

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 509

September 22, 2005

NEWS

Toll Road Leasing: 10 Questions New Jerseyans Should Ask

Acting Governor Codey's last clear statement about New Jersey's **transportation finance crisis** is that the next governor will have to face the long term problem. In his opinion, the solution is a long-term **lease of the Turnpike**, possible along with other toll roads. He suggested that he will attempt to create shorter-term transportation funding so the next administration will have time to investigate something so complex. If the next governor takes that direction, these are questions he should answer:

- 1) Would the deal create sustainable transportation funding? Or would it be a big one-shot? If a 99-year lease gets the state 20 years of transportation funding, what comes next?
- 2) How much and how often would tolls increase?
- 3) Wouldn't taxpayers and drivers be better off if the Turnpike collected higher tolls directly rather than paying them as profits to private shareholders?
- 4) Would any of the proceeds from a lease deal be used for non-transportation state spending?
- 5) How would toll road leases affect proposed widening of the Parkway in Ocean County and the Turnpike from Exit 8a to Exit 6? Would private toll road operators be free to propose other highway expansion projects?
- 6) What state-of-repair standards would a private operator be held to? How would they apply to the road's condition at the end of a lease?
- 7) A private operator would have incentive to generate or attract as much traffic as possible. How does that fit with overall state transportation priorities?
- 8) Would the "no trucks" rule on the Parkway be repealed?
- 9) Would the private operator have the freedom to charge different rates for different times of day, as the Turnpike does now, or to designate lanes and toll rates for vehicles based on occupancy?
- 10) What would be the fate of currently planned projects such as ramp improvements, exit 15x, and Route 92?

New York Needs Transportation Bond

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is backing passage of the NY State "**Rebuild and Renew Transportation Bond Act of 2005**" this November. The \$3.9 billion measure will appear on ballots across New York for voter approval or rejection of an increase in the state's general obligation debt to augment transportation construction programs.

If approved, the Bond Act will provide \$450 million for maintaining the current system by purchasing new subways cars and buses, buying new rail cars for Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road and repairing rail bridges on Staten Island.

The Bond Act also includes \$900 million vital to advancing the **Second Avenue Subway** and the **Long Island Rail Road connection to Grand Central Terminal**. This funding, together with earlier allocations, will move the projects well into construction and give them much-needed momentum as future state and city governments consider transportation needs and projects.

The state roadway network, especially in the downstate region and in New York City, also needs a significant infusion of resources for basic upkeep and improvements. Unlike the period preceding the vote on the 2000 transportation bond act, when the NY State DOT released a plan to widen nearly every highway on Long Island, the DOT is largely following a de facto "fix-it-first" policy. In large part, that is because its **capital budget cannot even keep up with maintenance** needs. Pavement conditions in NY State have begun to worsen again after improving over the past decade, while progress to eliminate bridge repair backlogs has leveled off (*MTR #488*)

Additional state debt is not the best way to pay for badly needed transportation improvements. *MTR* readers can imagine that the Campaign would **prefer a set of driving-related user fees** that reflect the full congestion, environmental and other costs of automobile-centered transportation, or at least a straightforward increase in the sets of taxes that pay for transportation investment, along the lines proposed last winter by MTA Chair Peter Kalikow (see *MTR #483*).

Nonetheless, given the government and politics we have, approving the Bond Act is less of a prob-

lem than returning transportation spending to an era of disinvestment and possibly sacrificing the strongest opportunity to expand the New York mass transit system in a generation or two.

The bond act has begun to elicit statements and news. Recently:

- **Governor Pataki** said he would campaign for the measure's passage, stating that keeping levels of investment in transportation up is essential to NY State's future. The Governor specifically mentioned projects to be funded by bond proceeds, such as mass transit, rail freight and cycling improvements, that would help the state save energy and money as fuel prices rise.

- **The MTA** launched an advertising campaign designed to get out the transportation funding vote. 15,000 ads are going up in buses and subway and commuter rail cars. MTA officials say failure to pass the bond act will jeopardize the Second Avenue subway and LIRR-Grand Central connection.

- Manhattan Borough President **C. Virginia Fields** is also concerned about the Second Avenue subway, and is convening a task force meeting to ensure that project supporters help whip up support for the transportation bond.

- Groups supporting the bond act include the Long Island Association, the Orange County Citizens Foundation, NY Public Interest Research Group's Straphangers Campaign, NYS AFL-CIO, Environmental Defense, New York League of Conservation Voters, Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, Empire State Transportation Alliance, Transportation Alternatives, Regional Plan Association, the American Planning Association of NY Metro Chapter and numerous transportation industry and contracting groups and associations.

- Staten Island Borough President **James Molinaro** is shaping up as the highest-profile NYC opponent of the bond act. Molinaro said he views the measure as an insult to Staten Island because it would not add transportation capacity there. Molinaro wants improvements like north shore rail reactivation, a link to the Hudson-Bergen line and a third MTA bus depot, but the bond act would only pay for repair of Staten Island Railway bridges, a new station and work along the West Shore Expressway. However, defeat of the bond act and hence fewer overall transportation dollars for the MTA and NY State will probably make it even less likely that Staten Island's needs will be seen to in the future. ❖

Tappan Zee Project: Back on Track ?

After a year and a half delay, the NY Thruway Authority and Metro-North Railroad are close to finalizing the short list of proposals to replace (or rehabilitate) the Tappan Zee Bridge. The original list of 16 proposals will be whittled down to 5 or 6 by mid-September, and released to the public by the end of October. The Campaign anticipates that this final list will include what most expected: **light rail, commuter rail, bus rapid transit** and various configurations for a new bridge.

As we reported in *MTR #504*, progress on the Tappan Zee project has been stalled by a stalemate between the Thruway Authority and Metro-North over project options. Metro-North had reportedly been opposed to inclusion of a costly separate **commuter rail tunnel** among the studied alternatives, because it would rather have its trains run over a new bridge paid for by the Thruway Authority.

Reportedly, that sticking point has been resolved, with the agencies finally agreeing to leave the tunnel option out of the short list.

The Thruway Authority and Metro-North expect to begin the two-year environmental review process by this winter, with the state DOT taking a bigger role going forward. A final decision on the project could come in 2007.

Possible progress on the T-Z environmental process seems timely. More big holes have appeared in the bridge deck, and several high-profile pile-ups have halted traffic for long periods. ❖

More Bus Funding, Service Urged for Nassau

In a letter last week, transit advocates urged Nassau leaders to take advantage of the County's improving financial situation and allocate \$15 million to **Long Island Bus** operations in 2006. More money must be allocated to Long Island Bus to keep pace with record ridership levels, they said.

County Executive Thomas Suozzi's proposed 2006 budget, submitted September 15th, keeps the county's contribution to Long Island Bus stable at \$10.5 million for 2006, the same level as 2005. Even with a modest county increase last year, county funding levels are still about half of what they were in 1999.

Meanwhile, Long Island Bus is consistently building ridership. *Newsday* recently reported that June marked a **record high for Long Island Bus**, with more than 14.9 million riders since the beginning of 2005. By the end of the year, ridership is expected to increase to **30.9 million**, compared to 29.9 million in 2000. High gas prices, a higher number of reverse commuters from Brooklyn and Queens, and a general increase in the number of low-income jobs on Long Island are contributing to

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

the ridership levels, the paper reported.

To keep pace with a 21% increase in demand over the past decade, Long Island Bus needs to offer expanded night and weekend service, new routes, and higher service frequency on routes. More money will be needed for riders to get the service they deserve. The legislature has until the end of October to approve the County's budget. ❖

More Progress for Trans-Hudson Tunnel

A preferred alternative for additional NJ Transit tunnels to Manhattan has been approved by both the NJ Transit board and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority. The step is part of finalizing the project's environmental impact statement.

Suburban growth in the region, including growth in suburban commuting to Manhattan, is **heavily focused in New Jersey**. NJ Transit track and train capacity under the Hudson is approaching its limit, while the Lincoln Tunnel exclusive bus lane is completely full.

The plan backed by the New Jersey agencies would build a **new two-track tunnel** from Secaucus to Manhattan, develop a new station under 34th Street and a track loop in Secaucus to allow trains on tracks coming from Bergen County to enter the tunnel and reach Manhattan directly. Its main benefit is that it could double NJ Transit train capacity to Manhattan. That in turn could lead to new services in northern NJ presently constrained by the Hudson tunnel crunch. In June, for instance, NJ Transit approved a project to implement diesel-powered commuter rail service on the Northern Branch, a little-used freight line in Bergen County, which would eventually link to the new tunnel. Although directly across the river from NYC, Bergen County has been poorly integrated into the regional rail system.

Transit hopes to wrap up the EIS and move into project design by mid-2006, with construction perhaps starting late in the decade. Major funding decisions still await, but the project enjoys broad backing in New Jersey and support by NYC business leaders. ❖

Smoother Crossing for Brooklyn Bikers

Transportation Alternatives reports that NYC DOT has developed a new expansion joint design for the **Williamsburg Bridge bike- and foot-way** that will eliminate the jarring, dangerous bumps that caused some cyclists to crash and made cycling over the span generally unpleasant (see *MTR #492*). T.A.'s information suggests the joint covering is nearly flush with the pathway surface.

T.A. mobilized many city cyclists to protest the bad design. Although NYC DOT refused to consider a change initially, press coverage and continual pressure have paid off (www.transalt.org). ❖

The High Cost of Free Parking

Part III: The Search

Parking has been getting attention recently in New York City. First was the July city council vote to make parking free on Sundays and Mayor Bloomberg's subsequent veto. In August, some city parking meters began accepting parking cards for payment. Meanwhile, the Tri-State Campaign and some Bronx groups have expressed concern over plans to build thousands of additional parking spaces around Yankee Stadium, a change which will encourage more fans to drive. Thus, our next installment reviewing *The High Cost of Free Parking* seems timely (parts I and II in *MTR #'s 505, 506*).

In Part 2 of his book, professor Shoup explores the trials and tribulations of cruising for free curbside parking. This is an experience car-owning New Yorkers, facing alternate-side-of-the-street rules, not to mention visitors to the city, are very familiar with. Shoup asserts that cruising for parking is much more than just run-of-the-mill aggravation. In fact, **cruising for parking results in a tremendous amount of excess driving** and all of its concomitant ills — air pollution, crashes and traffic congestion.

Because it is available to drivers on a "first-come, first-served" basis, free parking suffers the problem of communal ownership. Once drivers secure a space, they have no incentive to give it up in a timely fashion.

Based on review of 16 mostly American and European studies of cruising conducted between 1927 and 2001, Shoup concludes that cars searching for free parking contribute to **over 8% of total traffic**. The relevant New York City study was conducted in 1995 by John Falcochio, Joe Darsin and Elena Prassas. They concluded the average time drivers took to find a curbside space between 8 and 10 a.m. was 7.3 minutes, increasing to 10.6 minutes between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. According to their research, cruising for curbside parking created about 8 percent of the total vehicle miles traveled in west Midtown.

Shoup has developed a model to explain why a driver would choose to cruise for free curbside parking rather than pay for off-street parking (interested readers can turn to page 323 of his book for the equation). He says the decision to seek free parking is based on the price of off-street parking, the amount of time a driver intends to park for, the time spent searching, the cost of gas burned while cruising, the number of people in the car, and the value of the driver and his passengers' time. If the cost of off-street parking outweighs all of those other variables, the driver will cruise for parking at the curbside.

Some will likely disagree that all time-wasting, gridlock-contributing motorists indulge in such an involved calculus, but it at least provides a baseline

for how some drivers may approach parking.

The most compelling chapter in this section examines the impacts of cruising for parking. Shoup uses UCLA's Westwood Village and its backwards pricing policy as his example. Westwood has plenty of moderately priced off-street parking available, but metered curb spaces are **free in the evening** when the district sees its highest traffic levels.

Shoup and his assistants conducted 160 park-and-visit tests by bicycle and found that the average search time for parking is 3.3 minutes for all times, but is **nearly 10 minutes during evening hours**.

The average search time of 3.3 minutes may seem insignificant, but added up across all of Westwood's drivers, it amounts to 426 hours per day (a little more than 10 work weeks).

Shoup found that the average distance driven while cruising for a free parking space in Westwood was half a mile. Added across all cruising drivers, the behavior contributes 3,600 vehicle miles traveled in the district each day. Over the year, that totals 945,000 extra miles traveled, or **two round trips to the moon**, using 47,000 gallons of gasoline and producing 728 tons of CO₂. The cumulative impact of cruising across all commercial districts in the U.S. is obviously far higher.

Beyond zoning requirements that cause overbuilding of off-street parking, many areas deal with parking shortages by setting time limits. These are ineffective because drivers routinely violate the rules. (A Seattle survey found the average parking duration in 1-hour spots was 2.1 hours.) Some areas have explored providing information measures to broadcast locations of available parking.

But Shoup asserts that the most appropriate way for cities to address curbside parking shortages is to **price the spaces** – he says that would result in 14 percent (about 1 in 7) of spaces being open. Like congestion pricing schemes, rates could vary throughout the day depending on demand (enabled by new technology like NYC's muni-meters).

But pricing free curbside parking isn't rocket science. Indeed, the parking meter, first introduced in Oklahoma in 1935, is the obvious example. Shoup suggests political hurdles to introducing or hiking prices can be overcome by shifting responsibility for setting rates from politicians to bureaucrats, though this seems a fairly ivory-tower, or at least Californian, point of view.

Part 4 of Shoup's opus, which *MTR* will review in a future issue, explores in greater detail approaches for overcoming both political and technological obstacles to better parking policies. ❖

Calendar

September 22, 9:00am. New Jersey Transit's Board Meeting. NJ Transit's Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Fl., Newark, NJ. 800-772-2222.

September 22, 12:00-2:00pm. [New York City Transit Riders Council](#) meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room. 212-878-7087.

September 27, 6:00-8:00pm. Forum: West Harlem's Waterfront. Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Place, Manhattan. 212-358-6111 or rsvp@aiany.org. Free.

September 28, 4:00-8:00pm. Public information session: World Trade Center Vehicular Security & Tour Bus Parking Environmental Assessment. Borough of Manhattan Community College, 199 Chambers St., 212-435-5599 or drpinfo@panynj.

September 29, 6:30-8:30pm. Tri-State Transportation Campaign's **10th Anniversary Event**. For information, call 212-268-7474. \$

October 6, 12:00, Transportation Research Forum. Speaker: Jack Wells, Chief Economist, U.S. DOT. Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St., Manhattan. www.trforum.org/calendar/newyork.php.

October 6, 12:15-2:00pm. [LIRR Commuter's Council meeting](#). MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Conference Room. Phone 212 878 7087.

October 18, 8:30 a.m. Tri-State Transit Symposium. Transit security and the financial future of transit in the region with MTA Chair Peter Kalikow. NYU Wagner Rudin Center for Transportation. 60 Washington Square S., 10th floor. 212-998-7545.

October 24, 4:45 p.m.. Transportation Alternatives rally for a car-free Central Park. Central Park, Manhattan. 212-629-8080, www.transalt.org.

October 24, 10am. NYMTC Bike and pedestrian working group. 199 Water St., 22nd Floor, Manhattan, 212-383-2530.

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