

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### City Transportation: What's the Big Idea ?

The news follow-up to Mayor Bloomberg's re-election considered various "big ideas" for his second term, emphasizing the mayor's accumulation of political capital via his substantial margin of victory.

In transportation, one such idea is congestion pricing. However, City Hall poured cold water on the theme last week following an advocacy spectacle launched by the **NYC Partnership** & Chamber of Commerce. Just two days after an election in which transportation issues played next to no role, the Partnership first asserted the mayor favored roadway pricing, then released a detailed pricing plan to the *NY Times*, which made it Friday's lead local story. Once the mayor headed for the hills, the Partnership told the *Times* that road pricing was not in fact high on its agenda. Business support will be important when NYC eventually decides to implement roadway pricing, but alone, it will not be sufficient. The general sense that congestion is a major problem must be heightened, and constituencies outside Manhattan will especially need to believe they will also benefit from new solutions to traffic.

A major initiative the city could pull off more or less on its own would be reorganizing major avenues in areas without subway service so **buses could avoid congested lanes and provide fast, attractive service**. Mayor Bloomberg embraced a "subway on the surface" for Manhattan's East Side in 2001, and the city is working with NYC Transit on a study of likely "bus rapid transit" corridors, but it is unknown what that effort will yield, and when.

Also up the mayor's alley, and another 2001 Bloomberg platform plank, would be a campaign to reassert city control over NYC Transit. It would involve the state because it would require a reorganization of the MTA, but promising better management and accountability in transit service could be managed as a highly populist effort given the bouts of hatred for transit New Yorkers are periodically prone to in their commuting routines. However, the mayor appears to see this as a remote possibility. In the last mayoral debate, Bloomberg seemed to bemoan NYC Transit's entanglement with MTA suburban railroads, but implied that suburban legislators would not be persuaded to give the city more control over transit. ❖

### Where to, New Jersey?

Governor-elect Jon Corzine faces the immediate problem of leading a state that has no money to invest in transportation infrastructure or operations. **By mid-2006, New Jersey's gas tax revenue will be consumed by debt.** That will affect not only infrastructure, but also the operating budgets of NJ Transit and NJ DOT, because these agencies have been forced by inadequate appropriations in Trenton to raid the construction budgets to meet day-to-day expenses like bus fuel, routine road maintenance, snow plowing, train conductors and the like.

Wednesday editorials were not slow to task Corzine with fixing these problems: "Immediately, Corzine must devise a revenue source for the transportation trust fund," wrote the *Star-Ledger*.

A new report by the **Regional Plan Association** lays out an extensive menu of options for raising new transportation resources in New Jersey ([www.rpa.org](http://www.rpa.org)). It reiterates that \$1.3 billion in current state transportation funding needs to be completely replaced by 2006, and that failure to do so could also jeopardize and equivalent amount of federal funding. Any choice to raise a large new pot of money will be difficult, but the worst course of all will be to cut transportation programs, reversing recent progress fixing the state's roadway infrastructure and attracting more riders to mass transit.

To raise the money needed to undertake robust transit and DOT programs, Corzine will have to bring the public to an understanding of the problem, including an exposé of past borrow-and-spend practices, convince it that new revenue is ironclad and will not leak out into other areas of state spending and identify key transportation priorities.

Ironically, New Jersey faces its terrible transportation finance problem at a point where **state government is getting transportation policy right**. Emphasis on investment in basic infrastructure, smart transportation-efficient development partnerships with municipalities and intense focus on key transit projects like a new commuter rail tunnel to Manhattan are strong ingredients for a 21st Century transportation strategy. Corzine could make two strong votes in favor of this direction by retaining Jack Lettiere as NJ transportation commissioner and George Warrington as NJ Transit executive director. ❖

## New Yorkers Back Transportation Spending

According to unofficial results from the *Associated Press*, majorities in 18 of New York's 62 counties favored Proposition 2, the transportation bond act. Across NY State, the measure passed with 55% voting yes.

All five city boroughs and nearby suburbs, including Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland and Putnam returned majorities favoring the act. Manhattan led with **80% in support**, with The Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens supporting with 72% or more. Staten Island also produced a slight majority of "yes" voters despite a strong push against the measure by Staten Island politicians and editorialists.

Chemung, Steuben, Schuyler, Tompkins and Cattaraugus counties in south western New York voted strongly in favor of the measure. The area was promised over \$50 million for the completion of I-86, conversion of U.S. Route 15 to Interstate 99, and maintenance on Interstate 390. Support was also strong in northern New York. St. Lawrence and Jefferson Counties will receive \$15 million for reconstruction of the Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge and \$20 million for a new connector road from I-81 to the entrance of Fort Drum. ❖

## Transit Benefit Comes to Nassau

Nassau County announced implementation of the TransitChek benefit program for county employees in mid-September. It encourages transit use by allowing workers for the county to buy transit fares with pre-tax income, potentially saving hundreds of dollars per year. The program is already in place for New York City, Westchester County, and New Jersey state employees. Employers offering the program also save money in payroll taxes.

Within a month, 35 employees had chosen to participate, resulting in close to \$5,000 of total payroll deductions and a tax savings to participants. County officials said they expect participation to increase.

Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi said "I see our program as a model other Nassau County employers can easily follow." Suozzi first promised TransitChek for the county workforce in his 2001 campaign platform.

Suozzi also announced the **NuRide and Guaranteed Ride Home programs**. The former allows participants to use a website to search for and schedule shared rides with others; the latter ensures that NuRide participants get a free ride home, should unforeseen circumstances prevent them from carpooling as scheduled.

NuRide rewards participants with "NuRide Miles" that can be redeemed for gift certificates at retail stores. So far, 30 county employees has enrolled with NuRide. ❖

County	Yes Vote Share
Manhattan	80.2%
Bronx	76.0%
Brooklyn	74.8%
Queens	72.5%
Westchester	63.2%
Nassau	58.2%
Suffolk	53.8%
Rockland	51.9%
Staten Island	50.3%
Putnam	50.1%
Orange	46.1%
Dutchess	45.9%

**Percentage of downstate NY voters that approved bond act, by county.**

## Port Authority Faces Big Bills

Port Authority chair Anthony Coscia recently told reporters that a court decision allowing victims of the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing to seek gigantic damage payments could trigger a **Hudson River toll increase** and delay PA projects.

The jury in the case found the Port Authority mostly responsible for the bombing. Lawyers for the 400 plaintiffs say they will try to win nearly \$2 billion in awards from the Port Authority.

Before the verdict laying blame for the incident with the Authority, there were signs that the PA might seek some sort of revenue increase. Chairman Coscia had mentioned it at least once in the past year, noting the **major capital projects** the Authority wants to undertake. The Port Authority rolled out a series of announcements and events in October emphasizing high-cost projects, including a new PATH train fleet and related PATH infrastructure upgrades, record levels of spending on transportation security and a set of airport infrastructure projects. The period following NJ's state-wide election is not a bad time for the PA to announce a toll and fare increase. On the other hand, it is probably unwise for the PA to link a hike to damages from a lawsuit. To the extent the suit causes uncertainty in Port Authority budgeting, the agency could hold off on any hike, but if it waits past the fall, it risks running afoul of the NY governor's race.

If the Port Authority does raise its bridge and tunnel rates, it should deepen the price difference between peak and off-peak driving, increasing the **congestion pricing effect** of its tolls. ❖

## Views from the Turnpike

At a recent breakfast, New Jersey Turnpike Authority Executive Director Mike Lapolla discussed the large widenings planned for the New Jersey Turn-

pike and Garden State Parkway, and downplayed any role the Turnpike or Parkway might play in providing a long-term solution to the state's overall transportation funding crisis. The event was organized by the Women's Transportation Seminar.

Lapolla said the toll road agencies were very excited about the widening project for the central stretch of the New Jersey Turnpike (between exits 6 and 8A) and for the southern stretch of the Garden State Parkway. He expects part of the Parkway project to begin next year despite expressing some "frustration" with the state DEP and Pinelands Commission.

However, unlike the NJ DOT, which is looking at land use strategies in key corridors to minimize future trip generation, and to some extent at the sprawl

### **Smart Growth Supporters Ascendant in Brookhaven**

There may be hope for those wanting to link transportation and land use planning in central Long Island. Brookhaven voters elected Democrat Brian Foley, currently a Suffolk County legislator representing Blue Point, Patchogue, Medford, and portions of other nearby villages, to be the next Brookhaven Town Supervisor.

Foley is familiar with modern corridor planning — he helped launch a community planning charette to redesign Portion Road after the community opposed a Suffolk County plan to widen it. On that effort, his campaign website asserted: "Using the principles of 'smart growth' and working closely with town officials, local organizations and community leaders, Brian will create a thoroughly safe and productive thoroughfare." He has also worked for increased bus service and helped fund downtown revitalization projects.

Foley defeated Brookhaven Town Councilmember Edward Hennessey, who spearheaded an innovative planning process for the Mastic-Shirley area, and replaces John LaValle, who did not seek reelection.

Also in Brookhaven, smart growth activist **Connie Kepert** was elected to the Town Council for District 4. In recent years, she has led civic organizations against NYS DOT's plans to widen Middle Country Road (NY 25) into a five lane speedway and criticized the DOT plan to widen Route 347.

Along Route 25, she led an effort to define community aspirations for pedestrian-friendly development. A four day charette in 2002 produced a plan for village centers in Coram and Middle Island and rejected the road expansion. NYS DOT has refused to incorporate charette ideas in its plans, leading Kepert's groups to "declare independence" from the DOT ([www.middlecountryrdproject.org](http://www.middlecountryrdproject.org)). ❖

promoting impacts of additional road capacity, the Turnpike Authority does not plan to adopt a similar perspective for its widening projects. Lapolla emphasized that no new exits will be added as a result of the expansion projects.

It seemed to Lapolla and others in the room that the idea of selling or leasing the toll roads is dead. Significant opposition to the idea punched holes through that trial balloon from the moment it was launched, and both Governor-elect Jon Corzine and his Republican opponent Douglas Forrester distanced themselves from the concept. Lapolla did note that the Authority owns land around the state that it can sell to raise revenue. For instance, plots left over from a long-dead plan for a highway connection from New Brunswick to Red Bank are still on the Turnpike's property rolls.

Lapolla also noted that "securitizing" revenue the Turnpike Authority is supposed to give to the state every year would only yield one \$300 million infusion of revenue, though it was unclear what level of funding transfer Lapolla anticipated. No Turnpike transfer to the state Transportation Trust Fund has in fact been appropriated since 2001.

Turnpike leaders also said there is no known release date for the environmental statement for "Route 92," the hotly debated plan to build a toll road across southern Middlesex County. The EIS is in the charge of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Turnpike officials said they were not pushing for the document's completion. ❖

### **Newspaper to Candidates: Wake Up and Fix the Sprawl**

Last month, the Hartford *Courant* editorial board produced a fact-loaded manifesto on the costs of sprawl in the state, and called on state and local leaders to finally tackle the issue. "Sprawl is the most serious challenge facing the state. Connecticut's leaders can address it and manage the state's growth smartly and sensibly, if they have the imagination and political will...**Sprawl must be a centerpiece of the 2006 campaign,**" the editorial writers concluded.

Below are a few of the frightening statistics presented in the paper ([www.courant.com](http://www.courant.com)):

- From 1970 to 2000, the state's population grew by 12% but the amount of land in residential use increased by 102%;
- From 1985 to 2002, the state lost an average of 18 acres of forest per day and added 12 acres of buildings, parking lots, and roads.
- The number of vehicle miles traveled on local roads increased 46% between 1986 and 1995
- From 1997 to 2002, the state lost 12% of its farm-

land, the highest percentage of lost farms in the 50 states

- From 1995 to 2000, the state's workforce grew by only .2%, while NY's increased by 6.3%.

The editorial board called on the state to promote transit and transit oriented development, and invest a \$100 million set aside by the state for affordable housing in residences close to transit. They cite as examples the "pods of housing, stores, and offices" that have grown within walking distance of Washington D.C. transit stations, and Massachusetts' creation of a "super-agency" to oversee transportation and development. ❖

### Gunn on Firing by Amtrak Board

"The Board members came in this morning and asked me to resign. I refused, so they fired me," Gunn said in a Nov. 9 interview with *Railway Age* Editor William C. Vantuono.

"I feel at least that I did the right, honorable thing. I wasn't going to abandon our people." He said that the Bush Administration's people wanted to implement their plan, which is destroying Amtrak. "I stood in their way," he said. "That's why they fired me..."

Ridership at Amtrak is at an all-time high, but the Bush administration wants it to operate without subsidies. Now even generally unquestioning reporters are noting that other modes of transportation require government support and that Amtrak's budget is less than a drop in the federal bucket. "If you want an example of getting fired for producing good numbers, this is it," he said. "It's an upside-down world we live in..."

"Anything they all tell you is bullshit," Gunn told *Railway Age*. He cited the 93-6 vote in the Senate approving an Amtrak reauthorization bill earmarking nearly \$12 billion over the next few years as evidence the administration is out of step with the country. "The Administration is serious about taking this place apart..."

Gunn told *Railway Age* the Bush administration is in a rush to dismantle Amtrak. "They have to do a lot of the dirty stuff this year, because next year is an election year, and what they've got in mind will be very unpopular." Gunn predicted major service cuts within the next few months. [www.railwayage.com](http://www.railwayage.com) ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

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### Calendar

**November 16**, 8:00-9:30am. Jan Gehl, NYU Rudin Center on walking and cycling in urban environments, 295 Lafayette Street, 2nd Floor. [mnn2@nyu.edu](mailto:mnn2@nyu.edu) or call 212-998-7545.

**November 16**, 6:30pm. Manhattan Community Board #4, NYC DOT public meeting on bike lane for 8th Ave., 14th Street to Columbus Circle. 330 West 42nd St, 26th floor. 212-736-4536 or [info@manhattancb4.org](mailto:info@manhattancb4.org).

**November 17**, 12:15pm. [New York City Transit Riders Council](#) meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room. 212-878-7087.

**November 17**, 6:00-8:00pm. Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión, Bronx Community Board #4 town hall meeting on the Yankee Stadium redevelopment. Bronx School for Law, 244 East 163rd Street, 718-590-3500.

**November 21**, 8:00-9:45am. Seminar: 'Transportation: the Backbone of NJ's Economy' with Congressman Robert Menendez. RBP Conference Center, 744 Broad Street, 26th Floor, Newark. RSVP 973-242-4203 or [rpb@rpb.org](mailto:rpb@rpb.org).

**November 22**, 6:00-8:00pm. [Auto-Free NY](#) meeting. Topic: "Light Rail in a Red State! Some Insights from Dallas and Houston." NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington Street, Conf. Rm. 212-475-3394.

**November 30**, 3:00-7:00pm. Open House: Route 9A Project, Lower Manhattan Redevelopment. Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Place, Battery Park City, Manhattan.

**December 1**, 8:30am-1:00pm. "Can Growth Work for NY's Communities? Community Development, Social and Environmental Justice, and the City's Future." [Pratt Manhattan](#), 144 W. 14th Street, Room 213. Info: 718-636-3486 x2678

**December 1**, 11:45am, TRF Forum: MTA's Plans for Bus Rapid Transit Projects in NYC, Theodore Orosz, MTA NYC Transit, Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St at Rector, 212-435-4226, [pgessner@panynj.gov](mailto:pgessner@panynj.gov)

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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