

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Environmental Agency Wants More Information On G.S. Parkway Widening

For months the New Jersey Turnpike Authority insisted that there would be no increased traffic around the interchanges after its planned widenings of the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway. Earlier this month, regulators at the New Jersey Dept. of Environmental Protection squashed that notion by potentially requiring the Authority to fully examine all impacts of adding **about 100 lane-miles** to the Parkway (between exits 30 and 81 — roughly Ocean City to Toms River).

In a letter addressed to the chief Turnpike Authority engineer, the DEP said that the Authority, which now runs the Parkway, had handed in applications for coastal area, waterfront development, stream encroachment, wetlands and water quality permits that were “neither timely nor complete.”

The DEP said it was ready to expedite these processes for the Turnpike Authority but seemed put out by the apparently sketchy nature of the Authority’s submission. A list of missing items included proof that public notice requirements had been met, materials relating to tidal wetlands, extensive materials on possible impacts to coastal areas — including **general “secondary impacts”** of the project, notification of affected parties along streams and other waterways and permit fees of about \$200,000.

It’s unknown how long it will take the Turnpike Authority to complete these requirements. The Parkway widening **environmental impact statement has not been released** in any form. The Authority has said that its EIS will rely heavily on analysis it developed in the late 1990s for the project — hopefully that work will be updated and released for public review in the near future.

The Authority’s plan to widen the **NJ Turnpike** would add about **40-lane miles**, but the agency has recently discussed extending the project. The recent embrace of the land use/transportation relationship as a key to planning by the NJ Dept. of Transportation appears to have obtained no foothold within the Turnpike Authority. At a recent meeting of the Central Jersey Transportation Forum, Authority officials said expanding the Turnpike **would have no impact on land use** (MTR #536). The State DEP may disagree in the case of the Garden State Parkway. ❖

Rell Calls for Transportation-Land Use Connection

Governor Jodi Rell announced over Labor Day weekend that her administration was seeking a deputy transportation commissioner whose focus would be **better mass transit and containing sprawl development**. Rell’s statement said that greater use of mass transit requires “walkable and bikeable neighborhoods” and business development near transit stations.

The governor’s statement said that “in order for Connecticut to achieve long-term success, the state’s economic development, environment, public health, energy and transportation policies need to be coordinated and balanced in every way.”

The Hartford *Courant* lauded the announcement, but complained that the state transportation commissioner, **rather than a deputy**, ought to be the expert on smart growth and mass transit.

We are less inclined to worry about individual job descriptions, so long as the message from the top remains focused on joint land use and transportation planning that can avoid the radical generation of new vehicle trips the region has seen during the past few decades of suburban development. The **New Jersey Dept. of Transportation** has pioneered a model for bringing the land use powers of municipalities together with the DOT capital budget and planning resources into plans in congested corridors. It will be interesting to see how Connecticut’s approach shapes up, and whether New York State will join its neighbors in this regard when it comes under new management next year. ❖

Ratner Can Do Better on Traffic, Transit

News reports after Labor Day said that Forest City Ratner would reduce the size of the controversial Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn project by a few hundred apartments. The project, which comprises a Nets basketball arena plus 16 residential and commercial skyscrapers, is the largest ever proposed for Brooklyn. While its champions favor the project for bringing needed jobs and housing to the area, opponents have cited concerns about increased density, **traffic congestion, and subway crowding**.

A smaller residential component will probably have small effect on the traffic and transit impacts

laid out in the environmental review, which associates **the most intense impacts with arena events** rather than the day-to-day addition of residents to the transportation mix.

Still, the announcement could be a step towards a more palatable compromise on the project. Thus far, the project has pitted those in favor of jobs against those concerned about a development of overwhelming scale wielding property condemnation power. The media coverage that has ensued, similar to that of the **pending IKEA store in Red Hook**, has emphasized the racial and economic divides in the opposed viewpoints, leaving less room for any in the middle to win improvements to the project.

The reality of the situation is that there many consensus points that can still be used to guide modifications to the plan. In addition to other issues, all want a transportation plan that reduces traffic, offers more reliable transit service, and creates a safer pedestrian environment. A fairly modest transportation program could encompass these points, for example:

Developer

- Reduce overall parking supply
- Eliminate 944-space Phase I surface parking lot
- Offer deeper transit incentives — build transit fare into every purchased arena ticket.
- Incorporate Flatbush bus rapid transit, eliminate Flatbush limo/taxi drop-off lane.
- Run and manage residential parking permit system during game/event days.

City

- Traffic calming in neighborhoods around the site.
- Implement Flatbush BRT before 2010.
- Insert Brooklyn transit capacity improvement program into 2009-2014 MTA capital program.
- Zoning to exclude secondary parking development in area surrounding arena.

For the Campaign's testimony and draft comments on the project, see www.tstc.org. ❖

Transit Ridership Soaring in New York

The MTA announced in August that ridership on city subways and buses had grown 36% between 1995 and 2005, with commuter rail showing 14% growth in the same period.

The *Journal News* also reported in August that **Transport of Rockland's** ridership in first half of 2006 jumped 18.7% over the same period in 2005, and that Rockland-Westchester Tappan Zee Express riding is up 17% compared to early 2005. **Long Island Bus** also reported a big spike, with ridership numbers for the first six months of 2006 showing a 5.1% increase over the same period last year. For the past two years, after a slight dip, L.I. Bus ridership has continually set all-time highs. ❖

More Service for NJTransit Bus Riders

NJ Transit is updating its bus schedules this month, adding trips or stops to 49 routes. Service enhancements are coming to Bergen, Passaic, Essex and Middlesex county routes that serve commuters to New York City, to River Line and PATCO connecting routes in South Jersey, and on lines used by students to get to and from school.

This is especially good news for **Newark, the bus riding capital of New Jersey**. Transit has added peak hour trips on a variety of bus lines connecting Newark to key north Jersey points. Still, more improvements are needed on Newark local routes, which comprise 8 of the 9 most-used lines in the state. These routes need new buses, better shelters, more priority travel lanes, pre-boarding fare collection, and real-time arrival information. ❖

Thruway Set With Non-Stop Tolls

The NY State Thruway Authority will begin its "Highway Speed E-ZPass" program next month at Rockland County's Spring Valley toll plaza, which only collects tolls from trucks. The Thruway will later implement **open-road tolls at the Woodbury plaza** in Orange County and at other toll plazas where barriers now span the Thruway's main lanes.

All toll road agencies in the region with the exception of MTA Bridges & Tunnels in New York City are now in the process of eliminating artificial roadway bottlenecks with advanced electronic toll collection technology. ❖

HOV Lane Not Meeting Expectation? Get Paying Customers

New high-occupancy/toll (HOT) lanes converted from underperforming carpool lanes appear to be working well in the Denver and Minneapolis areas.

In Denver, toll revenues collected in the **I-25 HOT lanes** exceeded the projected \$40,000 by about 5% in its first month of operation, according to the *Urban Transportation Monitor*. Violation rates were also high, but officials report that transponder applications have recently increased. The HOT lane does not accept cash.

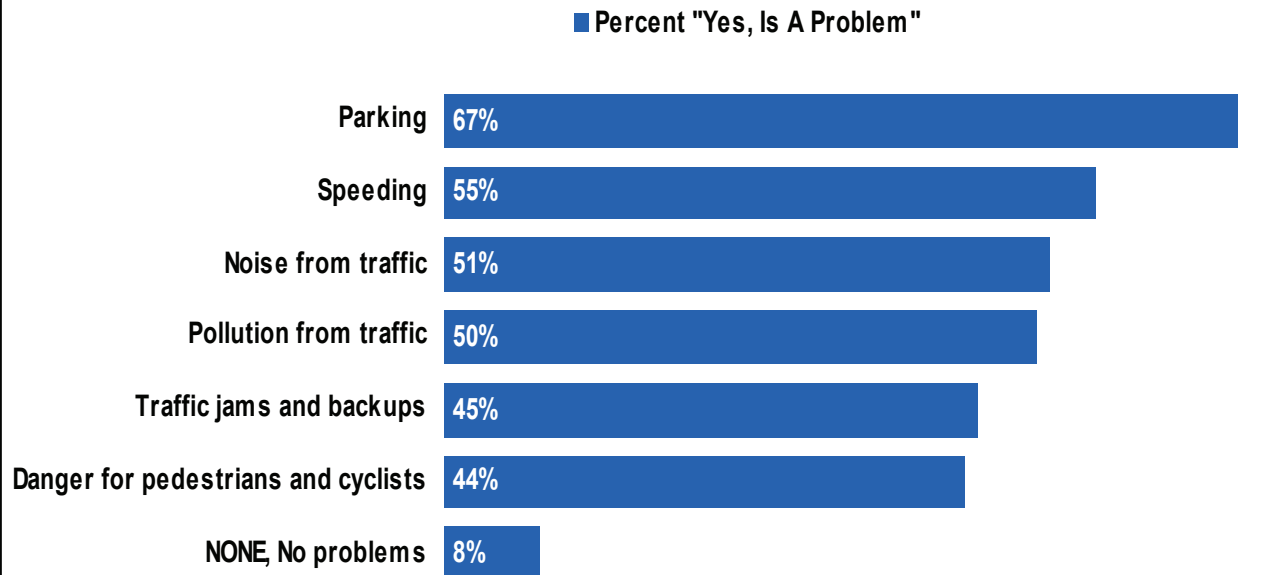
In Minneapolis, new HOT access rules are putting 300-400 more cars during peak hours into the **former carpool/bus lane on I-394**, but service levels have not declined. Survey results show that a significant majority support the HOT concept.

The CT DOT has applied for federal funding to examine HOT operation of the carpool lanes on I-84 and I-91 around Hartford, while Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi has expressed interest in HOT conversion of the Long Island Expressway HOV lane. The Port Authority is studying HOT/bus potential for a second Lincoln Tunnel bus lane. ❖

The Problems of NYC Transportation: the Neighborhood View

The opinion survey the Tri-State Transportation Campaign released in August found that city residents rated Mayor Bloomberg's performance relieving traffic congestion low compared to other issues facing the city, and reflected that about three-quarters of New Yorkers found weekday Manhattan traffic conditions less than acceptable (*MTR #537*). It also found that city dwellers have significant concerns across a range of transportation issues from the point of view of their neighborhoods. The charts here show scales of concern on various local problems, both city-wide and in detail by city borough:

Traffic-Related Problems in "Your Neighborhood"



-----BOROUGH OF RESIDENCE-----

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>Bronx</u>	<u>Brooklyn</u>	<u>Manhattan</u>	<u>Queens</u>	<u>S.I.</u>
<i>Parking</i>	67%	78%	72%	76%	58%	32%
<i>Speeding</i>	55	60	55	44	54	81
<i>Noise from traffic</i>	51	60	44	66	46	27
<i>Pollution from traffic</i>	50	51	50	63	44	34
<i>Traffic jams and backups</i>	45	49	43	56	37	56
<i>Dangerous conditions for pedestrians or bicycles</i>	44	51	40	53	38	47
<i>None of these problems</i>	8	8	7	4	14	6

For Total, weighted n=800.

The public opinion data reported in the survey are the result of a random and representative telephone survey conducted May 19 through June 4, 2006, with 800 New York City residents, 18 years of age and older. Sample distribution includes proportional representation across all five boroughs. For total sample results based on weighted data from 800 completed telephone interviews, the margin of error calculated at the 95 percent confidence level is +/- 3.5 percentage points. For full report of released survey results visit www.tstc.org. ❖

The Sacrifice

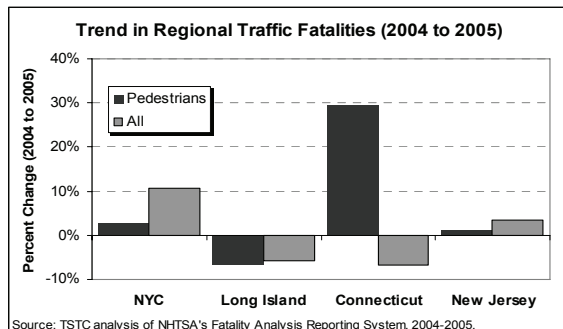
New data released in August by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show 2005 to be the deadliest year for traffic fatalities since 1990, with **43,443** people killed on America's roads. 2005 marks the first year since the mid-1980s that traffic deaths per mile driven (a metric frequently used by government officials for claims of improved traffic safety) increased over the previous year.

Data from earlier years shows that vehicle crashes are far and away the **leading cause of accidental death** in the U.S., and rank 7th on the list of all causes of premature death (heart disease and cancer are the top two). U.S. vehicle deaths outstrip firearm deaths by around 15,000 each year.

2005 was an especially bad year for Americans on foot or bicycling. Pedestrian and cyclist fatalities jumped 4.7 percent and 7.8 percent, respectively, compared to a 0.8 percent increase in fatalities among drivers and their passengers.

The picture in the tri-state region was mixed. Total traffic fatalities in New York City grew by 10.6 percent from 2004 to 2005, while pedestrian fatalities nudged up slightly, by 2.7 percent. Fatalities on Long Island fell by nearly 6 percent, with pedestrian fatalities dropping 6.7 percent. Pedestrian fatalities in Connecticut surged almost 30 percent from 2004 to 2005, even as total traffic deaths fell by 6.8 percent. And in New Jersey, total fatalities increased 3.5 percent, with pedestrian fatalities growing 1.3 percent. **The NJ situation seems set to deteriorate** further this year. Data from the NJ Dept of Law and Public Safety shows 2006 year-to-date fatalities up 11 percent over 2005 as of September 12th.

Long Island continues to lead NY State (and the tri-state region) in traffic fatalities, with Nassau and Suffolk the only two counties in the state suffering annual triple-digit traffic deaths. Suffolk County has the deadliest roads in the state by a wide margin. **164 people were killed on Suffolk roadways**, topping second-worst Nassau County by 56 deaths. The TSTC attempted to bring the problem to the attention of Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy last year but received no response. ❖



CALENDAR

September 18, 4:30-8pm. Community Forum, Atlantic Yards Project. NYC College of Technology, 285 Jay Street. www.empire.state.ny.us.

September 18. Written comments deadline for Proposed NY Route 347 widening project in Suffolk County. The DEIS is available online at www.ny347.org. 800-449-6361.

September 21, 1:15pm. [NYMTC's](#) monthly meeting. Topic: "What is the Future of Surface Transportation?" Ken Orski, editor and publisher of *Innovation Briefs*. NYMTC, 199 Water Street, 22nd Floor, Manhattan. RSVP required: 718-482-4551, amiles-cole@dot.state.ny.us.

September 21, 6:30-8pm. NYS DOT Stakeholder Advisory Committee for [Kosciuszko Bridge project](#). 329 Greenpoint Avenue, Conference Room 108, Brooklyn. kosciuszko@dot.state.ny.us.

September 26, 8am-12:30pm. Conference "Good to Go: Transit Options for Older Adults." w/ James Simpson, FTA Administrator. Wagner/Rudin Center. Kimmel Center-Rosenthal Pavilion, NYU. www.wagner.nyu.edu, 212-992-9864.

September 28, 12:00-2:00pm. [NYC Transit Riders Council](#) meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

September 29, 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.

October 11, 9am. NJ Transit public meeting. NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Floor, Newark. njtboard@njtransit.com.

October 12, 8:30am. Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer's transportation conference — guest speaker Enrique Penalosa, former mayor, Bogota, Colombia. Columbia University, Alfred Lerner Hall (115th and Broadway), Manhattan. 212-669-8300.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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MTR#538 Contributing: Michelle Ernst, Damien Newton, Teresa Toro Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kate Slevin

350 West 31st Street #802, New York, NY 10001 tel. 212-268-7474 fax 212-268-7333 tstc@tstc.org www.tstc.org