

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

North Jersey Plan Reinforces Smart Transportation Trends

The North Jersey Transportation and Planning Authority's draft long range plan, "Access and Mobility 2030" endorses and promotes the smart growth and fix-it-first priorities pursued recently by New Jersey DOT. It also urges complete financing of the state's transportation operating deficits.

Much of the material in "Access and Mobility 2030" shows that the reforms taking place at the state DOT are acknowledged and supported at regional and county levels. In the plan, the NJTPA proposes to increase funding for freight rail projects (by 20%), bicycle and pedestrian projects (by 25%) and reduce the amount spent on highway and road expansion (to less than 2.5% of the total budget).

The report also discusses the state's transportation budget crisis. While it doesn't recommend a funding source to refuel the Transportation Trust Fund, it recognizes that in addition to refueling the Trust Fund, the state will still be short-selling transportation without closing the massive operating deficits at the DOT and NJ Transit. Echoing the call of transit advocates at this year's NJ Transit fare hike hearings, the NJTPA calls for "a **stable funding mechanism for transit operations** that will yield sufficient operating revenues..."

Lastly, the report endorses NJ DOT's recent efforts to link land use and transportation planning at local and regional levels. This bodes well for DOT projects that attempt to use better planning to promote sustainable congestion relief, as opposed to the short term fix of conventional highway widening. ❖

TSTC Turns Ten — Save the Date!

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign will celebrate its 10th anniversary on the evening of:

Thursday, September 29th, 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.

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

Watch your mailboxes for invitations! For sponsorship opportunities, please call 212-268-7474 or email kates@tstc.org. ❖

City Dems Queried on Congestion Pricing

All the democratic candidates for mayor of New York said they **did not favor East River bridge tolls** during a debate this past Tuesday. The glass-half-full interpretation of the exchange is that it is difficult for political candidates to favor new tolls or charges for motorists, but that the successful example of congestion charging in London has put the issue permanently on the agenda for large, traffic-clogged cities like New York. The question is when a leader like London mayor Ken Livingstone will appear and take hold of pricing as a transportation and quality of life solution. If one of the contending Democrats is elected, the answer for New York may be: sometime after 2009.

The less optimistic perspective acknowledges that discourse on traffic management and road pricing in much of the city's top political circles exists on a spectrum ranging from garbled to clueless. None of the candidates seemed aware that the Port Authority already has implemented congestion pricing on its NYC-NJ crossings, for instance.

Ferrer's comments ricocheted from "higher MTA tolls are appropriate" and "we've got to get people to use mass transit" to "free East River bridges are essential for many peoples' livelihoods." No thought was apparently given to the effects of congestion on the livelihood of a tradesperson who needs to drive about town. His statement that London is not as big or complex as New York reportedly had the audience scratching their heads.

Miller said some economic incentives could be appropriate for influencing truck traffic before changing the subject to investing in mass transit by implementing a transit-dedicated commuter tax. Interestingly, Miller noted that "I can't tell you how many people come up to me every day and say: Just get me to work on time. That's it. Just get me to work on time," but did not reflect on how chronic traffic congestion is a major factor in that problem for a great many New Yorkers, motorists and bus riders alike.

Weiner called East River tolls "a regressive tax on middle class New Yorkers in Brooklyn and Queens and Staten Island" without any reference to the fact that those who drive over the bridges **earn more than \$14,000** on average than those who do not.

Weiner said the city should invest in ferries like his Rockaways-Manhattan plan. He also said there should be some incentive for trucks serving large establishments to deliver at night. His comment that more New Yorkers should drive hybrid-power vehicles was not germane to a discussion about traffic congestion.

C. Virginia Fields said she was open to congestion pricing, but offered no specifics and said she opposed East River bridge tolls.

In the debate, all of the candidates advocated more effort on **mass transit security** (see below). Weiner said he would change the system that gives the city a small minority on the MTA board, arguing that Albany has too much day-to-day control over factors affecting city life. Ferrer said Mayor Bloomberg has hurt the transit system by favoring below-market sales of MTA assets to developers. ❖

Ferrer: Transit Security a Priority

NYC mayoral hopeful Fernando Ferrer recently issued a plan for mass transit security, blaming Mayor Bloomberg for not pushing the MTA harder on the issue during his term. "The London terrorist attacks were a wake-up call for many," said Ferrer. "But we should've already been wide awake," said Ferrer.

Ferrer called for more electronic surveillance in the subway system, a permanently higher level of police presence in the transit system and better coordination among government agencies. He said the MTA's halting moves toward stronger security and the NYPD's recent bag search policy amounted to a series of ad hoc measures "implemented after each new scare."

Ferrer said he would integrate transit workers into counter-terrorism security training. Transit union officials in NY have charged that the MTA has not adequately prepared them for emergency situations.

Bloomberg's campaign told reporters that NYPD chief Ray Kelly had ample counter-terrorism experience and was better positioned than Ferrer to keep New Yorkers safe. Bloomberg spokespeople pointed out that the mayor does not control the MTA, but only appoints a minority of its board members.

Ferrer also charged that Mayor Bloomberg has been largely **absent from the fight in Washington** to have homeland security funding allocated according to need rather than evenly distributed among the states. Another Democratic candidate, City Council Speaker Gifford Miller, said this week that Mayor Bloomberg wasn't doing enough to get federal funding for the rising costs of subway bag searches, but the mayor claimed his administration was doing all it could to get every security dollar possible from Washington. ❖

Road Pricer in Manhattan Race

Manhattan Borough President candidate Brian Ellner has called for a London-like congestion charging system to bust traffic in the Big Apple. "**Congestion pricing is a win-win** for Manhattan and the entire City," Ellner said. "Taking vehicles off the road will drastically improve the quality of our air, which is among the worst in the nation and a direct contributor to record rates of asthma in our children. And it will create a revenue stream to pay for maintenance and upgrades to public transportation." Ellner did not specify how the system he envisions would work. London uses cameras to record the license plates of vehicles entering the central charging zone. New York has tolls at many of the bridges and tunnels entering Manhattan, but not at city-owned bridges crossing the East and Harlem Rivers. Ellner inaccurately said that all of the existing tolls are flat-rate rather than congestion-oriented — Port Authority (NJ-NY) crossings charge more at rush hours, including weekend afternoons.

It will be interesting to see whether Ellner can inject congestion and transportation into the crowded BP race. Mayor Bloomberg flirted with East River bridge tolls early in his term but never took a clear step to plan or implement the policy. State Assemblymember Scott Stringer, another candidate for borough president, says if elected he will seek to close Central Park loop drives to all traffic and push for rapid bus services. Others in the race cite support for mass transit expansion projects and cycling improvements. Ellner is a member of Manhattan community board #2. Most of his eight opponents for the Democratic nomination are current or former elected officials. www.brianelner.com ❖

New Federal Funds Factor in City Race

City mayoral candidate and Congressman Anthony Weiner is pressing for the start-up of commuter ferry service from the **Rockaways to Manhattan**, citing the long subway commute. Weiner was able to set aside \$15 million for such a service in the new federal transportation funding bill. But city officials say the money isn't enough to start up new service, let alone operate it into the future. NYC DOT officials say given likely ridership, the plan isn't their top priority. Weiner contends that the ferries the city could buy with the \$15 million would be appropriately scaled to demand, and that a stop along the Brooklyn waterfront would give the service plenty of patrons. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Rep. Rangel Seeks to Stop Harlem Flyover

In *MTR* #500 we reported on the NYC DOT's plan for a **new elevated highway structure** in East Harlem, stretching from 126th to 131st Streets. It would connect the Harlem River Drive and Third Avenue Bridge, visually blighting the waterfront, increasing exposure to vehicle emissions for residents in an area that already suffers **high asthma rates** and divert \$78 million in scarce city capital dollars and federal bridge repair funds that are badly needed elsewhere.

In response to these problems, Congressman Charles Rangel has written to the chair of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council, urging denial of funding for the project. The flyover was also listed as one of several 2005 "Waterfront Wastes" in a New York City Council Waterfront Committee report. The NYC DOT has reportedly begun work on an alternative plan. ❖

Rail Operators Shoot Selves, State in Foot

A battle between the state and operators of rail "transload" facilities that handle garbage has spilled onto New Jersey's front pages in recent weeks, giving a black eye to the rail freight industry at a time when the Garden State needs to build up its rail infrastructure.

On July 25, Acting Governor Codey unveiled the state's newest attempt to urge rail freight operators to comply with state law. "Operation Safety Net" is a multi-agency enforcement initiative that went right after rail transfer stations operated by NY Susquehanna & Western Railway in Hudson County. By the end of the week, the Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Community Affairs, and State Police had issued NYS&W over \$2.5 million in fines for alleged environmental and safety violations.

Rail officials at NYS&W and other waste transfer stations have claimed that federal legislation, drafted in the early 1800's, exempts these operations from state legislation and have now sued the state over the issuance of the fines. However, every challenge and every violation of state laws leads to more headlines and may be painting railroads as villains at a time when transportation trends need them as one of the good guys.

With **50% growth in truck traffic** expected in the next 15 years, New Jersey will need a robust rail freight system to stem traffic congestion, local impacts and highway damage. There are already significant obstacles to expanding rail operations in New Jersey. It would be a pity for the railroads themselves to inflame skeptical public sentiment and add to these hurdles. ❖

New Federal Transportation Bill Passed

Nearly two years and 12 funding extensions after TEA-21 expired, President Bush signed the 1,752-page "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU) on August 10, 2005. The bill provides \$286.4 billion in funds over six years (fiscal years 2004-2009) for highway construction and maintenance, transit projects and operations, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, and safety programs.

SAFETEA-LU represents a nominal 38% increase over TEA-21 spending levels but only a **15% rise** in inflation is accounted for. The levels are far less than FHWA, AASHTO and others have said is necessary to repair and modernize transportation networks across the country. The amount is also significantly less than the \$318 billion the Senate sought in its version of the bill last summer, and is nearly \$100 billion short of the \$375 billion House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chair Don Young's (R-AK) proposed roughly three years ago. The overall funding level was a major sticking point for the White House. *MTR* readers will remember that last summer President Bush had threatened to veto any bill larger than \$256 billion. White House concessions on the overall funding level, and a congressional compromise which guarantees that by 2008 each state will get back at least 92% of contributions to the highway trust fund, cleared the way for SAFETEA-LU's passage just before Congress left Washington for August recess.

With fiscal year 2004 behind us, SAFETEA-LU will provide over \$244 billion in guaranteed funding for fiscal years 2005 through 2009. Of that, more than \$193 billion is set aside for broadly defined highway programs (a roughly 10% inflation-adjusted increase). Public transit will receive more than \$45.3 billion over five years (for a 22% hike after inflation), and a larger highway safety program has been separated from the highway title and will get about \$5 billion.

New York State will receive **\$8.4 billion in highway funding** over the next five years. New Jersey will get \$4.7 billion, and Connecticut will receive \$2.5 billion in highway funding. Federal Transit Administration funding is doled out to states, metropolitan planning organizations and transit agencies using formulas based on population, ridership, and density, among other variables. Detailed allocations are not entirely clear as yet, though New York and New Jersey can be expected to receive a large portion of the transit total. The two states are slated to receive at least \$490 million (and probably more) directly allocated in 2006 for the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line, the LIRR Connection to Grand Central, and probably the Second Avenue Subway.

Much attention has focused on the high level of Congressional earmarking in SAFETEA-LU. The bill contains nearly 6,400 member items totaling \$24 billion (about 9% of the total guaranteed funding). In 1987, President Reagan vetoed a transportation bill because there were 152 earmarked projects in it.

The New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut congressional delegations were certainly active in this regard. With 494 earmarks totaling \$990 million, New York State received the second highest number of special projects (California was first), and the fourth highest dollar amount for earmarks. New Jersey received 179 earmarks for \$553 million. And Connecticut had 104 for \$335 million. Two notable projects, both for freight rail, are a \$100 million for further development of the cross harbor freight tunnel project secured by Representative Jerry Nadler, and \$100 million in funding for the Liberty Corridor project, a set of freight rail projects in the north Jersey port district championed by Rep. Robert Menendez.

Under the guise of "streamlining," SAFETEA-LU makes several changes to the environmental review process. For one, the bill sets a 180-day deadline for court challenges to project permits or environmental reviews and exempts projects with "de minimis" impacts from protections afforded to historic sites and natural resources. The federal requirement that transportation and air pollution reduction plans must be coordinated will remain, though the frequency of reviews is lengthened to every four years from three.

SAFETEA-LU offers good news for bicycling and pedestrian advocates. The bill contains about \$600 million for a new Safe Routes to Schools program for improving the bicycling and pedestrian environment around schools, although spread across the country this will amount to only a few million per state per year. It also boosts the Transportation Enhancements program, heavily used since 1991 to build cycling and walking infrastructure, to about \$4 billion, up from \$3.3 billion in TEA-21, and features a large number of "green pork" earmarks for cycling and pedestrian projects. ❖

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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MTR#507 Contributing: Michelle Ernst, Menaka Mohan, Damien Newton 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

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

August 25, 12-1pm. New York City Transit Riders Council Meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Rm., Manhattan. 212-878-7087. www.pcac.org

August 27, 10am. Community Forum/Rally about Major Development in the South Bronx, Bronx Voices for Equal Inclusion. SCAN NY Auditorium, 40 East 164th Street next to Mulhally Park, 718-410-6735 x1343, sierra_lydia@yahoo.com.

August 30, 6:30pm. Transport Workers Union, Local 100's Safety in the Subway Town Hall Meeting. Lafayette Avenue Church, 85 South Oxford St., Brooklyn. 646-539-2112.

September 9, 9am-12pm. University Transportation Research Center presents *Ten Principals for Successful Development Around Transit* with Robert Dunphy of the Urban Land Institute. Harold M. Proshansky Auditorium, The Graduate Center at CUNY, 365 5th Ave, Manhattan. www.utrc2.org, (212) 650-8050.

September 11, Transportation Alternatives' Century Bike Tour. Choose from 100, 75, 55, 55, or 15 mile routes. Register: 212-629-8080, www.transalt.org

September 12, 8-9:30pm. The Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management presents: A Breakfast with Iris Weinshall. RSVP by Sept. 6 at www.wagner.nyu.edu/events. 60 Washington Square South, 8th Floor, Manhattan. 212-998-7545.

September 22, 9am. New Jersey Transit's Board Meeting. NJ Transit's Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Fl., Newark, NJ. 1-800-772-2222.

September 29, 6:30-9pm. Tri-State Transportation Campaign's 10th Anniversary Gala, honoring Janine Bauer, James T.B. Tripp, and Edward Skloot. Carriage House Center for the Arts. 149 East 38th Street, Manhattan. 212-268-7474, kates@tstc.org.

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