

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

High Traffic Fatality Toll Persists in NJ

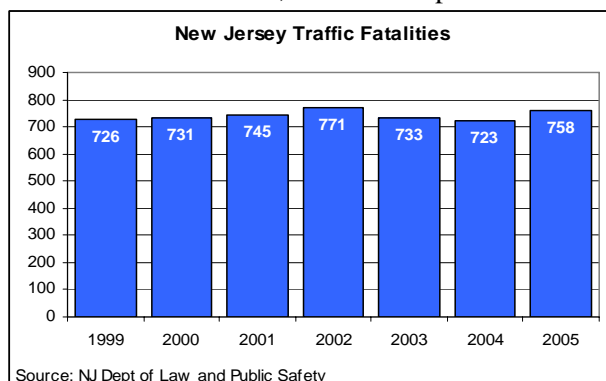
A citizen recently interviewed by the *Asbury Park Press* said motorists should not be ticketed for **speeding to appointments** for which they are late. Does the statement suggest the reason traffic deaths have not significantly declined in over a decade in New Jersey? Are traffic offenses indeed viewed by elected leaders and police as petty white-collar crime that politicians would do well to stay away from, despite the high body count?

According to state data compiled by the Tri-State Campaign, 2005 was the **second most deadly year** on New Jersey's roadways **since 1997**. 758 people died in traffic crashes in 2005, up nearly 5% from 2004. Pedestrian fatalities also increased, to 156 in 2005 from 150 the previous year.

An analysis of federal traffic fatality data reveals New Jersey would benefit from more enforcement. Federal records show that more than 60% of traffic fatalities from 1999 through 2004 were the result of **speeding or otherwise reckless driving**.

In response to the Campaign's release of the data, the Corzine administration pointed to a NJ DOT **"Safety First" initiative**. It includes plans to prevent median crossover crashes, improve sidewalks, increase "safe streets to schools" funding and quicken emergency response time to crashes.

The administration demurred regarding the Campaign's call for a "broken window" approach to roadway crime, but the release spurred some papers to call for stepped up enforcement. In February, Governor Corzine complained about speed traps during a radio show, saying, "situations designed for revenues just aren't right." The fringe motor-libertarian National Motorists Association said of the state's traffic deaths, "there is no problem." ❖



Yankee Stadium's Metro-North Station Not a Done Deal

A day before the City Council vote on the Yankee Stadium proposal, Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg announced support for construction of a new Metro-North station next to the stadium. The Tri-State Campaign and other organizations have said for months that the station should replace new parking garages as a main transportation component of the plan. The station would serve trains from the Hudson, Harlem Valley and New Haven lines.

As a political stroke, **the announcement worked** — even Council members who had been sharply critical of the stadium plan the prior week lined up on April 5 to approve the Yankees' land use application. Some cited the train station as the cover they needed to go along with the mayor and Council Speaker Christine Quinn's support for the project.

However, the announcement cost the mayor and governor little. The Yankees' entire land use plan — with garages containing thousands of new parking spaces displacing parkland — has been approved, while **neither the Yankees, the state nor the city have pledged a dime** for the train station.

If the MTA is forced to undertake the project with its own resources, it is likely that its funding will come from other essential Metro-North or NYC Transit projects. The MTA will attempt to fudge this fact and fall on its sword for the outgoing governor. But to the extent the transit system runs into **larger capital budget problems** down the road — there are big unfunded "out-year" costs, not to mention huge unrealized asset sales within the approved 2005-2009 MTA capital program — the Yankee Stadium station could well meet the budget axe in a consolidation of priorities under the next state administration. City Council members will blame the MTA if that happens. Perhaps the only politician who might be held accountable to some degree is Adolfo Carrión, who has ambitions to run for mayor in 2009 and who says the interests of the Yankees and the South Bronx are the same.

The MTA is expected to offer a preliminary budget and design for the station at its April 26 board meeting. Transit advocates say the elimination of additional parking could free up \$70 million in state funding, more than enough for the station. A

New York Times editorial this weekend called on the Yankees to help fund the station. But unfortunately, few politicians or media outlets appear to understand a basic fact—the more parking available at a site, **the more likely people are to choose driving** over transit. With the construction of thousands more parking spaces near the Yankees stadium, the Metro-North station, even if constructed, will not do as much as it could to reduce game-day traffic in the South Bronx.

Councilman Joel Rivera said that he is lobbying hard for a “feasibility study for game-day residential parking permits.” If all the new parking is built, permits could at least help ensure that fans use it by restricting their access to street parking. ❖

Jersey Road Privatization Off the Table — for a Few Weeks

During the his election campaign this fall, Senator Jon Corzine assured New Jersey voters that he wouldn’t consider selling the New Jersey Turnpike (MTR #512). Perhaps having to deal with the difficult issue of the state’s Transportation Trust Fund has changed his mind. The governor’s office recently told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* it wouldn’t rule out the sale of toll roads saying, “Before selling or leasing any of our transportation assets, we have to make sure these transactions are successful.”

The statement responded to a new round of proposals in the state senate. Senator Raymond Lesniak has written a bill authorizing sale of 49% of the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway to private investors. Lesniak originally said the plan would garner \$6 billion to pay off state pension obligations, but has since shown flexibility about devoting proceeds to infrastructure.

The plan would skirt the problem of the state’s controlling share by legislating annual toll increases pegged to the consumer price index, according to *NJBIZ*. Whether toll road investors would be interested in a minority share is unknown. So is whether the plan represents a good deal for citizens, but the idea appears to be making toll-road sale more palatable to opinion-makers across the state.

Senator William Gormley is leading a push for the second toll-road privatization plan to lease the Atlantic City Expressway for 75 years, dedicating 70% of the estimated \$3.8 billion price to southern Jersey projects and the other 30% to the Transportation Trust Fund. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Dueling Toll Studies?

The South Western Regional Planning Agency has submitted its own application to the Federal Highway Administration to study the reintroduction of tolls to Connecticut highways.

The *New Haven Register* recently wrote that the State Dept. of Transportation recently submitted a proposal to FHWA for a study of HOT lane conversion of HOV lanes on interstates around Hartford (single-occupant vehicles paying tolls to use lanes currently designated for carpools — MTR #526), though other stories have said the ConnDOT study would look at a variety of strategies across the state.

SWRPA, a metropolitan planning organization, believes a study looking just at lower Fairfield County would constitute a stronger proposal, so has submitted its own study plan. There are no HOV lanes in the southwestern part of CT, for instance. SWRPA said it was interested in working with DOT, but accused the agency of ignoring its requests. SWRPA representatives told the *Stamford Advocate* that the DOT’s application did not say it would study impact on mass transit ridership and fares, presented out-of-date information about area traffic volumes and did not focus enough on lower Fairfield County. SWRPA has said it will withdraw its application if DOT proves that its requests were heard. ❖

Better Information Through Legislation

NYC Councilwoman Gale Brewer recently introduced a bill directing the NYC DOT to adopt real-world performance measures regarding the city’s transportation system, as opposed to the data on bureaucratic activity it currently reports.

Intro 199 says “the Department of Transportation currently measures surface transportation performance through an array of output measures that assess activity [such as] the number of traffic lights repaired and the number of potholes filled.”

If enacted, the bill would supplement these statistics with a set of measures whose aim will be to assess and reduce “the amount of traffic citywide and within each borough.” Specific aims of the new data would be to “reduce commute time citywide,” reduce household exposure to street emissions and reduce driving’s share of travel to central business districts while increasing those of mass transit, cycling and walking. A report on transportation performance would be due each January 15.

The legislation leaves it to the NYC DOT to come up with the specific units of measurement, but the aim of the performance measures is clear and worthy of passage by the Council. Supporters hope the information will inform a goal-driven city transportation policy that curbs driving impacts and makes more room for other means of travel. ❖

Tinkering, Not Planning, on Staten Island

Mayor Bloomberg's Staten Island Transportation Task Force came out with its recommendations in late March. The report cannot be called innovative. Some worthy projects, like reactivating the rail freight bridge over the Arthur Kill and building a third bus depot in Charleston have been discussed for years and should already be complete. In fact, most of the recommendations existed before the creation of the Task Force.

The Mayor formed the Task Force, with elected officials, agency heads, and community board chairs, after pressure from many of the same people to address mounting congestion problems.

Short-term recommendations (to be complete by 2007) offer modest bus service improvements and a somewhat better schedule and expanded parking for the Staten Island Railway, but are mainly weighted toward **shoehorning more cars** through intersections. The tone of the effort seems set at the outset of the city's presentation, where mass transit is called "limited" but the highway system is described as "under-built." However, that the mayor successfully pressed NYC Transit to participate and come through with some initiatives is noteworthy.

One interesting short term recommendation inserts the city into development guidelines, possibly requiring developers to **connect adjacent sites** to reduce short-haul traffic on busy roads by allowing easier access between neighboring uses.

One test of the initiative will be its staying power. But even in the medium and longer terms, transit-oriented points are disappointingly listed as "studies," while street and highway projects are itemized as "improvements." The studies include **bus rapid transit** on Hylan Boulevard and Richmond Avenue and additional miles of greenways, to be done by 2009 (not the 2007 implementation date the NYC DOT and NYC Transit have cited for their city-wide bus rapid transit effort). The "improvements" are widening Forest Hill Road, Arthur Kill Road and other streets, and a variety of highway ramp projects.

Land use/transportation studies for the north shore and an area along the West Shore Expressway are mentioned, but whether the establishment of transit-oriented growth zones is intended is not clear.

Reaction to the plan seems to demonstrate **how low the bar has been set** for transportation innovation and government performance in the city. Some elected leaders seemed amazed that the city met the 60-day deadline imposed by Mayor Bloomberg. Borough President Molinaro said the recommendations "absolutely address all my concerns."

Ultimately, if growth proceeds as projected on Staten Island, the borough will need a stronger plan that channels development to designated higher-density areas that can be better served by mass transit. The Island today could probably support a good set of bus rapid transit lines, but the city seems in no hurry to plan or test that concept.

We urge Staten Island elected and civic leaders to keep the pressure on Mayor Bloomberg for **more ambitious traffic relief and a broader vision** of Staten Island's future than is represented in the current grab-bag of small-scale and recycled initiatives. For a complete list of projects, go to www.nyc.gov/html/gmtf. ❖

CALENDAR

April 18, 6:30pm. Brooklyn Community Board 1 subway service forum: Van Arsdale High School, 257 North 6th St. (use entrance at Roebling), 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 Rudin Center presents "The Coming Transformation of Travel" with John Poorman, Director of Capital District Transp. Committee. 60 Washington Square South, 10th Floor. RSVP by April 17 to mnn2@nyu.edu.

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

April 20, 6:30pm. NYS DOT Kosciuszko Bridge Stakeholders Committee meeting. Martin Luther High School, 60-02 Maspeth Avenue, Queens. kosciuszko@dot.state.ny.us.

April 27, 10am-12pm. NJ DOT Community Roundtable on Route 21 Newark, Murray Street to Edison Place. NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza E, Newark. 609-921-8813.

April 27, 12:15-2:00pm. New York City Transit Riders Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

May 1, 5:30-7:30pm. East Coast Greenway NY Committee. 457 Madison Avenue, 2nd Floor. 800-364-9943. RSVP to karen@greenway.org.

More calendar items at www.tstc.org