

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Pressure to Extend Atlantic Yards Review

Last week, elected officials, civic leaders and transit groups called for a longer public review period for Brooklyn's Atlantic Yards project, where developer Forest City Ratner plans to build a new basketball arena and 16 skyscrapers.

The project will have a significant **traffic impact** on most of the intersections in the study area, and will increase already crowded conditions on **Brooklyn subway trains** and platforms at the Atlantic Avenue subway station.

The environmental review, detailing the impacts of the project, was released in mid-July, and the Empire State Development Corp. scheduled the only public hearing on August 23rd, giving the public just over a month to review the **1,400-page document**. ESDC has also scheduled an additional "community forum" on September 12th, but because it is not an official public hearing, the agency has no legal obligation to record or respond to concerns raised at it. Sept. 12 is also an election day in New York State.

In a letter, twelve community and transit advocacy groups asked members of the state **Public Authority Control Board** to urge the ESDC to hold a second public hearing in October, and accept written comments until at least November. The letter said, "The Atlantic Yards project is controversial enough without the public feeling that the developer and ESDC are proceeding with an unfair process. The issues surrounding this large scale project will be more fully vetted before the Public Authorities Control Board considers it if public review is given a reasonable time to proceed."

The Public Authority Control Board is a panel with representatives from both houses of the NY State legislature and the governor that approves creation of new authorities and issuance of some public authority debt. **State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver** used his PACB position to stop the West Side stadium project in 2005.

Last week, **City Council Speaker Christine Quinn** and gubernatorial candidate Elliot Spitzer also called on ESDC to extend the public review time for the project. Quinn said that more time was needed to conduct an independent, community-run review of the project, enabled with funds from both the City Council and State Assembly. ❖

Turnpike Sale Back on Table ?

In his opening speech to the New Jersey legislature's special session on property taxes, Governor Corzine promised a plan within three months that will outline the **sale or lease of state properties**. While he didn't specify which public assets would be targeted, many legislators told the press the only state holdings with a high enough value to make a big impact are the state's major toll roads.

Some Democrats feel that the much of the opposition to a long term Turnpike lease would go away if the state maintains a **51% share** of the toll road. Then the state would be able to control toll increases and maintenance of the highway. However, that type of plan could reduce the road's lease price. It is unknown how privatization opponents in **public sector unions** will react.

Word in Trenton is that the **New Jersey Treasury Dept.** will head up a new study of toll road leasing. The NJ DOT had been studying the issue prior to Governor Corzine's election but says it is no longer involved in the issue.

It is unclear how the Turnpike Authority's intention to widen significant sections of the Turnpike would mesh with an effort to fully or partly privatize the highway.

Governor Corzine has appeared to change his public stance on privatizing New Jersey's toll roads to fund transportation projects or pay off state debt several times (see *MTR* #511, *MTR* #512, *MTR*#527).❖

NYC Says Trash Plan Cuts Truck Reliance

New York City's recently adopted solid waste plan has been widely applauded, not least because of its transportation features. The city says that the plan, when fully implemented in 2009, will **reduce truck miles** on city streets and highways by **3.5 million** annually. Additionally, many more truck miles outside the city stemming from long-haul truck export would be avoided — up to **55 million miles** annually by "transfer trailers" according to city documents.

Public focus in the city has been on the siting of several marine transfer stations, which will take waste from trucks, put it in shipping containers and then move the containers by barge to sites where it

will be loaded for long-range export. These transfer stations are slated for East 91st Street in Manhattan, Flushing Bay and Hamilton Avenue and Gravesend in Brooklyn.

However, the export strategy also relies on a variety of other facilities — it relies on delivery of containerized waste to several other **truck-to-rail facilities**. A Staten Island truck-to-rail station is under construction now near Howland Hook container terminal, where **rail access to New Jersey** is supposed to be restored shortly.

Such stations are also contemplated for The Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens, mostly by modifying or expanding existing commercial transfer stations to allow them to move a portion of commercial waste onto trains and barges.

In the Bronx, rail export of garbage would be expanded by the city contracting with the Harlem River Yard Transfer Station or the E. 132nd Street Transfer Station in Port Morris. The latter would require the trucking of containers from the 132nd St. facility 2.5 miles to the Oak Point Rail Yard.

In northern Brooklyn, likely facilities are a modified transfer station at Greenpoint's Varick Avenue or a new truck-to-rail facility at Scott Ave. and Scholes Street, also in Greenpoint (both served by the LIRR Bushwick Branch).

In Queens, some waste would be brought to an expanded private transfer station on Review Ave., containerized, then hauled by truck to the Maspeth Rail Yard (LIRR Montauk Branch) along Rust St.

A portion of Manhattan's garbage will continue to be trucked directly to an incinerator in Newark, though city Dept. of Sanitation documents say this will be less than current levels.

The plan attempts to strike a balance across the city's boroughs by limiting the waste handled by any one facility to 4,500 tons per day and requiring that garbage be exported within 48 hours of "arriving at a facility."

It notes that long-range export arrangements are not in place yet. It anticipates that barges from marine transfer stations will be "trans-loaded" at facilities in New York Harbor to larger barges that will reach destinations outside the region. Containers slated to be moved by rail from Brooklyn, Queens and The Bronx will travel up **the Hudson Line** to the Hudson River bridge at Selkirk, NY. Export trains originating in Staten Island will travel over the more extensive New Jersey railroad network.

Freight industry representatives contacted by the Tri-State Campaign said they did not foresee any real capacity or market constraints regarding long-range barging and the required trans-loading operations. Some, however, worried that **rail lines in New Jersey** are already **capacity-constrained** and that addition of a large new demand on them will

aggravate congestion. They noted that the city's waste export need is a good match for rail and that its regular supply of freight and long-term contracts would be attractive to railroads, but that emergence of a large new "client" or demand could lead to competition with existing rail customers. They urged that the city join with New Jersey to promote more ambitious rail network expansion.

Traffic Reduction: Meaningful Millions ?

Although Mayor Bloomberg's figure of **3.5 million annual truck miles** avoided by shifting garbage export to barges and trains received significant play in the news cycle following the city's approval of the plan, it is worth putting it in the context of more ambitious potential traffic management steps.

In a 2003 study, analyst Charles Komanoff estimated that tolls on the city's East River bridges would eliminate **140 million vehicle miles** per year within the five boroughs. Although reducing growth in truck travel in the city is a critical goal since trucks have greater infrastructure, quality of life, safety, pollution and congestion impacts than passenger cars, and are the fastest growing segment of traffic, the **factor of 40** separating the two measures is striking. See "The Hours: Time Savings from Tolling the East River Bridges" at www.bridgetolls.org.

The Port Authority and the new Tunnel: Far from the Last Word

The Port Authority board's approval of a \$1-\$2 billion commitment to the new NJ Transit commuter rail tunnel from Secaucus to West 34th Street in Manhattan (now called the Trans-Hudson Express or THE Tunnel) will probably occasion more discussion and deal-making in the future.

The PA has allocated \$1 billion for now, and will consider a second authorization by the end of the year, according to news reports.

Although the project obviously touches and benefits both New York and New Jersey, in the political world the tunnel is classified as a New Jersey project. New York is likely to demand some equivalent contribution for a priority of its own. Even in the Port Authority press release announcing the funding commitment, Governor Pataki's quote rapidly departs from the topic at hand to point to projects in New York: "New York City continues to be fiscally strong and a major generator of new development and jobs, and mass transportation projects like THE Tunnel, **East Side Access** and the **JFK Rail Link** to Lower Manhattan and Long Island will ensure that trend continues for future generations."

The front-runner to succeed Pataki has also mentioned that a quid pro quo may be expected for the

financial commitment to THE Tunnel. At the Regional Plan Association conference last spring, gubernatorial candidate Elliot Spitzer laid out transportation project priorities and said his support for Port Authority financing of the new tunnel to New Jersey would depend on “an **equivalent level of funding** for a comparable New York project of regional significance,” (MTR #529) presumably the connection of the Long Island Rail Road to Grand Central Terminal, which is approaching major construction. ❖

NYC Transit Postpones Fare Increase

The MTA postponed a fare increase planned for the end of 2006 until September 2007 thanks to greater than anticipated state tax revenues. But the MTA still faces huge future deficits, perhaps close to one billion by 2008 and rising thereafter because of escalating debt service payments for the transit system’s capital program.

But advocates hope that a new governor could mean a new deal for mass transit. MTA leaders have skillfully maneuvered the next decision on fares into the **next state administration**. Additional state support for transit operations could further postpone a fare hike, or an infusion of support for capital programs might allow some measure of debt reduction.

MTA budget documents indicated the possibility of service cuts to save \$5 million during 2007, and also of further reducing staffed token booths and nighttime bus service.

Brooklyn transit advocates were quick to worry that G train service to Queens was on the chopping block, though *Newsday* reported that MTA board members said G train service may be expanded south into Brooklyn beyond the current terminal at Smith & 9th Streets, rather than being cut. ❖

Cycling Through Pyongyang ?

Transportation Alternatives has posted an alert page at www.transalt.org that provides ways to e-mail Mayor Bloomberg, NYC City Council Speaker Quinn and other elected officials to oppose the NY Police Dept.’s proposed rule change to classify as a “parade” any group of **two or more pedestrians or bicyclists** that break a traffic law. It would thus add to a moving violation the second, arrestable infraction of “parading without a permit.”

The change would represent a striking intrusion by police on rights of free assembly and travel, and makes one wonder what sort of political cultures are at work within the NYPD. ❖

Rell’s Pick to Run ConnDOT

In July, Governor Rell appointed Motor Vehicle Commissioner and state police force veteran **Ralph Carpenter** as Connecticut Dept. of Transportation Commissioner. While Carpenter is well-respected in the state, he is not the reformer many Connecticut transportation observers were hoping for.

However, Governor Rell said she is commencing a national search for another deputy commissioner focused on **transit and transit-oriented development**. It is unclear how much power this position will hold, however.

In an editorial entitled “An Uninspired Choice,” the *Hartford Courant* said the **DOT needs a leader to transform it** from the highway building agency it is into a more balanced agency focused on moving people with mass transit and developing homes and retail near rail and bus hubs. “Parking lots are not transit-oriented development,” the editorial says. It concludes: “the message this sends is not that the governor wants a balanced and innovative transportation system; it is that she wants no further scandals....There’s reason for this: A federal investigation of the DOT’s rail operations unit has thus far resulted in a guilty plea from one high-ranking official to charges of theft and obstruction of justice. ... But pushing only for a clean department **sets the bar too low**. The public deserves both honesty and innovative leadership.” ❖

NJ Transit Postpones Fare Increase

New Jersey Transit’s \$1.3 billion fiscal 2007 operating budget is good news for bus and train riders because it puts off any fare increase until July, 2007 at the earliest. Transit advocates had **criticized inclusion of a fare hike** in January in Governor Corzine’s proposed state budget since the governor ruled out Turnpike toll and state gas tax increases last year, despite a yawning transportation budget deficit. Transit riders would have been the only travelers in the state asked to pay more in the Corzine administration’s first year if a January fare increase had gone ahead. Transit director George Warrington said **fuel prices** continue to be a concern for the agency’s operating budget, but also said they would drive ridership increases. He projected continued rider growth over the next twelve months, according to the *Bergen Record*, and said the budget would allow room for rider growth on both trains and buses. It will add three million more miles of bus and rail service to support an increase from 827,000 to 860,000 daily passenger trips.

Warrington said the increase in ridership brought on by increased gas prices and new services, increases in parking revenue at NJ Transit sites and a \$22 million increase in state aid allows Transit to hold its troubling **capital-to-operating budget**

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

transfer at \$356 million for a third year in a row.

At a recent board meeting, NJ Transit also awarded an \$82 million contract for engineering for the new cross-Hudson commuter rail tunnel, and funds for engineering and right-of-way acquisition for new train service in Bergen County. ❖

Regional Rail News

New Haven-Springfield Western Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley Planning Commission has expressed support for the New Haven-Springfield commuter rail line currently under study by Connecticut officials. The planning organization says it is urging state legislators to allocate \$30 million for construction and \$1 million in annual operating funds for Massachusetts' share of the project, according to the *Stamford Advocate*.

The draft EIS for the rail line will likely be available for public input in the "spring or summer" of 2007 according to the newspaper.

Limbo for Downtown Rail Funds Although the U.S. House had voted earlier to allow the conversion of \$1.75 billion in unused tax credits for New York into federal cash to build an extension of the Long Island Rail Road to lower Manhattan, the U.S. Senate blocked the measure late last week. That's because the rail funding provision in the Senate had been lumped into a broad bill that would cut inheritance taxes, extend other tax breaks for the wealthy and middle class and hike the federal minimum wage. Democrat leaders in the Senate vowed to kill the legislation, and even New York's Senators were not swayed by inclusion of the rail link financing.

The rail link does not enjoy a consensus in New York, at any rate. Pro-transit groups fear it will deliver little ridership bang for the six billion bucks it will cost, and gubernatorial front-runner Elliot Spitzer has said he has other transportation project priorities (*MTR #529*).

NYC Comptroller: Expand CityTicket NYC Comptroller William Thompson wrote on July 18 to MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow, asking that the MTA expand its CityTicket program. Thompson asked that current restrictions be relaxed so that more New Yorkers can use it — particularly fans heading to Shea Stadium and off-peak commuters. CityTicket began two years ago, offers a \$3 flat fare for the LIRR or Metro-North Hudson and Harlem Valley lines inside city limits — but only on weekends. Thompson said a program expanded to weeknights and the New Haven Line could provide more travel options, and could spell relief for some affected by subway construction projects (*MTR #496*). ❖

MTR#536

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CALENDAR

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

August 22, 6-8pm. Ride the Hudson Bergen Light Rail with Auto-Free New York. Meet at Hoboken Terminal, Main Waiting Room at 6pm. 212-475-3394, www.auto-free.org.

August 23, 4:30-8:30, Public Hearing on Atlantic Yards Project, NYC College of Technology, 285 Jay Street, Brooklyn. 212-803-3233 or see www.empire.state.ny.us

August 23, 6pm, Public hearing and rally on new NYPD parade laws. 1 Police Plaza, Manhattan. For more info, see www.transalt.org.

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

August 26, 8pm, Screening of *Contested Streets: Breaking NYC Gridlock*, Solar1, E. 23rd St. @ East River. www.transalt.org or 212-629-8080.

September 13, 6-8pm. "All Aboard! Moving Forward on Regional Rail" Opening Reception. The Urban Center, Municipal Arts Society, 457 Madison Ave at 51st st, Manhattan. 212-935-3960, info@mas.org.

September 22, 5:30pm. Written comments due for Atlantic Yards project. Send to 633 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, att: Maria Mooney, or email to atlanticyards@empire.state.ny.us.

September 26, 8am-12:30pm. "Good to Go: Transit Options for Older Adults." With James Simpson Federal Transit Administration chief. Kimmel Center, NYU, Manhattan. www.wagner.nyu.edu. 212-992-9864

More calendar items at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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