

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Kolluri on Hold ?

Although we confirmed Kris Kolluri as the Corzine administration's pick as state transportation commissioner with several Trenton sources (*MTR* #518), Governor Corzine still has yet to announce the appointment.

Current transportation commissioner Jack Lettiere has reportedly been asked to stay on until a replacement is named, which may suggest the administration is reconsidering the Kolluri pick.

### "Safest Big City" Still Features Mean Streets

A hotel worker, a graduate student, a philanthropist and a Holocaust survivor were among the pedestrians killed by NYC drivers this week.

The dead, all women, were:

- 49-year-old Haggar Frempong-Manso, crushed Saturday by a backing beer truck on W. 44<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Hannah Engle, 25, killed by an allegedly drunk driver at E. 14th St. and Second Ave. early Sunday.
- Andrea Bronfman, 60, mowed down on Monday in an East 65th Street crosswalk by a cab turning from 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.
- Eva Schweizer, age 81, run over by a NYC Transit bus on Gun Hill Road in the Bronx on Tuesday.

None of the drivers has been charged with more than a traffic violation. Yet not even the death of Bronfman, wife of billionaire Seagram's heir Charles Bronfman and arguably the most socially prominent New Yorker in decades to be killed crossing the street, is likely to ruffle the city's "drivers uber alles" culture.

Seven years have passed since *Killed By Automobile* identified "car turning into pedestrian in crosswalk" — the m.o. in Bronfman's death — as the city's Number One cause of traffic fatalities. Yet the Bloomberg administration has no programs aimed at protecting pedestrians' right-of-way (see *MTR* #s 212, 214 and 215 or [www.panix.com/~jlefevre/cars-suck/research/kba.html](http://www.panix.com/~jlefevre/cars-suck/research/kba.html)).

Mayor Bloomberg this week announced sweeping changes costing \$25 million at the Administration for Children's Services following the beating death of Nixzmary Brown. No shake-ups are reported at DOT or the NYPD, which is expected to again arrest bicyclists at tonight's Critical Mass ride. ❖

### Corzine Names Traffic Scofflaw as AG

Governor Corzine has nominated Zulima Farber as his choice for state attorney general. State Senators at Farber's initial confirmation hearing queried her about the **12 speeding tickets** she has received, and the various **driver license suspensions** imposed on her after failure to appear in court following some of the speeding citations.

Farber told the Senate panel she is embarrassed about her driving record and would consider counseling to remedy the situation. News reports said that former governor James McGreevey considered Farber but passed her over when the driving record issues came to light.

Farber's nomination is a troubling sign of the **low regard driving laws are accorded** and the extent to which anti-social behavior at the wheel is seen as normal throughout U.S. society. While other types of crime are addressed obsessively by politicians and press, dangerous, often deadly, driving behavior is generally winked at by opinion makers (witness wide NJ editorial support for Farber) and broadly tolerated by the legal system, and the problem seems to be getting worse.

Since the Campaign has tracked traffic deaths across New Jersey, beginning in the early 1990s, we've seen little improvement. **Statewide traffic deaths predictably exceed 730 per year**. We recently called on officials across the region to find ways to apply a "broken window theory" to traffic crime (*MTR* #518b), where zero tolerance for basic infractions can help reduce the dangerous driving that takes such a high death and injury toll across the region. Placing a habitual speeder in the state's top law enforcement position hardly seems the place to start. ❖

### Sell the Tappan Zee ?

Though some news articles published beforehand made it seem as if Governor Pataki's budget address would make a big deal of the idea of privatizing the Tappan Zee Bridge, the governor did not in fact mention the span. But the executive budget released last Tuesday contains legislation authorizing "**design-build**" contracts in which a single contractor undertakes multiple elements of project execution, and another provision would allow government agencies to **form partnerships with private com-**

panies on big infrastructure projects. The general idea in a case like the Tappan Zee would be for the state or its transportation agencies to collect a large lease payment from a private operator in return for the **rights to operate and collect tolls** (and likely increase them) on the Tappan Zee Bridge. The lease payment could finance the needed new bridge and mass transit lines that are anticipated to cross it.

The *Times Herald-Record* of Orange County said firms such as Australia's Macquarie, which purchased operating rights for a Chicago toll road last year, and Bechtel Corp. had expressed interest in the Tappan Zee, but provided no specific information.

Authorizing design-build is not a radical step – many states and agencies use the procedure, including New Jersey DOT and NJ Transit, and it is allowed under the laws governing federal transportation aid. The proposed legislation that accompanies the budget would allow the NY State DOT and the Thruway Authority to launch pilot design-build programs – 12 projects for DOT and five for the Thruway. As its name indicates, it combines project design and construction into a single contract. Its main reputed benefit is speedier project completion.

### Spitzer for LIRR Third Track

NY gubernatorial candidate Elliot Spitzer came out in support of the LIRR's third track project at a business breakfast Thursday, according to *Newsday*.

Spitzer said the project would help bring businesses to the Island and improve transportation generally. The project would build an additional track along the LIRR Main Line from Bellerose to Hicksville, creating a significant train capacity increase in both directions of travel. It is opposed by NIMBY residents and local politicians. It has been more quietly supported by Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi, Spitzer's likely challenger for the Democratic nomination for governor. ❖

### Regional and U.S. Reform—the Big Picture

The Surface Transportation Policy Project, 1000 Friends of CT, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and others are sponsoring a regional workshop on transportation policy reform and the provisions of the new federal transportation funding law, "SAFETEA-LU." in New Haven on **Feb 9-10**.

The workshop will discuss the status of policy reform in northeastern states and consider strategies for progress, along with a look at new and continuing federal programs. For details and to register, visit [www.transact.org/2006workshops/](http://www.transact.org/2006workshops/)

Governor Pataki's budget bill claims the procedure will save money as well. Some say design-build bidding processes, as opposed to design-build projects contracted via a detailed project negotiation, can yield less than optimal projects because the "customer" – transportation agencies and the public – has little control of the project after an initial concept is floated and an award made to a low bidder.

The public-private partnership section of the budget bills authorizes the DOT, Thruway and MTA to enter into "transportation development partnerships" with private companies.

These would allow private companies to "acquire, design, finance, construct, improve, operate and maintain transportation facilities, provide transportation services, and impose user fees for the use of the facilities or services." User fees – tolls or fares – would only be permitted on facilities that already charge them, or are altogether new roads or transit lines or represent new capacity. Thus, the legislation could allow a private company to build and operate a **high-occupancy toll lane** over the Tappan Zee Bridge, as all of the agency scenarios for the Tappan Zee corridor project envision. It would not permit the state to lease out rights to collect tolls on, for example, the Long Island Expressway.

The governor's memo in support of the legislation claims that traditional means of financing transportation infrastructure will be inadequate going forward, and will burden taxpayers and travelers with "unsustainable" cost burdens. It cites the **recent sale** of operating rights of a **Chicago toll-way** and private financing for the Dulles "Greenway" in Virginia. The legislation provides that all environmental review and public involvement procedures governing transportation agencies would remain in place for public-private projects.

However, the recent history of public-private toll road projects in North America has been less straightforward than the governor's memo suggests.

The Dulles Greenway example cited in the bill lost about \$30 million per year due to **wildly inaccurate traffic forecasts**. The initial operator, Autostrade, was forced to refinance the project, requested that the state increase the negotiated toll ceiling and then sold a majority stake to Macquarie, the Australian leaseholder of Chicago's Skyway. Macquarie claims the project is a good long term investment. Tolls increased on the road this month and are scheduled to rise again in 2007.

Toronto's Highway 407, built and run by Cintra-Macquarie, has become a political thorn in the side of local government thanks to **five toll increases** since 1999, for an overall hike of 250%. Authorities are widely viewed as having been sorely out-negotiated by the company, which paid \$3.1 billion for a 99 year lease of the 67-mile highway.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

A private road in Texas failed due to poor traffic projections and was sold at auction in 2004. Texas DOT now owns it. To the extent the road has general utility that exceeds its impacts and there are no hidden subsidies, Texas taxpayers got the road for a bargain, on the backs of its initial investors.

To be sure, traffic levels on existing roadways like the Thruway or Tappan Zee are **more predictable** than for new highways, provided growth rates are estimated conservatively. The general rule for operating lease projects is that they are impossible to evaluate without knowing details of the specific deal. Does the up-front payment allow the “public-private partnership” to build a project that would otherwise simply not happen? Why can’t public agencies raise tolls, issue bonds and build the project themselves? **Is government so broken and hamstrung** than it cannot execute big ideas, or is

### Waterfront Killing Highway May Morph Again

For years the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, residents of Trenton and planning advocates railed against a plan to create a highway in Trenton that would dramatically increase traffic and separate the city from the Delaware River waterfront (see MTR #'s 172, 177, 218 and 282). The project, initially designed to remove trucks from local streets, became a **parody** when **truck traffic was banned** from it before its completion.

When the large road project was completed in 2002, there was no ribbon-cutting ceremony; Governor James McGreevey’s office and the state DOT “celebrated” its completion with a press release that was more traffic advisory than commemoration.

Today, the DOT has admitted to serious problems with Route 29 and wants to perform another do-over. In part, the move responds to constant complaints from Trenton’s government, and in part it reflects a new point of view at NJ DOT.

The latest plan for Route 29 would change it to an **urban boulevard**, complete with bicycle and pedestrian access to the riverfront. The boulevard would connect to a **new local grid system**, so that at rush hour (or the end of a minor league hockey or baseball game) the road doesn’t back up. There is also direct economic gain for the city. The road-slimming plan will free up 18 acres of land for commercial and residential redevelopment.

The new plan is one of several “smart growth corridor studies” being advanced by NJ DOT’s Office of Project Planning and Development. The Route 29 example was highlighted on a piece on transportation reform in last October’s *Governing* magazine (MTR #512); but when the project for the new Route 29 is completed, the real winners will be the residents of Trenton. ❖

that just the day’s political propaganda? Is a private toll lease a good short-term deal for politicians afraid to raise taxes, a good deal for the public over the very long-term of many such leases, or both?

Some Hudson Valley contractors seemed interested in the idea’s application in the Tappan Zee corridor if it could move projects into construction more quickly. But a *NY Times* weekend editorial noted the potential conflict of making “vital infrastructure hostage to companies whose primary loyalties are to profits and shareholders.” Others seem even less convinced: “Until we know what it is they’re doing with the money, we don’t know if we have a good idea, a bad idea or a scam,” Assemblyman Richard Brodsky of Greenburgh told the *Journal-News*. “Our trains, buses, roads and bridges are in pretty good shape, and the private sector will try to pick off the cream.”

Design-build and public-private partnership legislation was defeated in Albany in 2005. The NY State DOT is reportedly holding a conference on public-private partnerships this March.

### Staten Island: the Edge of Gridlock

In his state of the city speech this week, Mayor Bloomberg told Staten Island leaders he would organize the **transportation task force** they have clamored for as the most traffic-ridden borough has ground ever closer to a halt.

Rapid growth, lack of planning and little investment in transportation infrastructure have made Staten Island the corner of New York City where traffic congestion is routinely a front-page item.

It will be interesting to see what the task force yields. Some of Staten Island leaders’ demands will help. They include additional express bus service (and an additional bus depot to support it), new fast ferry services, new rail cars for the S.I. Railway and a bus route to better link the Island to the Hudson-Bergen light rail line in Bayonne.

However, these measures alone do not constitute a comprehensive plan, and there are other impulses at work that will **make Staten Island traffic worse** before it gets better.

Consider Bricktown Center, the 42-acre suburban style big box development in Charleston, on the South Shore, which is likely to be accompanied by other nearby large commercial and residential developments. Assemblyman Vincent Ignizio asked the State Department of Transportation in November to study solutions to the traffic nightmare the development will create, and DOT agreed to start the 9-month study in March. But Borough President Molinaro, a strong supporter of Bricktown, has more recently devised his own \$100 million solution: build more roads to and from the site.

Further north, other officials want to open the new

Staten Island Expressway bus lanes to cars, effectively widening the highway and inviting more driving overall.

Tackling (or at least containing) traffic congestion on Staten Island is probably going to require a consensus around three main points:

1. Resisting the impulse to build or widen roads, which just extends today's problem.
2. Planning some higher density areas to absorb growth in an efficient way, rather than plunking it down on available car-dependent land on the South Shore. This can support the next point:
3. Developing a real mass transit system—bus rapid transit is likely the only way to do this anytime soon. BRT is a good choice because it has the flexibility to serve both on-Island and express-bus commuter markets, and is relatively inexpensive to implement. But it will require some tradeoff of street space between cars and room to allow the buses to move. Leaving the S.I.E. bus lanes intact would be a good first step in this direction. ❖

### London Pricing System to Evolve

The *Economist* reports that officials in London are experimenting with **E-ZPass-like toll tags** to improve the efficiency of their congestion charging system. Currently, cars entering or driving in central London have photos taken of their license plates, and are subject to the congestion fee. The camera system apparently successfully identifies about 95% of vehicles, but that “leaves several thousand vehicles per day whose details must be checked by hand.”

Additionally, the current London **payment system is not overly popular** — the charge is paid manually, by phone, internet or via a pay-point in a local shop, with steep fines for those who forget. Toll-tags that deduct payments automatically would eliminate this cumbersome element for most users. It would also allow officials to refine how the London charge is levied. Currently, drivers pay one daily flat fee. London authorities would like to charge users each time they enter the central zone, and **tailor charges to most congested times**. The *Economist* says the current system has cut jams the most at mid-day, when they are least onerous.

The new system in Stockholm (*MTR* #518) has some of these features. It uses a combination of toll tags and cameras. If New York is ever to move to some form of central-area and/or congested artery pricing, it should take advantage of the strong presence of E-ZPass in the region. ❖

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## CALENDAR

**Jan 31**, 5:00-6:30pm. Women's Transportation Seminar Annual Meeting with Martha Ann Walther, Acting Pres., MTA Bridges & Tunnels: "Crossing the Rivers: Current Plans for MTA Bridges & Tunnels." Club 101, Park Ave & 40th St, Manhattan. RSVP: 212-973-2923 or [rsvp@wtsgny.org](mailto:rsvp@wtsgny.org).

**February 2**, 5:30-7:30pm. NY Metropolitan Transportation Council considers NJ Transit Access to the Region's Core preferred alternative, 199 Water Street, 22nd Floor, Manhattan. 973-491-7825. [www.accesstotheregionscore.com](http://www.accesstotheregionscore.com).

**February 7**, 7:00-10:00pm. Municipal Art Society opening gala: "Livable Streets: A New Vision for NYC." The Open Planning Project, Transportation Alternatives, and Project for Public Spaces. 457 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. RSVP to 212-935-2075 or [rsvp@mas.org](mailto:rsvp@mas.org).

**Feb. 9-10**, Surface Transportation Policy Project workshop on transportation reform and new federal transportation law. Amarante's Sea Cliff, New Haven. [www.transact.org/2006workshops/](http://www.transact.org/2006workshops/)

**February 15**, 6:30-8:00pm. Municipal Art Society presents "Neighborhoods and Traffic" with guest speaker Karla Quintero, Transportation Alternatives. 457 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. RSVP to 212-935-2075 or [rsvp@mas.org](mailto:rsvp@mas.org).

**February 16**, 8:00am. Women's Transportation Seminar & Transportation Research Forum — "The Port of NY & NJ: Preparing for the Future" with Peter Zantal. PANYNJ. Newark Club, One Newark Center. RSVP: 212-973-2923 or [rsvp@wtsgny.org](mailto:rsvp@wtsgny.org).

**February 23**, 10am-12pm. NJ DOT Community Roundtable on Route 21, Newark. NJ Transit HQ, One Penn Plaza E, Newark. 609-921-8813.

**February 28**, 9:30am. MTA Board Meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan.

**More calendar items at [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)**

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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