

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Transit Funding a Hit with Voters—Elsewhere

News analyses were bullish on the New York congressional delegation's rising clout following the 2006 election, frequently mentioning more transportation funding as a likely spoil of Democratic victory (see item next page). However, federal transportation aid is structured in many ways to **help states that help themselves**. New York, New Jersey and Connecticut would do well to keep an eye on the fact that areas outside the northeast are voting for measures to raise large amounts of local revenue for mass transit and road infrastructure with increasing frequency. If the states making up our region don't address transportation funding more directly, other parts of the country will become increasingly poised to out-bid us for both federal aid and the quality of life that attracts capital and skilled people.

Recent funding action here has largely been a **matter of catch-up**. New York passed a \$3.9 billion general obligation bond issue for transportation in 2005, the first major transit revenue action since Governor Pataki was elected in 1994. The bond act and several other tax measures enacted to launch the MTA and NY State DOT 2005-2009 capital programs **did not fully fund** those programs, although a hike in the downstate Mortgage Recording Tax has yielded greater than expected returns. Connecticut has moved to raise transportation revenue after cutting it in the 1990s and bringing systems like the New Haven Line close to collapse. New Jersey has maintained its capital programs by finding ways to dig an **ever-deeper hole of debt**.

Most of the transportation action at the state level last week involved issuing debt, redirecting or making more flexible existing state revenues or protecting transportation resources from diversion. New Jerseyans approved the ballot measure to dedicate the final 1.5 cents of the state gas tax to the Transportation Trust Fund by 58% to 42% (see *MTR* #542). California passed an interesting statewide measure to fund infill and transit-oriented development. California county governments continued the recent western trend of raising significant new funds for mass transit expansion, as did counties around Salt Lake City and in Washington State. The City of Seattle also approved its own funding measure. See www.cfte.org for more details. ❖

NJ Transportation Reform at Year Three

Starting in 2003, the NJDOT has undergone a planning revolution. The agency that, in the mid nineties, spent 50% of its capital budget on new road capacity is now **leading the state's smart growth effort**. Working with municipalities, the DOT is creating master plans for road corridors that connect land uses with state-funded transportation projects. Their goal is to site development where it makes transportation sense (i.e., creates fewer and shorter car trips), improving mobility for drivers, transit users and pedestrians alike, while fostering more attractive communities in the process.

This week, the DOT held its **annual overview of smart corridor projects** in the works. There are now over a dozen in the program, which the agency calls NJ FIT, for "Future in Transportation." They include Route 31 in Flemington, Route 9 in Ocean County, Manalapan Village Center, and Route 42 by Camden County College.

The Route 31 project in Flemington Circle is perhaps the farthest along, with construction of new pieces of a traditional street grid underway, in place of the big bypass envisioned in the 1990s. Developers are voluntarily agreeing to **"build to the street"** — the planning term for getting the parking lot out from in front of the store so that more traditional sidewalk environments can be recovered or created.

A plan for a denser village center and strip mall streets rehabilitated into pedestrian-oriented commercial areas in Manalapan, at the intersection of Routes 33 and 9 in Monmouth County, was developed after a four day design studio with residents and elected officials. Along Route 322 in Gloucester County, NJDOT is working with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission to protect an area from future big box, strip mall development pressures and traffic. Similar work is going on around rural Route 57 in northwestern NJ, to keep the roadway from becoming a facilitator of sprawl.

DOT's biggest corridor planning challenges so far appear to be along Route 9 in Ocean County, where some citizen groups were not engaged early and some parts of the corridor are still far from consensus (see *MTR* #542) and Route 17, where some would still rather take homes and businesses to widen the road rather than accept that congestion in

northern New Jersey will never be wholly defeated.

We would welcome **more urban applications** of the DOT program, or perhaps some broader regional analysis of the transportation implications of more intensive use of urban land versus spreading the same activity into smaller towns or the suburbs. NJ DOT has conducted a good project process around Route 21 in Newark and has very interesting ideas about Route 29 in Trenton. Can DOT become a key protagonist in the revival of New Jersey's cities?

Garden State Lessons for Rell and Spitzer

New Jersey's overall approach and program offers very strong lessons on the type of planning processes Connecticut and NY State DOTs need to consider to head off worsening sprawl-driven gridlock and to arrive at transportation investments that deliver long-term value to the public

Most of the New Jersey projects started with public design workshops, in which local leaders and citizens offer ideas for the future of the community. This is a stark **contract to "design and defend"** engineering approaches in New York and CT, where projects are closely confined to engineering within a right of way, detailed behind closed doors and made public in a few short sessions.

The "Lessons learned" presented at NJDOT's recent conference could be a starting point for reform in New York and Connecticut. It was noteworthy that several **NY State DOT staffers** attended the session, and we commend the agency's interest in New Jersey's example. The lessons presented were:

- Involve the public early and frequently: the public must ultimately feel like they own the project. If they don't, the process will be stalled and could involve lawsuits and other forms of dispute;
- ◆ Work for incremental, not monumental, change;
- ◆ Compromise will be necessary;
- ◆ Win approval from other state agencies so all support the project's progress;
- ◆ Think outside local municipal boundaries;
- ◆ Timing is everything: Supportive local officials will not be in power forever. ❖

Suffolk Getting Real About Road Chaos ?

According to *Newsday*, Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy has announced a crack-down on dangerous holiday season driving. More officers will be at danger spots to issue tickets for speeding and other moving violations. Suffolk has the highest number of traffic fatalities of any county in New York State, and indeed on the East Coast. The initiative is a good start, but to really tame Suffolk drivers, the crackdown will have to be more enduring. TSTC has called on the County Executive in the past to do more about high road fatality rates (*MTR #538*). ❖

New Congress, New Committee Alignments

One result of this year's mid-term elections is that the key Congressional committees which define federal policy and spending will see new leadership and new members in 2007. NJ Congressman Steve Rothman, soon to be a majority member of the House Appropriations Committee, was already promising last Wednesday that **Amtrak** would see a drastic increase in funding as a result of the new Democratic ascendance in Congress.

In the House of Representatives, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will be chaired by **James Oberstar** of Minnesota, who is very well versed across the spectrum of transportation issues facing the United States. He replaces Don Young of Alaska, who is closely associated with the "bridge to nowhere" project that has become a poster child for over-the-top pork barrel practice.

In the Senate, California's **Barbara Boxer** will take over as chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee, a key locus for surface transportation policy. Boxer will replace James Inhofe of Oklahoma, who used the position most notably to question science pointing to emissions-driven climate change. Three Senators from our region on the committee, Lautenberg, Lieberman and Clinton will move from minority to majority positions. **Connecticut's Christopher Dodd** will chair the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, which deals with mass transit policy and funding authorizations. New York's Charles Schumer and NJ's Robert Menendez will help make up the majority on this committee. ❖

Westchester Welcomes MetroCard

MetroCard is finally coming to Westchester's Bee-Line bus system. Starting April 1, 2007, Bee-Line riders will be able to use Metrocard on all Bee-Line buses, and **transfer for free** to NYC Transit subways and buses.

The agency has been investigating the service improvement for some time (*MTR #'s 377, #461*). The *Journal News* reported that about 30 people attended public hearing earlier this week to support the initiative. "The people have spoken, and they have said, 'Yes!'" said Transportation Commissioner Larry Salley.

Once the fare system is implemented, riders will no longer be able to pay the \$1.75 fare with dollar bills — only MetroCard and coins will be accepted. Bee-Line officials estimate that 36% of riders already own MetroCards.

The innovation should bode very well for **rider-ship** on Bee-Line, but that may also bring the challenge of **adding service**. Long Island Bus ridership boomed when it implemented free transfers to NYC

subways and buses in the late nineties, and the growth has never abated. ❖

A Little Help for Long Island Bus

According to the Nassau County Clerk's office, County Executive Suozzi has signed off on the County's fiscal year 2007 budget that includes an additional \$300,000 for Long Island Bus. The money, put into the budget by Nassau County Legislature Presiding Officer Judy Jacobs, is supposed to be used for a study of bus routes to identify which ones need more service.

The funding, though small, would be **better spent directly on new service**, since the buses are bursting at the seams with riders. Bus officials are well aware of their system's usage pattern. ❖

Campaign Honors Sander

At its October 26th annual gala, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign honored **Elliot (Lee) Sander** for his advocacy efforts with the Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA) and his founding of NYU's Rudin Transportation Center, which spotlights key issues facing New York City and State.

Sander was NYC transportation commissioner during Mayor Giuliani's first term and is presently a senior vice president at DMJM Harris, a worldwide consulting company specializing in mass transit.

ESTA has combined a range of environmental, pro-transit, business and other constituencies to effect the scale and content of **MTA five-year capital programs** adopted in 2000 and 2005, and it promoted a detailed transportation reform agenda during the city mayoral race of 2001.

In his remarks at the event, Sander noted that his experience as city transportation commissioner heightened his appreciation of non-governmental actors in policy-making, leading to the later formation of ESTA. He also spoke of his family's flight from war-time Europe as the personal prism through which he sees and places very high value on a political and policy making environment that accommodates a multiplicity of voices, including groups like the Tri-State Campaign.

Lee was introduced at the event by Tri-State board member and Parsons-Brinckerhoff vice president Janette Sadik-Khan, who entertained the excellent cross-section of the region's transportation community at the event with a hilarious routine about his various "hats" and guises. Sander is reported by various news outlets to be a **leading candidate to run the MTA** under Gov.-elect Spitzer.

We offer sincere thanks to all who attended and sponsored the event—see you next year! ❖

CALENDAR

November 21, 7:30pm. ConnDOT & Town of Wilton public info meeting on widening of Route 7 from Wolfpit Road (Route 106) to Olmstead Hill Road. Cider Mill School cafeteria, 240 School Road, Wilton CT. 860-594-2000.

December 5, 1pm. Lecture: "Amtrak and US Intercity Passenger Rail: Prospecting for a Future." David Laney, Chair, Amtrak Board of Directors. Bloustein School, Special Events Forum, Civic Square Building, 33 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick. RSVP required: 732-932-3640 x638 or douge@rci.rutgers.edu.

December 6, 8-10am. "Contactless Smart Cards for Transit Fare Payment: A Paradigm Shift" with panelists from the Smart Card Alliance, MasterCard Worldwide, and NYC Transit; sponsored by NYMTC, University Transp. Research Center, others. Seating limited. RSVP by 11-29 at mnn2@nyu.edu.

December 7, 8-10am. Manhattan Institute panel discussion and breakfast: "Road Pricing Worked in London. Can it Work in NY? What New Yorkers Think" with Bruce Schaller, Kathryn Wyld, Samuel Schwartz, Councilman David Weprin. Harvard Club, 35 West 44th Street, Manhattan. RSVP to 646-839-3373.

December 7, 12-2pm. Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor conference room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

December 12, 6-8pm. Auto-Free NY: "Strategies for Reducing Car Use in Manhattan" with Megan Shane, Manhattan Borough President's Office. NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington Street, Manhattan. 212-475-3394.

December 13, 9am. NJ Transit public meeting. NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Floor, Newark. njtboard@njtransit.com.

December 21, 12-20pm. NYC 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)

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org