

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 501

May 31, 2005

NEWS

Divert Downtown LIRR Funds? Yes, Please

Senator Charles Schumer told newspapers a few weeks ago that he would look to **transfer the \$2 billion in federal 9/11 funds** slated for a LIRR connection to downtown if plans are not set by July 2006. This would be welcome news to transit advocates who believe that the LIRR connection is not a strong transit priority for the city or the region. Schumer would perform a huge service if he could figure out how to move the money to projects that are ready to go but are starved for funds, like the 2nd Ave subway and LIRR connection to Grand Central. The 2nd Avenue line would especially greatly improve access to Lower Manhattan and be a boon for downtown business. The hoops that the congressional delegation and the city might have to jump through to move the 9-11 money to the Second Avenue project might prove to be too numerous in the end. But expanding transit capacity where it is needed is essential, so it would be worth a try.

Earlier this month, the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA called on the state to **abandon plans for the \$6 billion downtown LIRR link** and instead focus on projects that will provide service for more riders, including the 2nd Avenue Line and LIRR East Side Access.

A Long Island connection to Lower Manhattan would likely attract very few riders compared to other projects that are much further along in planning stages, the undocumented ridership claims of its supporters notwithstanding. Some analyses have shown that even Long Islanders destined for parts of downtown might not use it, because the single station in lower Manhattan might not be any more convenient to their ultimate destination than using a subway from Penn Station or Grand Central. Long Island business leaders have certainly expressed their lack of interest in the project. They would much prefer to see the long-promised and ready to go LIRR link to Grand Central realized.

One project that would should automatically benefit from some of the federal 9-11 transit funds is the \$80 million **Cortlandt St. station** renovation. The cost of fixing the station is now inexplicably coming out of the hide of the underfunded MTA capital budget, while NYC Transit planners cut other long-suffering subway stations off of the repair list. ❧

The West Side Stadium-Transportation Connection

A NY State judge may rule on several lawsuits challenging the football stadium proposed for Manhattan's West Side this week, and a panel of state political leaders could also vote whether or not to establish a new public authority to borrow money run the stadium and related projects.

As recounted in these pages over the past year, the stadium plan has a number of significant transportation problems:

❧ The stadium's environmental impact statement presents a **poorly argued best-case scenario** for patron travel choices, claiming it will attract a far higher percentage of mass transit riders than Madison Square Garden, even though transit is much less convenient at the stadium site. Additionally, although the city's case for high transit use for the stadium implicitly rests on the difficulty of reaching the site by car and finding parking, its study predicts only minor traffic congestion impacts. If the city is wrong on these points by only a few percentage points, the West Side is in for tremendous gridlock, and their cursory treatment in the project's environmental review does not promote confidence in the city's conclusions. The Tri-State Transportation Campaign and NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign have challenged the stadium environmental impact statement in court over these issues.

❧ The stadium site is owned by the cash-strapped Metropolitan Transportation Authority, but the MTA has agreed to sell development rights on the site for a **fraction of their market value**. The Campaign, Straphangers, Transport Workers Union and good government groups have also brought a legal challenge to this political fix.

❧ The rezoning plan for Far West Side development violates parking supply restrictions that are in place in the Manhattan central business district (below 60th Street) as part of the state plan to meet **Clean Air Act** emission-reduction targets. The city plans to build a more car-oriented district there than exists elsewhere in Manhattan. The new rules could lead to construction of more stadium parking than the city admits, and are bad policy for Manhattan in any case. Neighborhood groups have challenged the

Clear Air Act violation in federal court.

✍️ The impact of the #7 subway extension on the Manhattan subway network has been poorly thought out, and will likely lead to **tremendous crowding** at transfer points like Grand Central. The MTA also appears likely to have to pay for the inevitable cost overruns experienced in the city-financed extension of the #7 subway, though it is cutting capital projects needed elsewhere in the system because of its financial straits. A recent *NY Post* legal notice said the MTA has scheduled a public hearing on land to be acquired through eminent domain for the #7. ✍️

Atlantic Yards Highlights Absence of Transport Planning in NYC's Big Projects

The "transportation" slide in Forest City Ratner's presentation to the NYC City Council last week was a great demonstration of the regard given to transportation in many of the large economic development projects under discussion in New York City.

The only acknowledgement that people will need to travel to and from the new NBA arena, 4,500 to 7,000 housing units and millions of square feet of commercial space was a map showing that numerous subway lines and a LIRR branch serve the immediate area. Problem solved. End of transportation discussion.

Atlantic Avenue-Pacific Street is the **third largest transit hub** in New York City and collects the fourth highest number of fares in Brooklyn. Many of the rush hour trains that come through it now are packed upon arrival and don't become less crowded until they have reached Manhattan. Many of the lines rate near the bottom of a number of key statistics compiled by the Straphangers Campaign. The R train ranks the lowest in interior cleanliness and second lowest in breakdown rate. The 5 train ranks the lowest in regularity of service, while both 4 and 5 trains are near the bottom in chance of finding a seat, beat out only by the ever crowded L train.

News reports have already stated that the new Target in Atlantic Center, just above Atlantic Ave station, have greatly increased transit and vehicle trips in the area. How will the transit system handle the large increase in transit ridership that will come with all of Ratner's proposed development, especially when other developments begin to take advantage of downtown Brooklyn's recent rezoning? How will the roads handle new vehicle trips resulting from the development? Neither Ratner nor the Bloomberg administration appear to have even looked at the issue. ✍️

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Corzine's Freight Plan

U.S. Senator and NJ gubernatorial hopeful Jon Corzine urged New Jersey to build on the freight boom at Ports Newark and Elizabeth by capturing business up and down the freight movement supply chain. Corzine pledged to support rail and road construction to facilitate freight movement and freight-related companies.

It is unclear for now whether the approach would accelerate or relieve the already-steady annual increase in truck traffic volume on New Jersey's roads. If done intelligently, Corzine's proposal to consolidate various aspects of freight movement, such as logistics, assembly, and distribution, in New Jersey could help reduce truck trips.

However, implementation of rail freight projects under the state's auspices must speed up if the state is going to accommodate more goods movement. The NJ DOT received \$25 mill. from the Port Authority to advance a group of port district rail projects some four years ago, but the relatively small scale, inexpensive projects have barely gotten off the drawing board, let alone moved toward construction.

Even without realizing Corzine's ambitions, the state is projected to see big increases in goods flowing through the port, and over all of its roadways. Imports in the port of NY and NJ have tripled since 1990, and truck traffic volumes will continue to soar in future years. Improved rail freight service will become more and more important for taking the edge off truck traffic growth and its various congestion, pollution and other impacts. ✍️

Bloomberg's Truck Policy a Dead End?

Mayor Bloomberg thinks relieving truck impacts in neighborhoods is good politics. We agree. A recent web-banner ad for the mayor's re-election campaign targeted to Queens voters noted the success of the NYC DOT's decision to allow some trucks onto the Grand Central Parkway between the Triborough Bridge and Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, which provided Astoria residents immediate relief from a claimed "7 million trucks."

Also in nearby Maspeth, the mayor decided that truck relief is good politics, but his position there is to oppose a rail yard that could spell significant truck traffic relief for the entire city. Maspeth residents and civic leaders are strongly against the proposed cross-harbor rail freight tunnel project, because the main yard for it would be located there and it would cause a local increase in truck volumes. During a recent visit to Maspeth, Bloomberg ended the city's support for the project (all of the work on it has been done by the NYC Economic Development Corp.), denouncing it for its potential effects in Maspeth. Unfortunately, now that his administration

is against the rail tunnel, the mayor has already run out of neighborhoods where he has anything to offer on the problem of booming traffic volumes (we support the mayor's general take on waste export strategies but believe the city is a very long way from addressing any of the practical matters for implementing it). ✍

Wanted: More Time for Route 347 Comments

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign has asked the NY State DOT to **extend the "scoping" comment period** for the environmental impact statement for a project to widen Suffolk County's Route 347 (and has questioned the adequacy of the scoping process itself). The current deadline is June 6th.

A Tri-State Transportation Campaign staffer has been contacting the DOT via the project's email address, route347@ekmail.com, since April 27, requesting the information with no success. Public information meetings were held in early May, however, the materials have not been available to people who could not attend the meetings until May 25 when the DOT finally posted the information on a webpage.

In addition, it is not clear that the materials that have been posted on the website constitute a draft scoping document, as required in the environmental review process. If scoping is conducted, a project sponsor is required to submit a draft scoping document "to all involved agencies, and make it available to any individual or interested agency that has expressed interest in writing to the lead agency." NYCRR § 617.8(b).

From a preliminary look at the Route 347 website (www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r10/ny347/features.html) it seems that DOT is proposing an old-fashioned and expensive highway widening to reduce congestion. Tri-State and other planning groups have encouraged them to **consider a more holistic approach** that improves local land use decisions and works towards a Main Street-style corridor.

NYS DOT Region 10 has a history of conducting a closed, "black-box" planning process. We hope that will change with the Route 347 project, and that the concerns of local citizens, elected, and transportation groups will be taken seriously. ✍

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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Calendar

June 1, 8am-5pm. Delaware and Raritan Canal Conference: The Past, The Present and The Promise. Municipal Land Use Center at The College of New Jersey. Ewing, NJ. Call 609-771-2832 for conference details.

June 2, 12pm. Permanent Citizens Advisory Council to the MTA quarterly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 212-878-7087. www.pcac.org

June 3, 10am. Pedestrian-Bicycle Working Group Meeting presented by NYMTC. 22nd Fl., 199 Water St, Manhattan. 212-383-25301. www.nymtc.org

June 4, 10am. SI Raid Transit's Joe Kimbrig presents: *St. George to Tottenville: Staten Island Railroad*. Take 10am Ferry from South Ferry Station. 718-694-1867 for registration info.

June 5, 8:30am. Transportation Alternatives' Tour de Brooklyn: 18 miles escorted bike tour. 212-629-8080. www.tourdebrooklyn.org

June 8, 4:30pm. MTA Public Hearing on Federal Funding Proposals for New York City Transit and its subsidiaries. Board Room, 5th Floor, 347 Madison Ave. Manhattan. 212-878-7483. www.mta.info

June 9, 12-2pm. Final Stakeholder Committee Meeting, Comprehensive Port Improvement Plan. North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, 17th Fl. Conf. Rm., One Newark Center, Newark.

June 14, 4-6pm & 7-9pm. Public Meetings on the LIRR Main Line Corridor Improvement Project, which would add a third track to LIRR Main Line and improve traffic flow. Jericho Terrace, 249 Jericho Turnpike, Mineola, NY. 718-558-7934.

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

June 16, 4-6pm. & 7-9pm. Public Meetings on the LIRR Main Line Corridor Improvement Project. Floral Terrace, 250 Jericho Turnpike, Floral Park, NY. 718-558-7934.

June 21, 4-6pm. & 7-9pm. Public Meetings on the LIRR Main Line Corridor Improvement Project. Antons Hicksville, 244 Old Country Road, Hicksville, NY. 718-558-7934.