

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Corzine Borrowing Plan Poorly Received

The plan to refinance existing state transportation bonds in order to head off the **pending insolvency** of the state's main fund for transportation infrastructure spending floated recently by the Corzine administration is not winning ringing endorsements anywhere in New Jersey.

The plan would apparently launch a new round of long term bonds backed by the savings from refinancing and rescheduled payments on existing debt.

Many worry that another round of borrowing, even if it yields strong capital spending levels for the next few years, will leave the state with a **gigantic transportation debt** it will be hard pressed to repay, and that severe transportation cuts will be required early in the next decade. However, Democratic legislative leaders have not been among those expressing concern.

"It's unfathomable to me that we're borrowing again, but I guess that's what the new treasurer wants to do," Assemblyman Bob Briant, who last year was appointed help oversee the Transportation Trust Fund, told the *Star-Ledger*. "It's going to add to the debt problem, and it's going to severely hamper future commissioners from being able to deliver transportation improvements."

"We get \$6 billion in revenue for the price of \$11 billion," said State Assembly transportation committee chair John Wisniewski in the *Star-Ledger*. "That's a big price to pay to get through a couple of years....By doing this we'd be going in the direction other than the reforms that we have talked about the last two years."

"That's \$5 or \$6 billion going into the pockets of bond holders instead of to roads and mass-transit systems," the Tri-State Campaign's Jon Orcutt told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

"What the (fund) needs is a thoughtful, fiscally responsible, long-term solution. What the governor is proposing is none of those," Senator Robert Littell, a member of the Senate Budget Committee, told the *Gloucester County Times*.

"Short-term fix after short-term fix creates the recurring fiscal crisis Governor Corzine said he wanted to avoid when he took office." Laborers Union president Ray Pocino wrote in a recent letter to legislators. ❖

### City Begins to Respond to Truck Onslaught

Last week, the NYC Council Transportation Committee held an oversight hearing; the theme was "Trucks, trucks everywhere: Does the City do anything to manage truck traffic?"

The answer is ambiguous at best, said the numerous community activists and policy organizations that testified.

Council Transportation Chair John Liu alternately criticized and questioned NYC DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall regarding the many years taken for a study of how to revise and better enforce official city truck routes. Liu noted that he and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign have been calling for truck management reform for **close to a decade**, when he was president of the North Flushing Civic Association.

On February 10, three days before the oversight hearing, NYC DOT indeed released preliminary findings from its Truck Route Management and Community Impact Reductions Study, which has been in the works since the late 1990s.

Chief among the recommendations is creation of a **new Office of Freight Mobility** within the NYC DOT. That could be a sign that city government is adapting the city DOT's mission to large increases in the volume of truck traffic plying city streets. Federal estimates expect the trend to continue, putting as many as 50% more trucks on city streets by 2020 than are experienced today. The new office will represent progress if it brings more DOT and NYPD attention to bear on the heavy truck impacts being felt in communities in every borough of the city, and begins to make the city's rules and routes for trucks into something known and tangible to both truck drivers and neighborhoods.

City transportation commissioner Iris Weinshall said one reason for the study's long duration is that NYC DOT expanded its scope to encompass crash data related to trucks and broader public outreach. She called the effort a "monumental undertaking."

Still, it's hard to understand why several of the showcased recommendations could not have been put into effect years ago. The city unveiled a new set of clearer truck route signs to replace the hodgepodge of existing truck-related signs, and a set of locally-tailored palm cards to that precinct-level

police officers can use to immediately identify through and local truck routes in their areas. Many neighborhood leaders report significant confusion on the part of local police about truck route maps and rules, and the city's strong emphasis on police education at the Council hearing seemed to confirm this. Commissioner Weinshall also said that the DOT intended to include administrative law judges in its educational efforts, presumably to tighten the application of penalties for trucks that receive summonses.

Police commitment from the top will likely also need to increase if neighborhoods are going to see any relief. Council member questioning at the hearing revealed that while about **13,000 NYPD summonses were issued to trucks** for all reasons during 2005, the police issued **40,000 tickets to bicyclists**. At two dozen meetings with community boards and civic groups, Tri-State Campaign staff found truck enforcement at the top of local traffic complaints, and no mention of bicyclists.

The DOT estimated that it would increase the total number of truck-route-related signs in the city to 10,000, from 4,000 today. They estimated that about 1,800 of these will be "negative" signs, which tell drivers not to drive on certain inappropriate streets. The DOT has apparently had a philosophical issue with "negative" signs in the past, and Commissioner Weinshall said that some communities do not want signs. However, our solicitation of community views and experiences indicates that some city neighborhoods have had to wage extended battles to get "no trucks" signs, and we anticipate no shortage of demand for the DOT's new model.

Other features of the city's plan mentioned in the initial recommendations or during the City Council session include time of day restrictions for some truck routes, which will be tested on Staten Island, and further investigation of opportunities to route trucks off of local streets and onto parkways. Commissioner Weinshall mentioned the city's successful opening to some trucks of the portion of the Grand

Central Parkway between the Triborough Bridge and the BQE, which diverted significant truck volumes off of Astoria streets (see [MTR # 459](#)).

Councilmember Leroy Comrie of Queens asked the DOT whether it anticipated using traffic calming measures as permanent deterrents to trucks trying to turn onto inappropriate streets, but received a non-answer about a city "wide turn zone" program, which appears to be a plan to get the largest trucks to use specific intersections. The absence of traffic calming in any form in the DOT's work is a big disappointment, but also a comment on where real traffic deterrents sit in that agency's overall planning and traffic management perspective.

Council members asked how the city planned to reduce overall truck growth, but the DOT had little to say on that front. Mayor Bloomberg withdrew the city's support for a cross-harbor rail freight tunnel during last year's election campaign and has not announced any freight plan to take its place.

No date has been announced by NYC DOT for the full release of its truck routing study. To review the preliminary recommendations, see: [www.nyc.gov/html/dot/pdf/truckstudy.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/pdf/truckstudy.pdf) ❖

### Suozzi Walks Third Track's Fine Line

*Newsday* recently reported that County Executive Thomas Suozzi opposes the LIRR third track project. The initiative would add another track to the LIRR Main Line between Bellerose and Hicksville. The paper reported that Suozzi warned residents in a letter last year that the project "may involve the taking of personal and village land."

In response to a Campaign query about the report, Nassau County provided this position: "One of the challenges of government is to meet the region's transportation needs and to protect the interests of residents and their communities which would be directly affected by the LIRR's plan to add a third track to the Main Line. I understand the importance of increasing the passenger capacity of the LIRR and I look forward to reviewing the draft DEIS, which will show us for the first time the actual location of the proposed third track. As I have said previously, I favor using the existing track bed and right-of-way. I oppose the forcible taking of property from homeowners and local governments to construct the third track."

So far, there is **no proof** that this project will require the taking of property, despite a loud campaign in western Nassau County to discredit the project.

It would be unfortunate if Suozzi opposed the **tangible transit and mobility** benefits of the LIRR third track while attempting to spearhead the "Nassau Hub" concept that pairs greater develop-

### E-Transport News from NYC

The NYC Dept. of Transportation publishes a **monthly e-mail newsletter** with updates on city projects and initiatives. The February edition (#7) mainly surveys current pedestrian safety and cycling projects, while presenting data on the continuing decline in NYC pedestrian fatalities and a summary of traffic measures implemented during the December transit strike.

It is possible to subscribe to the newsletter at the Dept.'s web-site: [www.nyc.gov/dot](http://www.nyc.gov/dot). However, a fairly extensive surf through that site did not turn up any archive of newsletter editions 1 through 6. ❖

ment density with new mass transit capacity in central Nassau County. That plan will ring hollow if the county fights or delays a plan that addresses the clear need for more overall Long Island Rail Road service. A business-labor coalition on Long Island has recently begun taking a tough approach to politicians inclined to support NIMBY opposition to the third track plan (MTR #521). ❖

### City Transit Use on Growth Path

New York City Transit saw the highest subway ridership last year since 1953, despite a three day transit strike and a fare hike for weekly and monthly MetroCard users, according to an agency release.

Total subway ridership was 1.45 billion, an increase of 23.1 million customers over 2004. Subway ridership averaged 4.7 million riders on weekdays. Annual bus ridership was down slightly during the year to 736.4 million, but weekend bus ridership reached the highest levels since 1975. Weekday bus ridership was also up by .6% over 2004. Overall subway and bus ridership reached the highest level since 1970, 2.2 billion.

The numbers indicate that riders prefer subways over buses. This is not surprising, since NYC's buses currently have the unflattering reputation of being the slowest city transit buses in the nation. NYC Transit is working on **bus rapid transit** concepts, though the initial effort may only offer modest increases on a few routes. NYC Transit and the city should **step up their efforts** to include more routes for these smaller scale improvements, and transform some streets into urban transitways with pre-boarding fare collection, for instance. A rapid, high-tech bus system could relieve some of the subway system's burdens, serve neighborhoods that are far from subways and offer relatively low-cost new transit capacity. ❖

### Is the No. 7 still alive and well?

In our last edition, we noted cross-currents in news stories about the health of NYC's plan to extend the #7 subway to foster development on Manhattan's Far West Side.

In the meantime, the MTA has issued a notice seeking a construction manager for the work. Potential bidders must be "prequalified," and then a formal request for proposals will be issued. The notice says subway construction should be complete by June 2012, and that the estimated construction cost is \$1.5 billion.

However, it also notes that financing for the contract is not in place, and a contract award will not be made until funding is secured. ❖

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## CALENDAR

**February 27**, 6:30 p.m. "Broadway as Destination: Redefining Broadway Around Great Destinations." Fred Kent, Proj. for Public Spaces, Jeff Zupan, RPA, Tim Tompkins, Times Sq. BID, others. Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Ave., Manhattan. [www.nycsr.org](http://www.nycsr.org).

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

**March 2**, 12:15-2:00pm. Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**March 2**, 7 p.m. Park Slope Civic Council annual meeting: "Traffic & Transportation in Brownstone Brooklyn." Fred Kent, Project for Public Spaces, Jon Orcutt, TSTC, Karla Quintero, Transp. Alternatives. Old 1st Reformed Church, 7th Ave. @ Carroll St., Brooklyn. 718-623-2480.

**March 8**: Written comment deadline for "50th St. Facility Environmental Assessment Notice of Clarification" (LIRR E. Side Access project). Mail to Joseph Petrocelli, Chief Administrative Officer, MTA LIRR East Side Access, 469 7th Avenue, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10018.

**March 9**, 8:30-10:00am. Municipal Art Society Planning Center Forum Series: "Market Forces and Community Vision: The Role of Community in 'As-of-Right' Development - Case Study: Flushing." MAS, 457 Madison Avenue. RSVP to Maia Mordana at 212-935-3960 or [planning@mas.org](mailto:planning@mas.org).

**March 15**, 4:00-5:30 and 5:30-8:00pm. ConnDOT Public Open House for New Britain-Hartford Busway Project. Union Station, Hartford, CT. 860-594-2001.

**March 15**, 5:00-7:00pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council President's Forum. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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