

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Corzine Team Looks to Fare Hike After Passing on Taxes, Tolls

In conversations connected with Governor Corzine's new plan to refinance New Jersey's transportation fund, NJ Transit has mentioned several times that it will soon seek fare increases. But at recent legislative hearings on the governor's proposal, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and Regional Plan Association testified that **raising transit fares** after refusing to increase gas taxes, vehicle registration fees or Turnpike tolls is **bad policy**.

"We find it ridiculous to raise fees on only one sector of the traveling public, especially those that cause less damage to the environment or, in the case of bus riders, tend to have lower incomes than their driving counterparts," said the Campaign.

At a recent NJ Transit board meeting, the NJ Association of Rail Passengers also warned Governor Corzine and NJ Transit it would fight fare hikes until the state has put its transportation finances on secure, long-term footing. ❖

Bill Strengthens NJ Fix-it-First Principle

If passed next week, New Jersey's Transportation Trust Fund legislation will strengthen New Jersey's commitment to smart growth.

The first draft of S. 1470, the Senate bill that codifies Governor Corzine's transportation refinancing plan (*MTR #521*), contained language that would have undercut the fix-it-first mandates put in place during the Trust Fund reauthorization in 2000. The fix-it-first mandate focused capital investment on existing roads and bridges and reduced spending on new highway capacity.

Prior to a recent Senate committee advocates for the NJ Environmental Federation, the Sierra Club and the Coalition for Affordable Housing joined with the Campaign to win stronger language codifying the fix-it-first principle. Senate staff on both sides of the aisle agreed to the change.

The legislation approved by the Senate Budget & Appropriations Committee **limits road expansion projects to 4%** of NJ DOT's annual capital budget.

The Assembly Transportation Committee approved similar legislation on Thursday. The full Senate will vote on the bill Monday; the full Assembly will vote Thursday. ❖

Big Funding Plan Offered in Hartford

Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives James Amann is aggressively pushing a \$2.5 billion revenue plan to fund a list of priority transportation capacity projects. Amann testified in favor of his bill in the legislature's joint Transportation Committee Wednesday, echoing growing sentiment across the state that "the people in this room have to stand up and have the guts to do what's needed" – raise a lot of money for transportation projects. Amann's plan is premised on a 1-for-1 federal match, for a **\$5 billion**, 10-year package.

State funds would be raised through additional increases in the petroleum gross receipts tax and general obligation borrowing. A \$1.3 billion financing plan for new rail cars and other improvements to the Metro-North New Haven Line proposed by Governor Jodi Rell and enacted last year will raise the tax to 8.1% by 2016. (*MTR #490*). Amann's plan would increase it gradually to 10.8% by 2016, almost double today's rate of 5.8%.

The priority projects are those identified several years ago by the state's **Transportation Strategy Board**, and include some commuter rail and bus rapid transit investments, but also extensive highway expansion plans, including widening I-95 in eastern CT and building a State Route 11 extension along a new alignment in a relatively undeveloped area northwest of New London.

The funding package attracted broad support in the state, with construction unions and business groups rallying before the hearing.

Connecticut Fund for the Environment supported the measure based on the strong presence of mass transit in the project list. The \$5 billion funding level, if enacted, is insufficient to construct the entire list, and environmentalists and smart growth advocates are expected to push the transit elements in the mix of projects. CFE's statement stressed New Haven to Springfield rail development and bus rapid transit projects around Hartford, and urged stronger looks at transportation-efficient planning and high-speed toll applications.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign testified that Connecticut will **never successfully chase traffic congestion** with new road capacity, and needs to change its overall planning approach to minimize

the generation of future automobile trips. The Campaign summarized the NJ DOT's corridor plans that are formulated in cooperation with municipalities.

Amann's bill competes with new legislation offered by Governor Rell and the State Senate. Rell's \$344 million plan emphasizes transit projects, and she says it can be accomplished with existing state revenues. Senate President Donald Williams has crafted a \$1.86 billion program that includes transit ideas for eastern Connecticut, an area the Strategy Board has slated for massive highway capacity investments. Williams is interested in a passenger rail line from New London to Worcester, Massachusetts. It would provide a link between the MBTA and CT's Shore Line East rail service. **Most of the overlap** between the various funding schemes is in **mass transit projects**, which may be hopeful.

Much of Connecticut's focus on transportation in recent years has created an odd institutional arrangement whereby the Transportation Strategy Board (TSB) has emerged as a policy-making body parallel to the Connecticut Dept. of Transportation. The Strategy Board is increasingly in control of capital funding for the projects it proposes – Amann's bill, for instance, creates a new Undersecretary for Transit & Growth in the powerful executive Office of Policy and Management and vests all of the new revenues in the TSB. The position would direct the Transportation Strategy Board and its capital budget, essentially functioning as a **second, independent transportation commissioner**. If the state wants to get transportation right, it will soon need to merge these functions back into a reformed ConnDOT and undertake a thorough look at how that agency using existing state transportation resources. ❖

Tolls on CT's Table ?

Other legislation pending in Hartford directs the state transportation commissioner to prepare a report by January, 2007 outlining a plan to levy road tolls on Interstates 95, 91, 84 and 395.

Legislators from Fairfield County backing the idea want some of the money plowed back into the state transportation system, and some devoted to increased local transportation aid to help towns struggling to meet road budgets and other local improvements. They also seem interested in high-speed E-ZPass toll applications like those operating in New Jersey and coming to the NY State Thruway. There are still foes to tolling among lawmakers, but House of Representatives **Speaker James Amann** is no longer among them. He recently changed his mind on the issue and vocally supports tolls to support greater transportation capital spending, a position he reiterated at Wednesday's Transportation Committee hearing. ❖

Stadium Parking Problem Getting Through ?

The NYC City Council postponed a meeting of its Sub-committee on Planning and Concessions this week. The Council was supposed to hear the Bloomberg administration/NY Yankees land use application for their Yankee Stadium redevelopment project. Council member Maria del Carmen Arroyo, representing the district containing the stadium, told the *NY Sun* Thursday that the Bronx delegation "had several questions neither the Parks Dept. nor the administration could answer." She told the paper that the city had not provided information about how it will address the problem of **additional traffic attracted by added parking capacity**.

The Tri-State Campaign and parks and Bronx advocacy organizations have criticized the stadium plan for adding thousands of new parking spaces without a demonstrable need for them. The city has justified the increase as a way to prevent baseball fans from parking in neighborhoods, and implausibly claims that a giant hike in parking capacity will not attract a single new car trip.

But the plan has no mechanism to prevent continued parking in the neighborhood, nor does it link the scale of that problem with the nearly **75% increase in parking** the project seeks. The new stadium will have fewer seats than the present one, and the Yankees set an all-time American League attendance record last year with their current transportation arrangements. Most of the new parking garages will displace or degrade scarce South Bronx parkland.

That the Bloomberg team could not answer basic questions about this large feature of the project suggests a shoddy approach to planning.

The city's final environmental impact statement for the new stadium lamely states that parking provision and fan travel behavior are not related, because Shea Stadium provides a huge amount of parking but sees a greater share of patrons using mass transit than does Yankee Stadium. However, the document provides no information on Shea parking capacity or transit share to back up the assertion, which flatly contradicts information the Tri-State Campaign collected from NYC Transit on stadium travel a year ago. The Bloomberg administration has so far not responded to our request for data to support the statement. ❖

Brooklyn Unites for Better Transportation?

Brooklynites need to press Mayor Bloomberg for transportation plans in development-stressed Brooklyn, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign told 200 attendees at a Park Slope Civic Council forum last week. The forum was meant to discuss what Brooklyn's population and development boom, with major projects like the Atlantic Yards, and the rezoning of Williamsburg-Greenpoint and Downtown Brooklyn

will mean for the borough's already crowded roads, subways, buses, and sidewalks.

Project for Public Spaces' Fred Kent and Karla Quintero from Transportation Alternatives spoke about the need to **reclaim New York City streets** for pedestrians, and the large community costs of too much traffic.

Brooklyn's population is projected to increase by 11% to 2.8 million by 2030. The Campaign found that since 1999, ridership at many Brooklyn subway stations is growing at two-to-three times citywide averages. And for every two trucks on the street today, a third will be added by 2020. Traffic in general may increase around 8% by 2025, on top of significant increases in the past decade.

No government agency has plans to deal with the **transportation impacts** of this development, and no overall transportation planning currently takes place in New York City. How can Brooklyn get the solutions it needs? Tri-State's Jon Orcutt suggested that community advocates cut through the alphabet soup of agencies and blurred lines of accountability by targeting Mayor Bloomberg — who has made development a signature issue — and demand that he focus city agencies and NYC Transit on projects and planning principles to accommodate Brooklyn's growth. **Staten Island** leaders, for example, made traffic problems a front page issue, and the Mayor responded with a **transportation task force** for the borough (MTR #519).

The city must also be forced to offer factual and honest transportation analyses of development projects—recent city studies for the West Side Stadium and Yankees Stadium, for example, have been at best weak on transportation impacts.

Potential steps to unclog Brooklyn's roads and transit could include Brooklyn subway projects in **the MTA's next capital program** (2009-2014), bus rapid transit corridors, traffic calming to prohibit trucks on certain residential streets, residential parking permits, and zoning to limit parking construction in denser, transit-rich areas.

None of these are likely unless Brooklyn civic and elected leaders create a unified platform and push the mayor. Hopefully, the Park Slope forum will mark the starting point of a coalition unified to win transportation investments for Brooklyn. ❖

City Preparing Big-Picture Plan ?

NYC Deputy Daniel Doctoroff has announced that the Bloomberg administration is compiling a report on infrastructure needs to handle the city's growing population. Little is known about the effort, but city leaders have told the *NY Times* and other outlets that transportation, sewer and energy infrastructure needs will be addressed, and that the study will be released this spring. ❖

Officials Demand North Brooklyn Plan

In February, the *Greenpoint Star* reported on the latest efforts of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and elected officials in northern Brooklyn's Greenpoint-Williamsburg to secure a transportation study for the area, which is likely to see a population increase of 20% or more in coming years.

When the Campaign suggested a study to DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall a year ago, she dismissed it, noting that the traffic mitigations in the city's recent rezoning action were enough. She also noted that L line service — which has already reached crowding levels projected for year 2011 — is outside DOT's purview (MTR # 510).

But elected officials representing the area — Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez, State Senator Martin Malave Dilan, Assemblyman Joe Lentol, and Council Members Diana Reyna and David Yassky — wrote to Weinshall last December, asking that she reconsider. They urged the city DOT to take a big-picture look at transportation, noting that the subway system's ability to respond to rapidly changing demographic conditions is limited, which argues “strongly in favor of pro-active forecasting of likely transit capacity needs, **greater city government involvement** in the development of MTA capital priorities and the likely street congestion effects of growth that overwhelms current levels of subway service. Unfortunately, your letter seems to suggest **waiting for problems to occur** before thinking about and planning to avoid them.” ❖

What's in a Lane?

On March 1st, Governor Pataki put regulations in place allowing energy efficient cars with only one-occupant to use the high occupancy vehicle lanes on the Long Island Expressway. The regulations will apply only to cars that get 45 miles or more per gallon on highways, excluding many hybrid SUVs. To use the lane, drivers register for “Clean Pass” stickers with the state Department of Motor Vehicles.

In New York City, City Council members are also reportedly interested in legislation to allow **hybrid-powered taxis to use city bus lanes**. It is unclear whether this would apply to all city bus lanes, such as those on Madison Ave., that already badly suffer from illegal taxi use. Some Council members also sponsored a resolution in 2003 that asked the MTA and Port Authority to reduce tolls for alt-fuel vehicles, but fortunately, the measure was dropped.

Opening high occupancy lanes to new-technology cars is often discussed but essentially represents a **confusion of anti-congestion and anti-pollution policies**. It poses a number of problems, especially in New York. First, already spotty enforcement becomes more difficult—with city taxis especially, it

will be difficult to distinguish efficient cabs from others, and on highways, small CleanPass stickers will also be tough to make out. The NY State transportation dept. in fact agrees. DOT spokesperson Eileen Peters told *Newsday* in 2005 the DOT would not consider hybrids in the L.I.E. HOV lane because of the **enforcement problem**.

Second, if the pro-hybrid rules and other, stronger factors like fuel prices succeed in building hybrids' market share, the lanes may **fill with clean single-occupant vehicles** and bog down. In Virginia, where similar rules were put in place, there is now pressure to repeal them, because HOV lanes are now as congested as regular travel lanes. In New York City, two-per-car vehicles have bogged down lanes on the Gowanus and the L.I.E. approach to the Midtown Tunnel to such an extent that the rules are now **three-per-car**, as well as bus-only at the Lincoln Tunnel and Staten Island Expressway.

In California, energy efficient cars are allowed to drive in HOV lanes, but the state smartly put a time limit on the rules, so it could reevaluate the plans if market share for the cleaner vehicles expands to the point that the priority lanes grind to a halt. ❖

Federal Transit Commute Benefit—it Works

The latest edition of TransitCenter's newsletter reported that commuter benefits help reduce the number of people who drive to work. A new Transportation Research Board report looked at 21 metropolitan areas, and found that generally transit ridership increased after the implementation of commuter benefit programs. The benefits allow employees to buy transit passes with pre-tax, gross earnings, potentially saving them hundreds in tax dollars annually, and are known as TransitChek, WageWorks, or MetroPool in the tri-state region.

Cities with a sizable existing transit riderships, like New York and Philadelphia understandably saw lower percentage increases. Still, **worksites measured in New York** saw a 16% increase in transit use, and 14% of transit benefit recipients were new to transit. Cities with a small overall share of transit riders, like Atlanta and Los Angeles saw some of the highest increases, 126% and 72% respectively.

The study had some notable findings:

- Ten to forty percent of those who received the benefit were new to transit.
- Most of the new transit riders previously commuted to work alone in an automobile;
- The transit benefit led to an increase in frequency of transit use among existing transit riders.

For more, see www.trb.org, Report 107. ❖

CALENDAR

March 15, 4:00-5:30 and 5:30-8:00pm. Conn-DOT Open House for New Britain-Hartford Busway. Union Station, Hartford, 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.

March 16, 11:45am. NYMTC Annual Council Meeting. 199 Water Street, 22nd Floor, Manhattan. RSVP to 212-383-7200.

March 21, 6:30pm. Citizens for NYC and Transportation Alternatives present a panel discussion on traffic relief, with Times Sq. Alliance; Councilman David Weprin. Museum of the City of NY, 1220 Fifth Ave. Manhattan. 212-629-8080.

March 22, 8:30-10:00am. NYU Wagner Rudin Center and Transportation Alternatives forum: "Less Traffic, More Life" with Enrique Peñalosa, former Mayor of Bogotá, Colombia. 60 Washington Square South, 10th Floor. RSVP to events@transalt.org. Info: 212-629-8080.

March 22, 9:00-10:30am. Good Jobs New York, NY Foundation and NY Community Trust: forum: "Community Needs and Public Financing Issues and the New Yankee Stadium." With Sustainable South Bronx; Save Our Parks and Tri-State Transportation Campaign. 350 Fifth Avenue, # 201, Manhattan. RSVP to 212-721-7996 or gjny@goodjobsfirst.org.

March 22, 6:00-8pm. Transportation Alternatives and the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy: an evening with Enrique Peñalosa. Tickets \$45, refreshments served. RSVP to events@transalt.org.

March 23, 12:15-2:00pm. New York City Transit Riders Council meeting. 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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