

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Casting for One-Shots in New Jersey

According to reports by the Associated Press and *Bergen Record*, Acting Governor Codey is considering closing the state's massive transportation deficit in the short term by raising the gas tax "temporarily" before **leasing out all or parts of the state's toll roads** — the New Jersey Turnpike and/or the Garden State Parkway. Further details were not available and a spokesperson for the governor said that plans to replenish the state Transportation Trust Fund would be discussed after the state budget is passed on June 30<sup>th</sup>.

As we wrote in January, when Governor Codey first mooted the idea (MTR #488), the devil would be in the details and these have been in short supply. The state needs to show citizens how much toll money they would likely pay, including profits to the toll road management company, over the duration of the lease, and compare that to what the state could use a similar amount for (after toll road costs). How high would toll rates go? Should NJ's drivers pay higher tolls to provide a return on capital to investors or to provide needed investments in the state transportation system?

New Jerseyans need especially to watch out for a fix designed to let politicians squirm out of the **deep hole** they have dug themselves over transportation finance, but fails to solve the underlying borrow-and-spend nature of New Jersey transportation finance. What if a 99-year lease only buys the state ten years worth of transportation funding? If so, it's a terrible deal for New Jersey citizens and motorists. As the *Home News Tribune* editorial page concluded this weekend, "It's unlikely that any lease deal would cover 50 years of road building and repair in New Jersey, and so the state essentially would be making itself poorer over time.

A private operator would have more leeway to raise toll rates and experiment with various forms of congestion pricing. But it would also have a major incentive to ensure that there is as much traffic as possible on the highways it manages. It might thus be expected to propose road expansion at times. On the other hand, the at-capacity nature of the toll roads at many times could make would-be investors think twice, since prospects for attracting new "customers" is relatively limited. ❖

### Better Roads and Planning ...

The New York State transportation department has in recent years undertaken a self-transformation, hoping to better integrate major features of transportation planning and operations in the Empire State (MTR #488). Indeed, such a transformation was endorsed and spelled out in some detail in *Trouble Ahead*, a report the NY State DOT requested from a panel appointed in 2004 by then-commissioner Joseph Boardman.

In addition to underscoring the financing difficulties facing NY State's road and transit systems, the paper called for a closer working relationship between the Department and municipalities and metropolitan planning organizations, and specifically urged that the NY State DOT assume a stronger role in working with communities, governments and developers on **land use decisions** that may have big transportation consequences.

"NYS DOT must lead the effort to link land use and transportation decisions...NYS DOT must adopt policies and practices that lead to local land use decisions that encourage open space preservation, make provisions for pedestrians and cyclists, and revitalize and ensure denser developments... If the State adds capacity to local highways to offset poor land use planning, this only rewards poor decision-making and encourages poor land use planning to continue," said the report.

That direction is very similar to that recently taken by the New Jersey DOT, which is concertedly engaging municipalities in new transportation strategies and discussions over locations for new development that make sense from a transportation point of view. Suffolk County departments have also begun work with communities on coordinated land use and transportation plans in corridors that need work.

Unfortunately, elements within NY State DOT still make a virtue out of doing the opposite. A spokesperson for NYSDOT's Long Island office told the *NY Times* last weekend, in a piece about plans to widen NY Route 347, that land use planning was not part of the DOT's world. "That is **absolutely out of our scope**," she told the paper. The *Times* characterized the DOT's position as viewing itself as having "no business pressuring municipalities on land use and zoning."

Route 347 runs through a part of Suffolk County that is choking on traffic and badly needs better planning for future growth. The DOT's project to invest over \$100 million in Route 347 provides a great opportunity to begin such a process.

It's unclear whether the DOT's pointed stand on Long Island against its own recent recommendations reflects the recent departure of Commissioner Boardman, who now heads the Federal Railroad Administration, and the absence of clear leadership at the agency, or if it is more reflective of resistance to change at the regional level. The NYSDOT has long been balkanized across 11 regional offices that in many cases seem to function as mini-departments under little control from Albany. ❖

### ...Better Transit Needed on Long Island

Starting today, the LIRR will be holding three public meetings for its Main Line Corridor Improvement project. The LIRR is considering the addition of a third track to the LIRR's Main Line and eliminating five street level railroad crossing along a 11.5 mile corridor from Queens Village to Hicksville. The meetings begin the environmental review process.

According to LIRR, the project would increase transit service by 28% to meet anticipated customer demand by 2025. It would especially benefit those "reverse" commuters who currently face **up to two hour waits** as all trains travel westbound in the morning and eastbound in the evening peaks. A recent *Newsday* story noted that 120,000 people commute from the city to work in jobs on Long Island every day. LIRR project documents say more transit will help Long Island communities become more attractive to young, working homeowners and help keep the Island's youth at home. The project would eliminate grade crossings at Covert Ave, 12<sup>th</sup> Street, New Hyde Park Road, School Street, and Urban Avenue. These would be replaced with bridges or underpasses to improve local traffic circulation even as train volumes on the Main Line increase.

The Campaign, in a coalition with fourteen other Long Island environmental, transit and business groups, strongly supports this project as an important foundation for transit ridership growth and transit-oriented economic development. Hearing details are provided in our calendar, and written comments are due August 31 to Peter Palermo, LIRR Public Affairs, Jamaica Station-1131, Jamaica, New York 11435. [www.mta.info/mta/planning/mainline/](http://www.mta.info/mta/planning/mainline/). ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

[www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

### Crash Data: *Newsday* Wins in Court

The *Associated Press* reported this week that the NY State Court of Appeals has ruled that *Newsday's* 3-year old freedom-of-information request to the State DOT for NY City's and Long Island's **most dangerous intersections** must be granted. State DOT officials argued that making such information available could lead to litigation against the state – an argument Judge Robert Smith disagreed with. In his written decision, Judge Smith noted: "No one disputes that *Newsday's* purpose in making its FOIL request was simply to gather news."

At press time, the DOT had not announced whether it would appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. ❖

### NJ Transit Meadowlands Plan: Any Riders Expected?

Calls for an examination of the transit needs and opportunities for the Meadowlands continue to go only partially heeded as plans for the Sports Complex continue to advance. A hearing on a Preliminary Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for a rail spur from the Pascack Valley Line to the complex will be held on Thursday (see calendar section).

Transportation activists, Bergen County municipalities (see *MTR* #498) and the Hudson County Board of Freeholders have all formally asked for a review of **all transportation and transit options** for the sports complex in recent months. Despite the fact that huge numbers of buses run past the site every day, almost no consideration for bus access from either Manhattan or New Jersey locales has been examined.

The rail spur PEIS reinforces the notion that the project is a weak half-measure mainly intended to allow Xanadu boosters to say they have "included mass transit." Nothing except for the commuter rail project are considered as viable alternatives, in large part because the self-fulfilling "project description" calls for a commuter rail link.

Specifically regarding the rail project, two key elements are missing from the PEIS. The first is **ridership estimates** for the rail line. While there is discussion of the need for transit to alleviate congestion, the statement seems exceedingly hollow when the PEIS makes no mention of how many people are expected to use the rail spur. Thus, the document does not permit any evaluation of whether the project represents good money after bad and is perhaps a sop to the overall lack of transportation planning related to the Xanadu endeavor.

Secondly, there is no discussion of **internal mobility** — pedestrian ways or expanded internal shuttle trips at the sprawling site. Locating the train station on the edge of huge parking lots creates a big

disincentive for anyone with a choice of travel options to ride the train. Given the traffic that will be generated by Xanadu and a new Giants Stadium, it is important that there be transit to the site. However, all options need to be thought through completely and should be examined alongside one another. ❖

### More Payoff from Pricing

Bicycling in London has increased dramatically in recent years. Local officials attribute some of the boom to the reduction in central city traffic by the city's congestion charge of £5 (soon to rise to £8), and to long-term efforts to accommodate cyclists on city streets and roads. Transport for London recently reported that **bicycle trips had increased 67%** since May 2000. At a recent conference organized by the London Cycling Campaign, Mayor Ken Livingstone urged companies to capitalize on the bike boom by installing more bicycle parking. He said that while cycling was declining in the United Kingdom as a whole, London is on track for an 80% increase in bike trips by 2010. A Transport for London official said the city was aiming for a 200% increase in bike ridership by 2020.

The traffic-clearing effect of central London's congestion charge has also been a boon for the efficiency and attractiveness of the city's bus system. Some of the motoring charge is invested in buses, and the relative lack of congestion allows the bus system to function. ❖

### Bike Parking for Brooklyn

In New York City, transportation officials are beginning to focus bike parking installations where they are most needed. The NYC DOT will install 53 new bike racks in Williamsburg, Brooklyn in response to demand from the local planning board, occasioned in turn by huge rates of general cycling and by bike-and-ride trips to the Bedford Avenue subway station.

In some phases of its existence, the DOT's City-Racks parking program spread itself thinly across the city. It is probably a better use of resources and demonstration of the program's potential to focus efforts more heavily in districts with more concentrated bike use, as now seems to be the case. ❖

## TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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## Calendar

**June 16**, 10am, 2pm, 7pm. Public Hearing on NJ Transit's PEIS for Pascack Valley Line Rail Spur to Meadowlands Sports Complex. Offices of the Meadowlands Commission Lyndhurst, NJ. 201-460-4627.

**June 16**, 1-5pm. NYC Department of Transportation presents, *Downtown Brooklyn Transportation Blueprint*, a planning charette. Brooklyn Borough Hall, 2nd Floor, Courtroom, Brooklyn, NY. 718-222-7271. [www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/motorist/downtownblueprint.html](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/motorist/downtownblueprint.html)

**June 16**, 4-6pm. & 7-9pm. Public Meeting on LIRR Main Line Corridor Improvement Project, which would add a third track to LIRR Main Line to improve traffic flow. Floral Terrace, 250 Jericho Turnpike, Floral Park, NY. 718-558-7934.

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

**June 16**, 4-8pm. MTA Public Hearing on eminent domain property acquisition for No. 7 Subway Extension. Fashion Institute of Technology, Haft Auditorium, 27th and 7th Ave., Manhattan. 212-788-0705.

**June 20**, 9am. Westchester County Dept. of Transportation presents: *Mobility for an Aging Population*. Westchester County Center, White Plains. Caryl Weinstein 914-813-6425.

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

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

**June 29**, 5:30-7:30pm. Regional Citizens' liason Committee Meeting: Access to the Region's Core Draft Environmental Impact Statement. NJTPA One Newark Center, 17th Fl., Newark, NJ. 973-491-8912.

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