advocate groups throughout the country, wrote to Senate Finance Chairman Charles Grassley and Ranking Member Max Baucus urging approval of Senator Schumer's plan to equalize the benefit and transit benefits at \$200 per month. Although the transit benefit was negotiated down to \$155, transit riders whose monthly costs range this high, like commuter rail riders, will still save on their commutes.

The amendment is now in the most recent version of the federal transportation bill, SAFETEA, which may be debated in the full Senate next week, though a deal for an overall funding package has eluded Congress for the last two years. ❖

Freight Industry Seeks Smarter Growth

The NY/NJ Port Authority has launched a new "Portfields" project to encourage development of distribution centers close to port terminals, according to the *Journal of Commerce*. The idea is to minimize multiple medium- or long-distance movements of the same freight, and thereby **relieve truck trips and congestion** on metropolitan highways. The Port Authority and NJ Economic Development Authority are already working on a large warehouse project near Port Elizabeth as the initiative's first capital project. The project's goal is to identify 20 such sites. ❖

Bush: Wrong Side of Amtrak

As Amtrak officials announced last week that brake problems will suspend Acela service until summer, the company's financial and organizational future was debated in Washington:

- Amtrak president David Gunn asked a Senate subcommittee for an additional \$682 million in funding, for a total of \$1.8 billion next year. President Bush has suggested zeroing funding for the system unless Congress finds a way to reorganize and reform the "money-losing" company. But even Trent Lott, Chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, deemed that option "ridiculous."
- The Amtrak Board of Directors announced a reorganization plan that largely relies on states splitting Amtrak costs with the federal government in a 20% to 80% agreement. The plan is similar to the Bush Administration's in that it loads more Amtrak burden on states, although the Bush plan calls for a

50/50 split. Both plans would lead to opening routes to private "competition," discontinuing less lucrative routes in central and western states, and transferring routes like the Northeast Corridor to smaller federal-state partnerships.

- The plan was quickly denounced by NY-NJ congresspeople, who said the states are already dealing with massive infrastructure funding problems, and are not able to provide funding to take over Amtrak. "States can't afford at this time to simply pick up the federal contribution to Amtrak," Sen. Frank Lautenberg, told *Associated Press*. "Expecting them to do so would be yet another unfunded mandated, and it would sink state budgets in a sea of red ink."

The very idea that transportation systems are supposed to make money **is a fiction** applied selectively by the Bush Administration. Of all the rail systems in the world, only a few busy routes in Japan and New Zealand turn a profit, according to the *Christian Science Monitor*. Most developed countries invest far more than we do in rail travel- Germany invests \$9 billion a year, and even developing India invests \$3.4 billion a year. These countries, among others, see a national transit system as an economic investment, similar to our government's support of air travel, roads, education, and security.

While profit making transit companies are a fiction, the disastrous impacts of privatization of transit service are not. Britain's privatization of its rail system in the 1990s lead to more accidents, worse service, and *increased* government subsidies.

As global trade, travel, security, and general mobility needs increase, a large country that relies too heavily on automobiles, trucks and roads **is threatening its environmental and economic future.** ❖

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" with Thomas Downs, Emil Frankel, Louis Gambacinni, Katherine Lapp, Janette Sadik-Kahn

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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Calendar

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 DtownCenter, 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394. www.auto-free.org

April 27, 5-7pm. The Delaware River Joint Toll Bride 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.drjtbc.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

May 2-4. The League of American Bicyclists presents: *Bicycle Education Leaders Conference. Focus on BikeEd, youth education programs, and educator in the community.* Hotel Pennsylvania. 401 7th Ave., Manhattan. 202-822-1333 or www.bikeleague.org for registration and fee info.

May 12, 8:30-10am. MAS Planning Center Forum: NYC Department of Transportation: Truck Route Study. Municipal Art Society. 457 Madison Ave (at 51st Street), Manhattan, 212-935-3960. www.mas.org

May 19-20. Project for Public Spaces Presents a Workshop: *How to Turn a Place Around. Focus on step-by-step approach to revitalization while observing Greenwich Village and Battery Park City.* For registration, 212-620-5660, www.pps.org/info/ppsnews/httapa_training_course.

June 14 & 15. National Corridors Initiative presents: *National Conference and Rally for Rail. Capital Hill, Washington, D.C.* 860-536-5480. www.nationalcorridors.org

July 15,16, 17. The Tri-State Trek benefit bike ride from Boston to NY that raises funds for Lou Gehrig's Disease. 860-523-8442. www.tristatetrek.com

more calendar entries at www.tstc.org