

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Aftermath of the West Side Stadium?

Although the demise of the West Side stadium has been reported far and wide, the NY Jets organization has not relinquished its claim to the development rights above the MTA's West Side rail yard (though they have not formally closed the deal either). How or whether a football stadium end game plays out, a number of key issues for the district will continue to be major issues for the city:

- **The #7 subway extension.** The MTA is set to begin eminent domain proceedings for the project, with a hearing scheduled for June 16. The city has been willing to pay for the \$2 billion project up to now, though likely cost overruns may end up in the MTA's lap. It, and probably other mass transit improvements, will be needed to anchor any major development on the far West Side. The MTA admits that without other subway system expansion, like the 2nd Avenue subway, the #7 project could cause crowding problems in transfer stations like Grand Central Terminal.
- Whether the Jets abandon their interest in the West Side site or the dispute over the MTA's award of the development rights to a low bidder **remains mired in court** (petitioners in the recently dismissed lawsuit on the issue of the MTA's award of the development rights are appealing), the MTA's 2005-2009 capital program depends in part on reaping a strong return on this asset.
- West Side community groups have sued the city over its rezoning plan for the area because its **relaxation of parking restrictions** in effect for Manhattan south of 60th Street violates city and state plans to meet U.S. Clean Air Act goals.

The *NY Times* recently called for the city to begin its work to develop the far West Side by getting the transformation of the Farley post office building into a train station moving. The project has been agreed to in concept for years, but neither city or state leadership has exerted the pressure needed to get it moving. A *Newsday* editorial writer cast its net wider, calling for a return to solving the funding problem for the LIRR Grand Central connection and the Second Avenue subway. ❖

NJ Race: Transportation Not Spoken Here

New Jersey's now-settled candidates for governor have said little about the transportation finance crisis facing the state, which is perhaps unsurprising given the tax-relief theme that both Jon Corzine and Douglas Forrester have espoused.

However, Forrester's contention that "New Jersey does not have a revenue problem, it has a spending addiction" does not apply to transportation. The state needs to invest billions in new mass transit capacity, innovative town and city circulation plans and basic infrastructure upkeep to create the capacity for growth and quality of life improvements in the 21st Century, but its transportation fund is close to dead broke. By the middle of next year, all of the gas taxes collected for transportation will be devoted to paying off debt for past projects.

To his credit, Forrester avoided taking a "no" position on raising the state gas tax during the debates for the Republican nomination (*MTR* #500). Corzine's main contribution on transportation has been a call for more freight industry development near the north Jersey ports, similar in concept to the "Portfields" initiative begun by the Port Authority and NJ agencies (*MTR* #'s 501, 496). However, as U.S. Senator, Corzine has also been a significant supporter of building additional commuter rail tunnels between New Jersey and Manhattan. ❖

High Speed for Parkway Widening Plan

In May, Acting Governor Codey announced he would seek to widen the Garden State Parkway through a 17-mile stretch of Ocean County. The Turnpike Authority, which oversees the Parkway, claimed in a public statement that a toll hike will not be necessary to pay for the new road capacity. According to the *Bergen Record*, a restructuring of up to \$1.2 billion of the Parkway's debt will enable the agency to borrow an additional \$135 million to pay for the project. Given the fiscal crisis facing the state's Transportation Trust Fund, and New Jersey in general, it is surprising that there has been **little discussion** as to whether or not this project is the best way to spend transportation dollars. \$150 million also seems like a low estimate for such a large expansion project.

The widening would add a travel lane and shoulder in both directions of the parkway between Interchange 80 in Toms River and Interchange 63 in Manhawkin. The proposal would also make the Barnegat toll plaza a one-way Express E-ZPass plaza.

According to the Turnpike Authority, construction on the project is scheduled to begin in 2007 and be completed by the 2009 "beach season." With construction scheduled to begin in less than two years, the bonding process is set for the coming months, and a public process to review project details will commence almost immediately thereafter. The fast timeline and scope of the project stands in stark contrast to New Jersey Department of Transportation's increasing interest in local cooperation and for more sustainable congestion relief alternatives to road widening. ❖

More Time for Route 347 Comments

NY State DOT has extended the public comment period for the Route 347 Safety and Mobility project until July 5th, 2005. This was welcome news to Tri-State who officially requested an extension a few weeks ago.

Project documents on DOT's website indicate that it is looking to build a scaled back version of the agency's 2000 proposal. The plan still seeks to add lanes to 347, but proposes only 3 new bridges over problem intersections, rather than the original 22 proposed in the 2000 plan.

But simply **adding new lanes** will have **little to no benefit** if local land use controls are not put into place. Transportation agencies across the country have realized that comprehensive planning is necessary to help reduce car trips along congested corridors. This can mean increasing connections in local street grids, building pedestrian walkways between stores, or putting in multi-level stores in a designated central area. The Tri-State Campaign is requesting that the DOT look at the congestion implications of a variety of build out scenarios, from smart growth, compact design to sprawling, low density development.

The NYMTC transportation improvement program allocates over \$120 million for improvements to Route 347 between 2006 and 2010. Full project documents are available at www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r10/ny347/index.html ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Transport Workers Union Endorses Ferrer for NYC Mayor

Last month, Transport Workers Union Local 100 gave its mayoral endorsement to Democrat Fernando Ferrer, a repeat from the 2001 mayoral race. Roger Toussaint, Local 100 president, told the *Daily News* that Mayor Bloomberg has not done enough to fund the transit system. ❖

Limited Input for NYC Rapid Bus Study

In a response to request by several organizations, including the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, that the NYC bus rapid transit study convene a stakeholders advisory group, NYC transportation commissioner Iris Weinshall replied that this was not possible since the project team must be kept to a "manageable size." She noted that a technical advisory committee already had a dozen agencies to provide input, and the study will continue to conduct public outreach at certain periods.

The Campaign maintains that this study would yield far better, and **more customer-oriented results** if independent groups and a few local groups were involved in a stakeholders group, especially because a policy area like speeding up buses is rife with opportunities for bureaucracies to settle for half-measures.

In May, the study saw an announcement from state and city officials that the list of potential rapid bus corridors has now been refined to 15, plus two related State DOT projects for the Cross Bronx and Staten Island Expressways. The initial corridors chosen seem to make sense, targeting congested avenues, some of which are beyond the reach of the subway system. Some possible routes are Northern Blvd in Queens, Flatlands Ave in Brooklyn, Hylan Blvd in Staten Island, 1st/2nd Aves in Manhattan, and Cross Bronx Expressway in the Bronx.

The project team says it will develop service plans specific to each corridor over the summer, followed by another round of public outreach meetings. Phase II of the study is intended to whittle the list down to five – one for each borough.

The NYC rapid bus website is online: www.mta.info/mta/planning/brt ❖

CT Preservationists Sue to Save Parkway

The Merritt Parkway Conservancy and the National Trust for Historic Preservation filed a lawsuit last week in federal court to stop the construction of an interchange between Merritt Parkway and U.S. Route 7 in Norwalk, CT.

The preservation groups state that the Merritt Parkway is a nationally recognized historic site and that constructing the \$98 million interchange will harm the Parkway's scenery and bridges, cause traf-

fic congestion, and cost too much. The suit is filed against the Federal Highway Administration to stop it from providing funds for the project and claims that the FHWA did not require the Connecticut Department of Transportation to create alternative proposals that would not harm the Parkway.

According to the *Stamford Advocate*, the Merritt Parkway Conservancy has developed alternative plans that would cost less, and still connect the Parkway and Route 7. After appealing to Governor Rell, "informational" hearings were held on the interchange. But ConnDOT stated that its plans had already been in place for 10 years, and that it intended to proceed. ❖

Small Step Toward Pedestrian Safety

A new law increasing the fine on motorists who **violate crosswalks** went into effect on June 2. Drivers who get caught by police failing to yield to a pedestrian crossing the street in a marked crosswalk will be charged \$100, up from \$50.

S. 251, legislation requiring the DOT to ban right turn on red at unsafe intersections, increase signage at cross walks and encourage pedestrian safety when distributing local aid funds, was passed recently by the Assembly. The legislation awaits approval from the Governor's office before becoming law.

However, A. 2605, legislation requiring motorists to stop for pedestrians waiting to enter crosswalks, has not moved since it was passed by the Assembly last winter. Some observers in Trenton say that urban Democrats in the State Senate are holding the bill up because they fear the measure will add to traffic congestion. The concern seems unfounded, however, since the measure would not apply to signalized intersections.

Two recent reports by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign highlighted the need for more attention to bike and pedestrian programs in the state. One found that municipal requests for bike and pedestrian projects far outweighs state allocations. (*MTR #499* and *MTR #494*) Another found the pedestrian fatality rates have been stagnant or increased over the past decade, increasing 4% from 2003 to 2004.

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TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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MTR#502

Contributing: Menaka Mohan, Damien Newton, Teresa Toro

Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kate Slevin

350 West 31st Street #802, New York, NY 10001 tel. (212) 268-7474 fax (212) 268-7333 tstc@tstc.org

Calendar

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, 718-558-7934. <http://www.mta.info/mta/planning/mainline/>

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, 1-5pm. NYC Department of Transportation *Downtown Brooklyn Transportation Blueprint* planning charette. Brooklyn Borough Hall, 2nd Floor, Courtroom, Brooklyn, NY. 718-222-7271. www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/motorist/downtownblueprint.html

June 16, 4-6pm. & 7-9pm. Public Meetings on the LIRR Main Line Corridor Improvement Project. Floral Terrace, 250 Jericho Turnpike, Floral Park. See June 14 for more info.

June 16, 6:30pm. Stakeholders Advisory Committee meeting on Kosciuszko Bridge Project. Jennings Hall, 260 Powers St., Brooklyn. 718-482-4683

June 20, 9am. Westchester County's Department of Transportation presents: *Mobility for an Aging Population*. Westchester County Center, White Plains, NY. 914-813-6425.

June 21, 4-6pm. & 7-9pm. Public Meeting on the LIRR Main Line Corridor Improvement Project. Antuns Hicksville, 244 Old Country Road, Hicksville, NY. See June 14 for more info.

June 28, 6-8pm. Auto-Free New York: *Regional Rail-linking the suburbs and the city*, Conf. Rm., NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394. www.auto-free.org

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