

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 499

May 3, 2005

NEWS

Transit Funding in a Bond

To boost state transportation funding, Governor Pataki and NY State lawmakers agreed last month to put a \$2.9 billion state-backed bond issue before voters on November 8th. If passed, the bond together with the already-approved state budget would provide \$21.1 billion over 5 years for transit, and an equal amount to fix roads and bridges controlled by the NY State Department of Transportation.

But passage of the bond measure is by no means certain. **In 2000, voters rejected** a \$3.8 billion transportation bond issue. Defeat of that measure was largely blamed on the lack of concrete information about what the funds would pay for, though upstate hostility toward downstate transit funding may also have been an issue. The measure did poorly in eastern Long Island as well. One factor favoring the act's passage this year is that New York City voter turnout will be heavier than in 2000, because of the mayoral race.

In 2000, the state's fuzzy explanation of how the revenue would be spent wasn't issued until August, giving voters only a few months to try to read the tea leaves and backers little time to craft and deliver supportive messages.

This time around, officials in Albany have set a **June 1st deadline** to complete a memorandum of understanding outlining how bond act proceeds would be used. This should help its cause in November because voters tend to be more willing to issue public debt when they have a sense of where the money will go.

They will have to use care in crafting the project list so that it appeals to a **variety of constituencies**. Some groups are already threatening to line up no votes regarding the measure if it promises funds for mass transit expansion. The New York State Conservative Party's executive director Shaun Marie Levine recently told the *Bond Buyer*, "If they are talking about the Second Avenue subway, we would obviously not support it."

Albany's Transit Cuts Come Home to Roost

Although newspaper headlines appeared to express shock, it's been obvious at least since the January release of New York Governor George Pataki's budget proposal that major cuts would be made in the MTA's capital program. "MTA cuts" are also a misnomer, since the MTA in fact articulated a capital program that represented increased investment in existing subway, bus and commuter rail infrastructure, and major expansions to subway and commuter rail capacity. "Albany cuts" are the problem facing transit riders and, ultimately, the entire region.

Projects listed as "deferred" for now by the MTA staff and board are 12 subway station rehabilitations, a new LIRR yard needed to increase service along the **Port Jefferson line** and \$27 million in basic infrastructure and parking projects in Metro-North's system.

Expansion projects are likely to have some budgets but will not move rapidly into construction. The MTA **rescinded contracts for tunneling** for LIRR East Side access last week. MTA board members contacted by the *NY Times* "expressed doubts" about the project's feasibility and suggested the "plan to build a subway under Second Avenue in Manhattan was **even less likely** to be realized."

Some official statements that the big projects' schedules would be stretched out by just a few years past their 2012 initial service dates seem hard to credit, since most of the **funding** for their construction has **yet to be identified**. Many point to the projects' high ratings by the Federal Transit Administration, but federal funding is a matching system that relies on states or localities to demonstrate ability to pay for a large share of project costs.

The deferral of LIRR East Side Access and Port Jefferson projects will likely also result in a smaller requirement for new trains. Scaled down LIRR rolling stock purchases can also help meet the capital budget shortfall.

Skimping on Sidewalks

A new report released last week by the Campaign finds that demand by New Jersey cities and towns for bicycle and pedestrian funding far exceeds available monies. The study, *Skimping on Sidewalks*, confirms the long-held belief of bike/ped advocates

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

that **the public wants better bicycling and walking infrastructure** and that more public funding should be devoted to these types of projects.

Skimping on Sidewalks analyzes several years of applications and approvals for New Jersey's Bikeways and Safe Streets to School local aid funding programs, as well as for the federal Transportation Enhancements program.

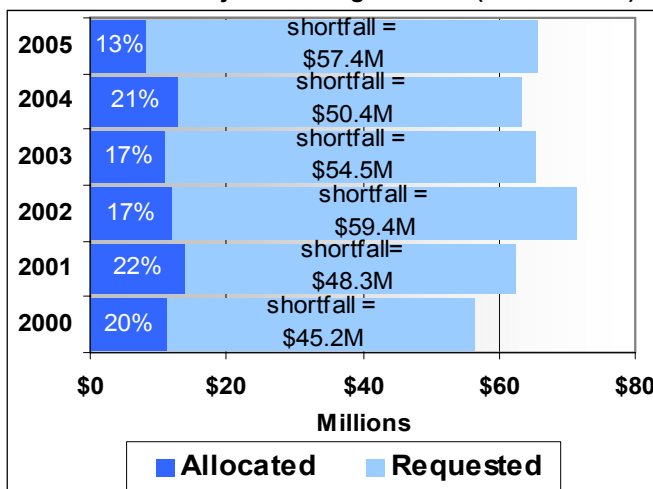
From 2003 through 2005, municipalities submitted almost 1,000 applications for \$194 million in state Bikeways and Safe Streets to School funding. Yet NJDOT approved only one-fourth of those applications, and granted just over \$31 million in funding.

The two most recent years of applications for federal Transportation Enhancements funding reveals a similar shortfall for that program. While municipalities submitted 367 applications for funding totaling nearly \$200 million, NJDOT approved only 46 projects, for just over \$18 million.

NJDOT officials acknowledged the need for more bicycle and pedestrian funding. Spokesman Marc Lavorgna told the *Press of Atlantic City*, "The needs outweigh the resources. We would love to fund them all if we could." And the 2003 Blue Ribbon Commission headed by NJDOT Commissioner Jack Lettiere called for **increasing annual funding** for both state programs **to \$40 million**.

But it will be up to the state legislature to make that happen when it works to renew the trust fund. On that point, Assembly Transportation Committee Chairman John S. Wisniewski noted, "New Jersey is becoming the national leader in smart transportation planning, but we will need more resources to deliver on that promise. Our Transportation Trust Fund must be replenished so that the needs of our communities, including bike and walkways, can be met. There needs to be a stable source of State funding so that these projects can get done without having to increase local property taxes."

NJ Bike-Ped Project Funding Shortfall (FY2000-2005)



Data: NJDOT Office of Local Aid. Percentages are portion of funding requested by municipalities granted in each year.

Meadowlands Light Rail ?

The New Jersey Sports & Exposition Authority approved a \$300,000 study to examine the feasibility for an extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail into the Meadowlands Sports Complex on Wednesday. It would serve trips to both the Xanadu entertainment complex and a new Giants Stadium. State officials estimate its cost at \$750 million to \$1 billion, but expect the benefits to be worth it. Still, critics of Xanadu's likely traffic impacts were unimpressed. One day after the SEA announced its new study, **Hudson County** joined three Bergen County municipalities (see *MTR #496*) in calling for a transportation study of the Meadowlands Sports Complex that would take an encompassing look at bus, bus rapid transit, light rail and train access to see what **the best mix of modes and projects** stands the best chance of maximizing mass transit use. This proposal stands in contrast to the SEA's approach of looking at several expensive rail projects in isolation, and ignoring relatively inexpensive and easy-to-implement bus options completely.

The New York Giants also have many concerns about Xanadu's effect on site traffic and have retained their own traffic experts to conduct an independent analysis. Their report is expected shortly.

NY State DOT Reviving Route 347 Project

While the New York State DOT has wanted to add new lanes to NY Rte 347 in Suffolk County for many years, the road designs it has offered to the surrounding communities have always engendered controversy and gone un-built. The agency is trying once more, launching an environmental impact statement with public "scoping" hearings this week. However, we remain concerned that if the project does little but add new lanes, it **will not produce lasting congestion relief** and represent a throwback project in light of recent advances in corridor planning techniques.

An expensive public investment in a corridor like Route 347 should aim for sustainable traffic congestion relief and to improve the public landscape and quality of life.

Smart planning for transportation corridors is evolving rapidly. In part, that is due to recognition that simple engineering approaches like widening highways and doing nothing else yields only fleeting benefits in busy metropolitan areas. New Jersey transportation commissioner Jack Lettiere noted in a recent speech that "Every highway [New Jersey DOT] recently widened has been **re-filled with cars in three years**."

If that happens on Route 347, the project will not even be worth the additional traffic delays that its construction will inevitably cause, not to mention

all the taxpayer dollars that will go to waste.

In New Jersey, the state DOT is employing a variety of planning approaches to ensure that public investment in roadways can produce more lasting benefits. One is **working with local governments** on development plans, so future growth is sited in transportation-efficient locations that generate fewer car trips than might otherwise be the case. It includes consideration of pedestrian connections and circulation, so that every stop in a particular location does not involve a new car trip to a new parking spot. It also looks at **rebuilding street grid systems**, which distribute traffic far more efficiently than roads like Route 347.

347 is badly congested in part because it is forced to accommodate every kind of trip in the area – from someone heading out of state to someone trying to get from store to store.

New Jersey commissioner Lettiere emphasizes that the new mission of his agency is to “build communities for the future of our children,” not just to pave or widen roads.

Long Islanders should demand the same of the New York State DOT.

More Dead — Roads Safer ?

How many bureaucrats does it take to spin bad news into good? The communications office of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration might be a good place to look for the answer.

On April 21st, NHTSA released preliminary traffic fatality data for 2004, showing an up-tick in nationwide deaths to approximately 42,800. Over the last decade, only 2002 had a higher number. Instead of sounding an alarm, NHTSA spun it into good news, reporting that fatalities **per mile traveled** dropped by 1.4 percent. The transportation system is killing more, but because Americans drive more, NHTSA claims safer roads. It doesn't ask how deepening car dependence and its dangers should be addressed.

To be fair, NHTSA's release did emphasize that total traffic fatalities increased in 2004. U.S. DOT Secretary Norman Mineta calls the problem a national epidemic, stating, “If this many people were to die from any one disease in a single year, Americans would demand a vaccine.”

It's a great sound bite, but its **impact is lost** when the feds at the same time emphasize that each individual driver's or passenger's chance of being one of 43,000 deaths has dropped a small amount. Does that make the agencies feel better about the deadly system they have helped create? Traffic crashes are the **leading cause of death** of Americans aged 3 to 33.

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Calendar

May 12, 8:30-10am. Municipal Art Society 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 12, 12:15pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 10th floor conference room. 212-878-7087. www.pcac.org.

May 19, Noon. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 10th floor conference room. 212-878-7087. www.pcac.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

May 26, Noon. NYC Transit Riders Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 5th floor conference room. 212-878-7087. www.pcac.org

June 2, Noon. Permanent Citizens Advisory Council to the MTA quarterly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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

June 28, 6-8pm. Auto-Free New York presents: *Regional Rail-linking the suburbs and the city* with George Haikalis, transportation engineer. Conf. Rm., NYPD DtownCenter, 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394. www.auto-free.org

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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