

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### CT Looks to Toll Conversion of HOV Lanes

The Connecticut DOT has sent a letter of interest to the Federal Highway Administration “value pricing” program that may herald an application for funds to study the **conversion of carpool lanes** on I-84, I-91 and I-384 around Hartford to “high-occupancy toll” (HOT) lanes. HOT lanes remain open to car-pools but also allow single-occupant vehicles whose drivers are willing to pay a toll.

A ConnDOT evaluation of HOV lanes cited in the New Haven *Register* found that the special lanes around Hartford are **being used at half capacity**, though congestion in general lanes is growing.

A November 2002 *Courant* opinion piece by CT Fund for the Environment’s Don Strait and the Tri-State Campaign’s Jon Orcutt urged the step, arguing “These [HOV] lanes are now underused. We could allow single-occupant drivers with an E-ZPass-type account to pay to use the lanes. Carpoolers would continue to use the lanes for free. Single drivers during peak hours could avoid congestion around Hartford by paying a toll. If such a test works, the concept could be broadened to areas of the state equally (or more) in need of them. Why not make the Merritt Parkway the tolled, congestion-free alternative to I-95, with the revenue devoted to adding train service on the New Haven line and other measures to reduce congestion in Connecticut’s southwest corridor?” (MTR #392). ❖

### SF to Gauge Pricing’s Benefits

San Francisco has received a funding commitment of \$1.04 million from the FHWA value pricing program to examine road pricing options for San Francisco County. The San Francisco County transportation authority recently said it hopes to use road pricing to cut congestion, increase bus and light rail speeds and funding and reduce air pollution, according to the San Francisco *Chronicle*. Officials said the study would consider a **downtown charging zone** as well as new tolls or toll schedules on approaches to congested areas, such as the Bay Bridge. The politics of any implementation will inevitably be complex, but San Francisco’s willingness to confront and discuss congestion and the appropriate direction for transportation policy puts it squarely ahead of New York. ❖

### A New Stop in the South Bronx

At press time, *MTR* learned that Governor Pataki will today announce the addition of a Metro-North station to the controversial Yankee Stadium plan.

Though the addition of a train station at the site is certainly welcome news, the plan still calls for **huge increase in parking supply, with garages displacing parkland**. Even with commuter rail access, the parking increase will cause more to drive to games, worsening already bad congestion and pollution in the area.

The Tri-State Campaign, environmental, good government and planning groups asked elected leaders for months to reduce the amount of new parking and direct subsidies to the Metro-North station rather than new parking.

A big question is who will pay for the new station. The state, city and Yankees should pick up the tab with new transit money, rather than loading the project on the already cash-strapped MTA. ❖

### City’s Credibility on Transport Ebbs

Last week, NYC assistant transportation commissioner Michael Primeggia told a City Council panel and a huge crowd assembled for a hearing on the Yankee Stadium redevelopment that availability of parking is a very **minor factor** in individual decisions to drive in New York City. The statement contradicts almost all research and common sense about urban transportation, but Primeggia had to say it in order to support the Yankee stadium environmental impact statement, which claims the huge increase in parking the plan calls for **will not create a single new car trip** to baseball games. Primeggia also dismissed the idea of game-day resident-only parking permits for the stadium area, claiming they “don’t work,” but offering no reason why motoring fans who seek on-street parking today will gravitate to paid garages in the future.

The prior weekend, responding to Transportation Alternatives’ rally that presented 100,000 petition signatures in favor of a **ban on cars from Central Park’s loop drive**, city transportation commissioner Iris Weinsall told the *Daily News* that the park drive is a “**critical transportation link for commuters**.” That is patently not the case. The number of cars using the park drive is a miniscule fraction

of total vehicles moving north or south in Manhattan on all avenue and highway lane during commuter hours. According to Transportation Alternatives, only one-half of one percent of the people entering New York's Central Business District on an average workday rely on the park drives.

### More Growth for Transit-Poor East Side

Elected officials and community groups are opposing a 6.3 million square foot mixed use development on the East River, between 35<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Streets on the 8.7 acres of the former Con Edison site. The project would add hundreds of residential units, 1.1 million square feet of commercial space, and 40,000 square feet of retail space (for comparison, a standard Home Depot is about 125,000 sq. ft, an average city storefront is 1-2,000 sq. ft). It would include 1,559 new parking spaces — 1,183 new public spaces and 376 accessory (residential) spaces. An EIS found the project would cause **crowding at #7 and Lexington Line** platforms in Grand Central, and along bus lines. The plan resembles the obsolete “tower in a park” format where large buildings are surrounded by lifeless, non-urban open areas.

East Siders want a smaller project that includes affordable housing, a waterfront esplanade and street-level retail. A scoping hearing was held last week – comments are due in May.

Nearby, between 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Streets along 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, Mayor Bloomberg has announced plans for the \$700 million **East River Science Park**. He said he hopes to lure biotech and other research firms. The first phase will house 540,000 square feet of office space, a second phase an additional 300,000. Construction is slated to begin this year with occupancy in 2008.

Farther uptown, a 3 million square-foot project is proposed from East 125<sup>th</sup> to East 127<sup>th</sup> Streets between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues. It would include 1,500 residential units, 700,000 square feet of commercial space, and 1,000 parking spaces. In a recent newsletter, the civic group **Civitas** notes that the project should encourage transit use rather than driving, and be consistent with recent plans to only allow contextual development in the area.

Together, the projects demand an expansion of mass transit capacity on the East Side. Elected officials and other involved in approvals for them should urge that transportation impacts be examined in light of the possibility of **bus rapid transit service** along 1<sup>st</sup> and/or 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenues, and perhaps insist that the transit improvement be implemented in tandem with the developments. The corridor is likely one of the five pilots that NYC DOT and NYC Transit are considering for BRT service, but the effort is proceeding at the pace of an M34 bus. ❖

In the one case, the NYC DOT is making false global policy claims to defend a private developer's irrational insistence on building thousands of parking spaces it doesn't need, and in the other, the agency is making up reasons to defend the turf of a park roadway the DOT doesn't want to have to remove from its automobile flow schemes.

As commentator Aaron Naparstek has written, “The most disappointing thing about Weinshall's public statement on Central Park is that it backs her into a corner. **To make the park car-free, the mayor will now have to contradict her** and set policy that goes against this idea that the Central Park Drives are a vital commuter link. Through misinformation, Weinshall has made it that much harder for a car-free park to happen during the Bloomberg Administration.”

The city DOT is free to make such pronouncements largely because **the city has no operative transportation policy or goals**. Unlike San Francisco's “transit first” agenda or European cities' even more aggressive steps to reduce driving, New York's approach is to muddle through and prevent dramatic crises even while trends like mushrooming truck traffic in neighborhoods overtake it.

In an era when urban shrinkage has given way to booming growth, that's no longer acceptable or workable for the city. The city needs policies that make traffic calming the rule, not the exception, for its streetscapes, that prioritizes bus travel on avenues, that considers the transportation consequences of huge development complexes at the beginning of the siting process, not as something to be explained away in environmental documents, and it needs to become more closely involved in setting priorities for MTA capital projects as growth strains the transit system's capacity and alters travel patterns.

**It's not clear the city's transportation institutions are up to these tasks.** NYC DOT in particular has shown great difficulty in delivering policy initiatives — faltering or taking forever just with the study stages of truck route enforcement, traffic calming in Brooklyn, safe routes to schools, bus rapid transit and downtown Brooklyn transportation capacity projects. Whether the urgency to innovate and policy purview of the DOT can be modernized through a top-to-bottom reconstruction of the agency, or whether it should be consigned to a pot-holes and traffic signals department with a new, robust urban “smart growth” and transportation planning located elsewhere is a debate New York needs to begin. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

## NJDOT's Plan for Warren County Provides Blueprint for Highlands

Last week, NJDOT unveiled its corridor plan for **Route 57** in front of an audience of 30 municipal leaders and leaders of local conservation activists. The highway runs southwest-northeast in a scenic, rural corridor of Warren County roughly bounded by the Delaware and Musconetcon Rivers. State officials laboriously refer to it as "one of the few remaining rural state highways **not yet overtaken by the sprawling development** patterns so common in the rest of the state." Most of the Route 57 corridor is within the Highlands Planning Area, a northwestern area of the state that has been designated for special environmental protection under legislation approved in Trenton last year.

The Route 57 plan seeks to **avoid widening the highway** by encouraging smart growth, fixing inter-

### Hudson River: NY's Capital of New Housing

Residential development along the Hudson is booming, projected to add 15,000 "cookie-cutter" homes to the river banks, with associated traffic impacts.

In response, **Scenic Hudson** has created a virtual aerial tour of new developments in 18 communities, from Yonkers to Kingston. On-line, a tour-taker can "fly over" completed and proposed developments, with commentary labeling them good, bad and ugly.

The development ranges from the completed award-winning Hudson Park at Yonkers, a mixed used, recreational development with waterfront access next to the Yonkers train station, to sterile "mcmansions" in Hyde Park, Upper Nyack and Fort Montgomery that are **far from transit and block public access** to the waterfront.

For the full Scenic Hudson "Riversprawl" aerial tour, as the *New York Times* described it, visit [www.scenichudson.org](http://www.scenichudson.org). Here are some examples of objectionable projects it surveys:

Yonkers: following successful development of Hudson Park at Yonkers, developers now want 6,000 new residential units near the waterfront.

Sleepy Hollow: Ichabod's Landing, a residential compound, is under construction. Next door, developer Roseland has proposed a 1,500 residential unit development. Kendall-on-Hudson, a large assisted living facility that overwhelms nearby parks. No transit is nearby.

Croton: New "Discovery Cove" condos along the waterfront offer little public access.

Upper Nyack: Forests are being cut down for new waterfront mcmansions.

Fort Montgomery: Forest cleared for new car-dependent family homes.

Kingston: Two developers have proposed 2,500 residential units far from any transit service. ❖

sections and other small problems to improve mobility and creating connections between other local roads to provide options for some local traffic. Included in the handouts were a tool-kit for municipalities that explained smart growth concepts and planning techniques like transit-oriented development, scenic corridor zoning, conservation zoning and historic preservation.

Local officials expressed support for the plan and pledged to work with the DOT to protect the corridor for traffic-attracting sprawl development.

Also last week, advisory groups to the New Jersey Highlands Council met to give input for a **Highlands master plan**, due out in May and supposed to develop details for implementing the protections signed into law last year. Suggestions given by the transportation committee were similar to the strategies expressed in the Route 57 plan. So far, no one has expressed strenuous objection to this approach, but the actual thinking of Council members is not well known. The Tri-State Campaign has urged them to follow NJ DOT's lead and use transportation investments to guide development and preserve western New Jersey from haphazard sprawl. ❖

### Newark Debates Roadway's Future

The New Jersey Department of Transportation is giving residents a chance to weigh in on two options for Route 21, also known in Newark as the **McCarter Highway**. The public sessions are to unveil the plans and gauge support for different options. The project area is a one mile stretch of the highway running south of Penn Station and the planned NJ Devils hockey arena.

One of the plans would **widen the road from four to six lanes**, effectively dividing the community by making the road even more daunting to pedestrians and requiring destruction of housing and small businesses along the corridor. While this option is has been supported by Newark city government, commuters and the trucking industry (Route 21 is a North-South alternative to the New Jersey Turnpike and its tolls) it would cost \$80 million dollars and would not be completed for at least a decade, according to DOT planners.

The second plan has far more local support, even by the local McDonalds restaurant, because it would not widen the road. Instead, it proposes a **series of intersection and pedestrian improvements** and spares businesses the problems of state/city buy-outs and large-scale construction disruptions. DOT says it can move traffic at an acceptable rate at volumes forecast for the next two decades. It would cost \$20 million.

With Mayor Sharpe James' recent decision not to seek re-election this spring, the **politics of the pro-**

ject are likely to change. The local city council-member Augusto Amador has adamantly opposed the widening. Neither of the major candidates to replace James, Cory Booker or Senator Ronald Rice, have shown much awareness of the issue and are probably less likely to rile local constituents in favor of suburban commuters or hockey fans.

The DOT is expected to make a decision on the two main options in June, after two more rounds of meetings with stakeholders. How the Department rules will be closely watched by community and transportation activists who are keenly interested in whether the new state administration places the concerns of local communities and the mission of urban revitalization over those of motorists and truckers looking to use Newark as a bypass. ❖

### NY Public Employees Rap Road Privatization

The New York State Public Employees Federation ran a half-page ad denouncing the possible privatization of transportation infrastructure in the NY Times metro section Friday. The ad's "Don't Go There" message was directed at state lawmakers considering a measure in **budget legislation** authorizing "public private partnerships."

The public-private partnership section in Governor Pataki's budget bill authorizes the NY State 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 (MTR #519)

The agencies recently awarded a consulting contract for research on such a partnership for **the Tappan Zee Bridge**, but that will only result in a study with recommendations for funding a replacement bridge and possible transit line in the Tappan Zee corridor.

The labor federation says the "public-private" arrangements "reduce government transparency, invite fraud, increase the state's reliance on costly consultants, limit public oversight and cost taxpayers more." It also points to the lengthy duration of most major leases — "if a deal is bad, it's bad for a long time."

The federation also attacks design-build contracting, saying only the largest companies are able to bid on such work. ❖

## CALENDAR

**April 5**, 6:00-8:00pm. Opening reception for "Big Box on the Basin: Retainins Red Hook's Last Working Shipyard." Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. RSVP to 212-935-2075 or [rsvp@mas.org](mailto:rsvp@mas.org).

**April 6**, 12:15-2:00pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**April 13**, 10:00am. Connecticut State Traffic Commission monthly meeting. ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Rm. B., 2800 Berlin Twp, Newington, CT. 860-594-3020.

**April 18**, 6:30pm. Brooklyn Community Board #1 forum on subway service in Greenpoint-Williamsburg. Van Arsdale High School, 257 North 6th Street (use entrance at Roebling Street), Williamsburg, Brooklyn. 718-389-0009.

**April 18**, 7:00pm. State Senator Liz Krueger, Councilman Dan Garodnick, and CIVITAS forum on Bus Rapid Transit. Marymount Manhattan College, 221 East 71st Street, Manhattan.

**April 19**, 8:30-10:00am. NYU's Wagner Rudin Center, Wagner Transportation Association, and the Council on Transportation present "The Coming Transformation of Travel" with John Poorman, Director of Capital District Transportation Committee. NYU Kimmel Center, 60 Washington Square South, 10th Floor. Seating limited, RSVP by April 17 to [mnn2@nyu.edu](mailto:mnn2@nyu.edu).

**April 20**, 12:15-2:00pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**April 20**, 6:30pm. NYS DOT Kosciuszko Bridge Stakeholders Advisory Committee meeting. Martin Luther High School, 60-02 Maspeth Avenue, Maspeth, Queens NY. Info: [kosciuszko@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:kosciuszko@dot.state.ny.us).

## TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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