

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 506

July 25, 2005

## NEWS

### 2nd London Bombings Ripple Through Region

Senator Charles Schumer says eligible uses for federal transit security funding should be expanded to allow for more police presence in transit systems (see *MTR #505*), as well as “infrastructure hardening” work. He called on Congress to revisit transit security funding even though the Senate rejected an amendment to a security appropriations bill for that purpose last week.

Meanwhile, the NYPD/MTA policy of searching transit riders’ bags, adopted also by NJ Transit and the Port Authority over the weekend, could be headed for litigation. The NY Civil Liberties Union opposes the policy and may be preparing a lawsuit charging violation of the Constitution’s 4th Amendment ([www.nyclu.org](http://www.nyclu.org)). The Straphangers Campaign’s Gene Russianoff told reporters that “you have the same odds of protecting people through random searches as you do of winning lotto.” ❖

### Putting the Trust Back in Trust Fund

The Regional Plan Association report released July 11th in association with the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, AAA, and Voorhes Transportation Institute (see *MTR #505*) identifies a set of **major reforms** the state of New Jersey must enact to revitalize the state’s Transportation Trust Fund:

- ◆ Fully fund NJ DOT and NJ TRANSIT operating budgets and eliminate capital-to-operating transfers, ending the practice of raiding construction and maintenance budgets to pay for day-to-day operating expenses;
- ◆ Constitutionally dedicate all originally intended resources to the Trust Fund, ending leakage to the general fund and guaranteeing that transportation funds are used for transportation projects;
- ◆ Restore a reasonable level of borrowing capacity to transportation finance by limiting bond maturities to ten years until fiscal stability is restored;
- ◆ 6 month reports by the Division of Taxation to clarify amounts collected from fuel taxes and other transportation-related revenue sources;
- ◆ Create an independent financial policy review committee to provide accountability and oversight.

The report warns against looking to one revenue stream to be the “silver bullet” to fix New Jersey’s transportation finances. ❖

### Subway Tunnel for LIRR-Downtown Link ? Fuhgeddaboutit

Brooklyn elected officials warned against any attempt to appropriate subway infrastructure for the Lower Manhattan-Jamaica/JFK Airport rail project under consideration by the MTA, Port Authority and NYC agencies.

Talk of taking a subway tunnel and adapting it for suburban commuter trains has been in the air since the idea of a Long Island Rail Road line to lower Manhattan became a fixation for downtown business leaders and Governor Pataki. A hearing for the environmental impact statement that has just begun for the idea is considering the use of the Montague Street subway tunnel — now used by the M and R subway lines — to reach lower Manhattan from the LIRR terminal at Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues.

Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz called for **construction of a new tunnel** instead, noting that Brooklyn’s transit service is already inadequate and the proposed rail link should be developed to accommodate growth in Brooklyn. Assemblywoman Joan Millman and Councilman David Yassky also opposed any use of existing Brooklyn subway capacity to facilitate the project.

It is also unclear whether the project would cause the closure of Brooklyn LIRR stations at Nostrand Avenue and East New York.

The Tri-State Campaign noted that the proposed rail link is likely to serve a relatively small number of air travelers and Long Island commuters. “This project is not at all in demand on Long Island. Meanwhile, it has the potential to shrink the mass transit system available to most Brooklynites while improving it for a small handful. Is that what we want?” asked the Campaign’s Teresa Toro.

The Campaign also cited the **high cost and low priority** of this project in comparison to other MTA system expansion projects like the Second Avenue subway and LIRR East Side access — it could break the already under-funded MTA capital program, and create pressure on the Port Authority’s budget and compete for funding with the new commuter rail tunnel between New Jersey and Manhattan. The rail link proposal, and contact information for submitting comments (deadline September 17), are online: [www.mta.info/mta/planning/lmlink/index.html](http://www.mta.info/mta/planning/lmlink/index.html) ❖

## Meadowlands Can Begin Collecting Transportation Impact Fees

Thanks to recently approved legislation, developers in the 14 municipalities surrounding the Meadowlands will have to pay impact fees to the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission to help cover some of the burden new development could impose on the already stressed transportation system.

The legislation provides a **good model for other places throughout the region** with financially strapped transportation agencies and ambitious economic development schemes.

It creates a transportation planning district and fund administered by the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission and a new Meadowlands Transportation Planning Board. The amount of the each impact fee will be determined by a specific formula, based on growth and development projections, including factors like vehicle trips generated by new development, the square footage of new buildings and numbers of parking spaces. Developers submitting a plan for reducing automobile trips during rush hours will receive discounts, and affordable housing units are exempt from the fees.

Officials with the Meadowlands Commission claim the money collected will amount to “seed money” to show state and federal decision makers that the region is serious about transportation projects and can provide a partial match to outside funds. Elected officials who supported the legislation pointed to the uncertainty of future funding at the federal and state levels.

Unfortunately, the legislation comes too late to compel the Mills/Mack Cali partnership to provide funds to help cover the transportation needs of the Xanadu mega-mall. Public agencies plan to spend tens of millions for road and rail access to the site. ❖

## G-Train Tussles

Fort Greene residents won a victory in June when NYC Transit reopened a G-train subway entrance at South Portland Ave. According to the *NY Times*, the entrance has been closed for 20 years. With Fort Greene and nearby areas of Brooklyn quickly changing, local residents sent Transit 350 letters asking that it be reopened, and the agency listened.

Other G riders aren't so lucky. The *Queens Chronicle* reported that the G has stopped at Court Square on weekends and nights for months, though it is supposed to travel to 71<sup>st</sup>/Continental Ave. at those times. In the MTA's 2005 budget, it cut most of this Queens portion of the route. An outcry forced a restoration, at least on paper. Riders now wonder whether the MTA is implementing its original plan but claiming it as temporary. The MTA says the closure is due to station rehabilitation work, and that service will be out for “quite a while.” ❖

## City Claims Big Parking Increase Won't Cause More Yankees Traffic

Bronx residents voiced concerns about the transportation impacts of the NY Yankees' proposed new stadium at public meetings last week.

Representatives for **Borough President Adolfo Carrión** and Assemblyman Michael Benjamin read statements expressing cautious optimism about the project, but raised traffic and transit issues.

A community board spokesperson said that there were already terrible traffic congestion problems during and after ball games. Others were critical of the additional parking garages.

The Tri-State Campaign **questioned the dramatic increase in parking**, and called for a greater investment in mass transit.

Although the new stadium has fewer seats, the new Yankee Stadium plan would add a lot of parking – from 7,079 spaces today to 11,044 within a ½ mile radius of the stadium. In NYC's parking-constrained environment, these spaces will be used. It seems beyond dispute that the new stadium as planned will generate more car trips than the old.

But according to the draft scoping document, because the project will reduce seating capacity slightly, the official prediction is that it will “not generate additional peak hour vehicle trips than those already coming to the area for the existing stadium.” The number of seats is irrelevant, whereas **parking capacity** is a key determinant of decisions to drive in a city with ample mass transit options.

Failing to account for induced traffic caused by the construction of four new parking garages on already congested roadways would be a serious flaw in the EIS. Assumptions about traffic influence findings on congestion, air quality, and noise. Any mitigation measures based on faulty traffic, air quality, and noise impacts will not be sufficient. The city owes it to the surrounding community that will be exposed to these impacts to do a legitimate, CEQR-compliant study of these impacts.

Rather than creating a more car-dependent facility, why not invest in mass transit? Interestingly, NY State DOT's Bronx Arterial Needs study found that many people who usually commute via Metro-North drive to Yankees games so they don't have to return to Grand Central or 125<sup>th</sup> Street to catch a train. Unfortunately, proposals to build a Metro-North station at Yankee stadium have languished for years. Instead of displacing parkland for parking, why can't the Yankees bring the Metro-North project to fruition?

Written comments may be submitted through August 17, 2005 to Joshua Laird, Chief of Planning, NYC Dept. of Parks & Recreation, The Arsenal, Central Park, NYC 10021. ❖

## LIRR Third Track Project Survives

The MTA capital program approved by the NY State legislature includes the LIRR “Main Line Corridor Improvement Project” **fully funded**. The project would add another track to the Main Line roughly between Bellerose and Hicksville, and eliminate several street-level railroad crossings which would reduce local congestion. It’s an important project for Long Island residents, workers and employers, including those who “reverse commute,” east in the morning or west in the evening.

Some local community members who opposed the plan tried to convince the Long Island state legislative delegation to remove the transit aspect of the project while moving forward with the grade crossing elimination work.

But the track addition and grade crossing eliminations will be studied as one project. The Tri-State Campaign and the other 14 organizations that comprise the LIRR Main Line Coalition wrote to the state delegation and MTA to show support as the capital program was debated. ❖

## Anti-Rail Bill Morphs in Trenton

Legislation that would have put a one year freeze on all state funded short line rail expansion plans was watered down by New Jersey’s Senate Transportation Committee recently. After the Assembly (MTR #480) narrowed the focus of the legislation to only effect the reactivation of the Rahway and Staten Island lines in Union County and another line in Middlesex County; the Senate committee removed the “Union County” provision. The legislation now would basically stall work on one rail line, for one year.

Ironically, this legislation was first proposed by Senator Kean (R-Union) and his Assembly counterparts Eric Munoz and Jon Bramnick to stall construction on the freight rail lines that would run through Union while a “Smart Freight Growth” study was completed. After protests from railroads and rail advocates that they were pursuing a state-wide solution to a local concern; the bill was pared down to just the Union and Middlesex projects.

A second irony is that while truck traffic continues to grow, the NJDOT has been so slow in moving forward with needed rail improvements that had this bill been passed when it was proposed in May of 2004, it would have expired with little noticeable impact on the reactivation of these rail lines. ❖

## The High Cost of Free Parking Part II — The Problem With Zoning

*The second in our serial look at Donald Shoup’s recent opus, [The High Cost of Free Parking](#).*

Zoning codes dictate the number of parking spaces required for each type of land use. According to the American Planning Association, cities set parking requirements for at least 662 different land uses – everything from “adult entertainment” establishments to nunneries (e.g. 1 space per patron, plus 1 space per employee on the largest working shift for adult entertainment and 1 space per 10 nuns for the nunnery). Shoup says the requirements are often simply **pulled out of thin air**. There are two primary sources for these requirements: the parking requirements of neighboring communities and the Institute of Transportation Engineers’ (ITE) *Parking Generation* manual. Both sources are problematic, but the second is all the more troubling in its faults because it purports to be scientific.

*Parking Generation* recommends the exact number of parking spaces needed per square foot for dozens of different land uses, and supports those figures with scatter plots and studies. But Shoup shows that the recommendations are in fact derived from far too few studies to be reliable. Half of the parking generation rates are based on four or fewer studies and 22 percent are based on a single study. But even if an adequate number of studies had been analyzed, the rates would still be skewed high because nearly all of the studies examine the demand for *free* parking during times of peak demand in suburban locations with few, if any, alternatives to driving. Shoup compares this to the demand for free pizza. The slices go a lot more quickly if they are free than if they are sold at an appropriate price.

Shoup says “city planners sometimes mistake Pandora’s box for a toolkit.” With the best of intentions, planners have “cured” parking shortages with a tonic that has made matters worse. The practice of setting off-street parking requirements in city zoning codes has become fully entrenched. Even for low-income housing projects where a majority of residents can’t afford a private vehicle, zoning codes require vast parking lots to meet a demand that will never materialize. Those lots not only add to the cost of a development, they also require that land which could otherwise be used for housing (or landscaping, etc). Overall, parking requirements increase the cost and diminish the supply of housing, and this effect is not limited just to low-income developments. A San Francisco study found that requirements for **off-street parking increased housing prices by an average of \$47,000** and increased the household income necessary to purchase a house from \$67,000 annually to \$76,000.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

Shoup calculates that parking requirements impose a public subsidy for drivers that came to at least **\$127 billion in 2002** (total annual land, capital and operating costs of U.S. off-street parking) and may be closer to \$374 billion. For comparison, in 2002 federal Medicare spending was \$231 billion and for the military was \$349 billion. Shoup calculates that the value of off-street parking, at approximately \$12,000 per vehicle, roughly equals the total capital cost of all vehicles plus all roads in the U.S..

On a per-mile driven basis, the subsidy for parking amounts to between 5 and 14 cents. Shoup calculates that gasoline taxes would have to be raised by \$1.27 to \$3.74 per gallon to offset this subsidy, and notes that charging appropriately for parking may be as, or even more effective, not to mention technologically simpler, than other pricing techniques aimed at reducing driving. He cites a study of Boston finds that a \$1 parking surcharge would roughly double the average traffic speed in the central business district, the same benefit that would result from a \$1 congestion fee.

Although part three of *The High Cost of Free Parking* is dedicated to Shoup's recommendations, in part one he discusses two solutions which could be implemented relatively easily in the near term: **fees in lieu of parking requirements**, and offering developers the option to **reduce travel demand** as an alternative to building a portion of required parking. Fees in lieu of parking requirements allow cities to collect funds from developers to build shared parking facilities. The idea has significant benefits for urban design, largely because it would consolidate parking rather than requiring each establishment to provide a separate lot. Further, because different land uses require parking during different times of the day, a smaller amount of parking can be shared among several establishments.

The second solution, reducing demand, offers developers a cost-effective alternative to building more parking. Shoup suggests that employers or developers can offer "eco-passes" as a way to encourage transit use, walking, or bicycling instead of driving. Other demand reduction options are "cash-out parking" (a travel demand management technique which Shoup conceived of years ago) whereby employers offer workers cash in lieu of a free parking space (the employee can spend it to park, or pocket it if another commuting means is available) and car-sharing. Beyond the obvious benefit of diminishing the need for parking and freeing up land for higher end uses, this approach reduces vehicle trips, cutting air pollution, lowering oil consumption, and easing congestion. ❖

MTR#506

Contributing: Michelle Enrst, 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](http://tstc@tstc.org)

## TSTC Turns Ten — Save the Date!

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the evening of **Thursday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005**. Please join us as we honor three who have been vital to our creation, growth, and success: Janine Bauer, James T.B. Tripp, and Edward Skloot. The event will be held in Manhattan at the Carriage House Center for the Arts from 6:30 until 8:30.

A separate New Jersey 10-year anniversary celebration will be held later in the year.

Please stay tuned for further details about both events. If you are interested in sponsorship opportunities, please contact Kate Slevin at 212-268-7474.

## Calendar

**July 26**, 6pm. Auto-Free New York presents a walking tour of Williamsburg/Greenpoint. Token Booth, Bedford Ave entrance, L Train Bedford Ave, 212-475-3394. [www.auto-free.org](http://www.auto-free.org).

**July 27**, 9:30am, MTA Board Meeting, 347 Madison Ave, 5th floor board room. [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info).

**July 28**, Noon, NYC Transit Riders Council meeting, Introduction of Millard Seay, NYCT Sr. Vice President, 347 Madison Ave, 5th floor board room, 212-878-7087, [mail@pcac.org](mailto:mail@pcac.org).

**August 23**, 6pm. Auto-Free New York presents a walking tour of *W. 42nd Street-light rail and the Hudson Yards*. 42nd St entrance, Conde Nast Bldg., east of Broadway, Manhattan. 212-475-3394. [www.auto-free.org](http://www.auto-free.org)

**August 11**, 12:15 - 2:00 PM. Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council monthly meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue (between 44th & 45th Streets), 10th Floor Conference Room. [mail@lirrcc.org](mailto:mail@lirrcc.org) or 212 878 7087.

**August 18**, 12-2pm. Metro-North Railroad Comuter Council monthly meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Conference Room. [mail@mnrcc.org](mailto:mail@mnrcc.org) or 212 878 7087.

**September 11**, Transportation Alternatives' NYC Century Bike Tour, 2005 15-,55-,75-,100-mile routes For more information and to sign up go to [www.NYCcentury.org](http://www.NYCcentury.org).

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region