

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Contested Streets

A new documentary, *Contested Streets: Breaking New York City Gridlock*, by **Transportation Alternatives**, makes the case that NYC must reclaim streets from the automobile and make them more livable for our growing population.

The 57-minute film piece discusses the historical context of NYC's transformation from a city crowded with pedestrians at the turn of the century to one overrun with cars and trucks. It goes further to explain the creation, in the middle of the 20th century, of the quintessential American notion that traffic is unequivocally good for the economy.

Unfortunately, much of city government appears to still believe this is the case, even though other large cities have realized that in order to compete as a growing, global city, they must make drastic improvements to the quality of street life and mass transit systems. The second part of the movie details the improvements made over a number of years in **London, Paris, and Copenhagen** where leaders have transformed streetscapes by taking space from cars in favor of dedicated lanes for buses, bicycles and pedestrians. The images of NYC's crowded, gridlocked streets where pedestrians navigate around trucks stopped in crosswalks and cyclists look endangered even in meager bike lanes are striking in juxtaposition to the organized, buffered, attractive transit- and pedestrian-friendly streets of London and Paris. The contrast is particularly apparent when one considers that our elected officials will not even ban cars from our green crown jewels, Central and Prospect Parks.

In the narrative, business leaders and others bluntly state that in order for NYC to maintain a competitive edge, it **must do something to reduce congestion** and create larger and safer spaces for pedestrians to walk and gather.

To obtain a copy of the movie or schedule a viewing in your community, please contact Dani Simons 646-873-6025 or [events@transalt.org](mailto:events@transalt.org). ❖

### NJ Budget Crisis: Hands Off Transit Construction Funds

Transportation issues at stake in New Jersey's fiscal 2007 budget impasse are the operating budgets for New Jersey DOT and New Jersey Transit. Governor Corzine's proposed budget did not require NJ Transit to use any more of its capital construction budget to pay for day-to-day operations than the past couple of New Jersey budgets, but it did raise the prospect of a **transit fare increase** in January 2007. Corzine's chief budget antagonist, Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts, is said to favor a budget that would emphasize cuts in state spending. There is no way today to know whether more cuts in an Assembly or compromise budget would be aimed at the transportation agencies, or if Trenton would expand the bad practice of raiding Transit's capital budget for regular operating funds.

About a quarter of NJ Transit's budget for daily operations has come from its fund for construction and heavy-duty maintenance for years now. Governor McGreevey had sought to prevent the amount from increasing (see *MTR #481*), but absent an overall and well-funded overhaul of transportation financing, the practice will be hard to end. One of the legislative ideas that gained currency before Governor Corzine resorted to a big borrowing and refinancing scheme to reauthorize the state Transportation Trust Fund earlier this year was a **gradual phase-out** of Transit's capital-operating switch, so that the transit system's capital program could be spent where it is intended – track work, new buses and trains, better stations, system expansion projects and the like. ❖

### Goethals Bridge Replacement Plan Refined

The Port Authority has returned from the drawing board with significantly revised plans for its Goethals Bridge replacement project. At a recent presentation, the project team showed a short list of alternatives, all of which include six travel lanes. The main outstanding issue appears to be whether to build **one six-lane bridge or two three-lane bridges**. The *Staten Island Advance* reported this week that Staten Island community board members approve of the overall thrust of the effort, though one alternative would require property takings.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

A six-lane Goethals Bridge would mean more immediate vehicle capacity on the bridge, but the number of lanes would match connecting segments of I-278. The Tri-State Campaign and many Staten Island groups and officials opposed an **8 or more lane twin span concept** in the 1990s that seemed to be part of a larger effort to widen the Staten Island Expressway. Additionally, replacing the 78-year-old Goethals offers the Port Authority a chance to meet modern safety standards, such as shoulders and wider travel lanes.

The addition of shoulders would be a huge improvement over the existing bridge — breakdowns on the Goethals now generally spell paralysis of Staten Island's highway system. One issue regarding shoulders is how to **prevent traffic managers from taking them for travel lanes in the future** — our region has many examples where space on bridges has been appropriated from initially planned uses to accommodate more car traffic. It's unclear whether the Port Authority would be under any binding obligation to leave the shoulders intact in the face of heavier traffic volumes in the future.

Due to current and projected truck, car and transit volumes between Staten Island and New Jersey, a dedicated bus rapid transit lane option was eliminated, but the PA is considering reserving one lane in each direction for express bus and HOV use. The agency is also committed to building a good walkway-bikeway. The current walkway is very narrow and very close to traffic and has been subject to lengthy closures during the past few decades. For more information: [www.goethalseis.com](http://www.goethalseis.com).



Separately, the Port Authority is considering the long range problem of the Bayonne Bridge's height above the Kill van Kull, the critical waterway that links NY/NJ's main port terminals to New York Harbor. Some of the largest **ocean-going freight vessels cannot fit under the bridge** at high tide or with less-than-full shiploads (which causes ships to ride higher in the water). Solutions under consideration, according to the *Journal of Commerce*, are jacking the bridge's footings up (increasing the height of the entire bridge), raising the roadway on the existing bridge framework, or replacing the span with a new structure. Raising the roadway on the existing frame could have the drawback of increasing grades on the roadway. Any of the options may cost about **\$1 billion**, but are likely to find their way into the Port Authority capital program only after the Goethals is replaced.

China Shipping, a company that serves New York directly from Asia via the Suez Canal, has already developed hinged mast and antenna structures for some of its vessels so they can get under the Bayonne on schedule. ❖

## New Trains Rolling In

Commuters will be happy to hear that every transit agency in the region will have new cars running within the next year.

**New Jersey Transit** expects to roll out 231 new bi-level rail cars by the end of 2006. The Port Authority paid for the first 100 cars in 2001 with some revenues from a toll increase at Hudson River crossings that year. NJTransit has allocated financing for the remaining 131 cars in this year's capital budget. The new cars will run on the Northeast Corridor and North Jersey Coast Lines, and on Midtown Direct service on the Morris & Essex Lines. The new rolling stock will give the system about a one-third increase in passenger cars over today's fleet of 711, and seating capacity will increase further still thanks to the double-deck feature. Transit recently retired 74 older (Comet I) rail cars and is completely refurbishing 148 other cars for a longer service life.

The next generations of new New Jersey trains is likely to be multiple unit (self-propelled, rather than drawn by locomotive) rail cars that can run on both diesel and electric power, and replacement of more electric rail cars. The diesel/electric rail cars would offer one seat rides from areas served by non-electrified lines once a new passenger rail tunnel is built under the Hudson River. That project has received strong bipartisan and bi-state support but is not anticipated to be open until 2015.

At **NYC Transit**, 660 new subway cars are also scheduled to arrive towards the end of the year. They are designed for service on "B Division" (lettered lines, like the A or L trains) though it is not yet clear which specific lines they will be deployed to. The 660-car order has options attached that could increase the ultimate number to 1,700, though transit officials tell us the decision to do so will depend on the quality of the cars they receive and what ridership indicators are (and we would add, the extent of future MTA capital programs) after the first cars are delivered. The NYC Transit says it routinely undertakes "Scheduled Maintenance System" or parts refitting of aging rail cars to keep them running longer. NYC Transit's subway car fleet totals 6,210.

The **Port Authority** has contracted for the manufacture of an entirely new 340-car **PATH fleet**, to serve the New York City-New Jersey rapid transit system. PATH train cars in service now average about 34 years in age. PA press statements indicate the new fleet will cost about \$500 million. New cars will begin to appear on the PATH system in 2008, with complete fleet replacement scheduled for 2011.

The cars will feature more doors, "on board video" and closed-circuit TV for security purposes. The new PATH cars are being assembled by Kawa-

saki at its Yonkers plant. The 340-car fleet level does not represent an increase in size over current levels, though federal data indicates the PATH system uses 268 cars in maximum service today. Presumably, other capital improvements to the PATH system such as track, signal and station upgrades may allow more cars to be used in peak periods as ridership grows, while the new fleet should allow a greater percentage of all cars to be available for service at any one time.

Together, the Metro-North and Long Island Railroads are nearly finished receiving a multi-year order of 1,172 modern M-7 multiple-unit, single level passenger train cars. As of the end of June, the LIRR had 674 of the new M-7 cars in service. It will have a total of 836 new M-7s by February. The M-7s are the most common type of rail car for the LIRR, making up 67% of their 994 rail car fleet. The agency says it is not yet sure whether the cars

### Menendez Articulates Liberty Corridor Vision

U.S. Senator Robert Menendez is in the early stages of developing an advisory board to prioritize projects within his vision of a "Liberty Corridor" of modern transportation infrastructure that underpins multi-layered economic development.

Menendez sees the nexus of the New Jersey ports, Newark Airport, I-95 and local and east coast rail service along the Northeast Corridor and connecting train lines as a **selling point for New Jersey** in attracting companies that want to be well positioned in both global and metropolitan markets. The \$104.4 million Liberty Corridor funding package that he was able to include in the 2005 SAFTEALU federal funding legislation is to help shore up and augment that infrastructure. The new advisory board will be to help allocate those funds.

Menendez has said he sees business opportunities in northern New Jersey adjacent to the intensive concentration of infrastructure ranging from **freight-related industries** that will capture more value locally from goods moving through the port ("freight villages" on brownfields around the port district) to research and development outfits that can exploit the region's intellectual capital and travel connections to global destinations.

The concept has grown to become somewhat of a catch-all, with the Senator declaring that the NJ DOT, Turnpike and Port Authority have already programmed hundreds of millions of dollars for projects he considers aspects of Liberty Corridor development. They include expansion of on-dock rail capacity at Ports Newark and Elizabeth, the Turnpike's look at adding lanes south of Exit 8a and road and bridge improvements along routes that connect to the ports and nearby rail terminals. ❖

still to come will offer expanded service.

Metro-North ordered 336 new M7s, almost all of which are already in service. 244 replace old, out-dated cars, and 62 have created capacity for new peak service on the Harlem Valley and Hudson lines. The agency says it hopes to work with ConnDOT to purchase new M-8s sometime this summer for the New Haven line. M-8s can run on power from overhead (necessary on the New Haven Line) or from a third rail underneath, so they can run on Metro-North line in both NY and in CT. For more on the pending M-8 purchase, visit ConnDOT's website: [www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?a=1386&q=316746](http://www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?a=1386&q=316746)

ConnDOT still has not put into service 33 used rail cars it purchased from Virginia in October 2004. They are meant for use on Shore Line East service from New Haven and New London, and Waterbury and Danbury branches, so other cars can be moved to New Haven Line service. They too are being refurbished by Kawasaki. Officials say about half will be in service by the end of the year, with the other half in service in 2007." ❖

### City Cyclists Call for Action

In the wake of the recent traffic deaths of several New York City bicyclists, **Transportation Alternatives** called on city government to step up its efforts to make the city more cycling friendly.

In particular, T.A. called on the city to implement a **master plan for cycling infrastructure** published in 1997, which is mostly incomplete and has no timetable for implementation. T.A. noted that the city's bike plan calls for design changes on Manhattan's Houston Street, where cyclist Derek Lake was killed in traffic in June. T.A. said two other cyclists were killed in traffic there during 1995.

"Houston Street, where Derek Lake died, where Brandie Bailey died, where Andrew Morgan died, is a route planned for improvement in the City's ten year-old 'Bicycle Master Plan.' The NYC DOT is currently planning a major reconstruction of Houston Street. Where are the bicycle safety improvements?" asked T.A. deputy director Noah Budnick.

Getting a significant part of the cycling master plan done will require more focus on cycling by the NYC DOT, and probably some tougher **trade-offs regarding allocation of street space** between motor lanes and space for cycling. The city recently established the first new bicycle lane through Midtown Manhattan since the 1980s on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, but the lane narrows or vanishes where conditions for cyclists are most difficult.

One measure many governments reach for when confronting the problem of bicycling safety is a legal requirement that all bicycle riders wear a helmet. While bike helmets in a place like New York are generally a good idea, **helmet laws** seem to be

another matter. Experience in several jurisdictions around the world suggests that such laws reduce the overall incidence of cycling, which is a discretionary activity, while close analyses of cycling fatalities suggests that the overall safety impact of helmets is generally overstated by medical and public health advocates of mandatory adult helmet usage. Many cyclists note that other activities, like riding in a car, are a much greater source of head injuries than cycling, and look askance at such legislation in the context of weak traffic law enforcement and poor planning provision for bicycling. The city council of Austin, TX, having proposed an adult helmet law, is grappling with these arguments now.

A commentator on the web-site of the *Austin-American Statesman* noted: "A helmet ordinance is the cheap route to building the impression that Austin's government cares about bicycle safety. The more expensive solution would be to improve the availability of bicycle lanes, similar to how the city built the Pfluger pedestrian bridge in response to the bicyclists killed on the Lamar bridge. Which do you think would increase bicycle ridership?" ❖

### After-life for Temporary East Side Road?

The NYC Parks Dept. says it will examine the feasibility of the using the FDR Drive "**outboard detour roadway**" as a permanent pedestrian and bicycle way along Manhattan's East Side. The detour structure now runs over the East River alongside the drive in the East 50s and 60s. It was opened in 2004 by the NY State DOT to keep traffic moving around highway reconstruction work.

The outboard road represents an opportunity to solve the **right-of-way** problem that section of waterfront poses to the goal of a continuous river's edge greenway around Manhattan. The Bloomberg administration has expressed interest in that vision and has advanced work elsewhere along the East Side waterfront. Immediately to the south of the outboard roadway, however, the United Nations complex will still pose a challenge.

The Parks Dept., in a letter to advocacy groups that urged the step, says it has explored the outboard roadway re-use concept with other agencies and thinks it merits further exploration. It noted, however, that the structure was built with **the understanding that it would be temporary**. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NY State environmental conservation department and U.S. Coast Guard would all have some say on whether the new structure could be left permanently in the East River. The current FDR rehab work has the outboard detour road scheduled for removal in 2007 or 2008. ❖

## CALENDAR

**July 11**, 4:00-8:00pm. Hudson County Bus Circulation and Infrastructure Study public open house. Jose Marti Middle School, 1800 Summit Avenue, Union City, NJ. 917-339-0488.

**July 12**, 10am-12pm; 2pm-4pm; and 7pm-8pm. Public hearing regarding proposed Meadowlands Stadium Project at NJSEA's Meadowlands Sports Complex. New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, 2 DeKorte Park Plaza, Lyndhurst, NJ. 201-460-1700.

**July 13**, 12:15-2:00pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**July 20**, 4:30-6:30pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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

**August 10**, 12:15-2:00pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**August 17**, 4:30-6:30pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**August 24**, 12:00-2:00pm. New York City Transit Riders Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**September 28**, 12:00-2:00pm. New York City Transit Riders Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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