

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Corzine Looks to the Future

The recent revelation that the New Jersey Treasury Department is studying the implications of **charging tolls** on some of the state's freeways is probably more a milestone in the regional conversation about paying for better, greener transportation in the 21st Century than something likely to be implemented soon. The initiative appears to be an outgrowth of the Corzine administration's interest in selling state assets to private companies, including the possibility of leasing one or more of the state's toll roads in return for a large up-front payment from a private operator. The natural question: "why do we charge tolls on some highways and not others?" arose as that investigation proceeded.

News stories on the effort elicited predictable condemnation from state legislators and denunciation by some editorial boards (notably the *Asbury Park Press*, which fights every idea for raising money for transportation), and some amusing verbal gymnastics from administration leaders who all but said they had to study bad ideas in order to eliminate them from consideration. But lawmakers are not a group that has collectively done a lot to find new money for transportation. New Jersey's gas tax is low and unless Trenton becomes somehow willing to embrace a huge percentage increase in a high gas price environment, **other sources of funding will be needed** in the next decade. The national discussion on these issues is proceeding in a similar way — the federal gas tax does not yield enough revenue to meet the country's infrastructure needs. Additionally, time-of-day tolls, high occupancy/toll lanes and the like are among the few tools available to allow future road managers to preserve peak capacity as the roads increasingly fill to the brim.

In one sign that this discussion may be changing, the *Star-Ledger* agreed, saying cautiously that a variety of toll strategies are worth a look.

The state's effort is ostensibly to find ways to relieve the state's debt burden and high property taxes. One outcome we feel confident of is that any highway-related fee proposed by the state will fail unless it is **tied directly to improving transportation**. But the need to renew the state Transportation Trust Fund again in 2010 or so may benefit from the administration's wide-ranging investigation. ❖

More Calls for a Liveable NYC

The Coalition for Traffic Relief, a initiative of 125 community and citywide groups from all five boroughs, gathered last Tuesday to ask Mayor Bloomberg to reduce traffic by 15% by 2009. The groups' platform calls on the city to allocate more street space to buses, bikes and pedestrians, institute parking reform to reduce the supply of free and underpriced parking, reduce impacts of trucks on neighborhoods, implement broad-scale traffic calming to slow traffic, and consider a congestion pricing scheme like London's. The full platform and list of supporters can be found at www.trafficrelief.org

The coalition announcement is the latest in a growing set of signs that New York City needs a new approach to planning, streets and transportation: ♻️ A recent Project for Public Spaces report, "9 Ways to Transform New York into a City of Great Places," says "the city can choose to either stay the course of worsening traffic and sterile streets, or redirect its energies to promote great public spaces and street life." It calls for improving **streets as public spaces**, balancing the needs of bicycles, pedestrians, and buses, restructuring city agencies, and reinventing community planning by involving community boards in the planning process and making them more accountable to local groups and residents. PPS recommends a number of starting points, like a new NYC Dept. of Transportation goal to move people and improve neighborhoods, rather than move cars, and putting an end to free public agency parking (often seen on sidewalks or other public spaces). Reclaiming Broadway and 125th Street from traffic and ensuring the Atlantic Yards project is more pedestrian friendly and recreating Times Square, Astor Place, Grand Army Plaza as gathering places and destinations for pedestrians are some of the specific recommendations. For the entire report, see www.pps.org.

♻️ In October, **Transportation Alternatives** released a report that found that heavy vehicle traffic severely impacts New Yorkers' quality of life. "**Traffic's Human Toll**" found that residents living on heavily trafficked streets spend less time outside and are more likely to restrict children's outdoor activity compared to people who live on "medium" and "low" traffic streets. New Yorkers on high traf-

fic streets have more negative perceptions of their blocks and are more frequently disturbed during sleep, meals, and conversations. 49% of all respondents to a related survey said reducing the number of cars on their streets would “totally improve” quality of life. The study was conducted in Brooklyn Heights, Chinatown, Astoria, and High Bridge. See www.transalt.org for the full study.

☞ In August, the Tri-State Campaign released a study by Michaels Opinion Research that found most New Yorkers think Mayor Bloomberg is doing a poor job reducing traffic congestion, and believe traffic jams, crowded transit, heavy truck traffic, slow buses and walking and cycling safety are major problems facing New York. Data from the survey has been published in *MTRs* 540, 539, 538, 537—the full report can be found at www.tstc.org. ❖

What's Wrong With This Picture?

Camera surveillance of New Yorkers seems to be increasing exponentially these days, with the **clear exception of those New Yorkers who endanger others** or cause gridlock by breaking traffic laws.

According to an *Associated Press* story earlier this year, NYPD has installed 500 surveillance cameras in high-crime neighborhoods. There are also 3,100 cameras in city housing projects and 1,000 cameras in the subways.

How many cameras are used to deter epidemic levels of **red light running** in New York City? 100.

MTA-NYC Transit recently announced a pilot program to install multiple cameras inside of buses. NYC Transit president Larry Reuter told the *Daily News* that Transit's goal for the cameras is to deter crime and create a record in case of acts of terrorism, violence against drivers or lawsuits brought against the MTA.

Another camera will apparently be directed through the windshield to capture the driver's view, though it is unclear whether it will be able to capture license plate numbers of bus-lane and bus-stop blocking cars. In any event, enforcement cams on buses would require state legislation like that holding back more red light cameras. A *New York Post* article about the bus cams noted that crime on buses is so low that it's not tracked separately, but given the number of accidents each day involving buses and other vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists, the **cameras would be far better suited** to aiding in the **battle for safer streets**. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

TSTC's Orcutt on Spitzer Transition Committee

Tri-State Transportation Campaign executive director Jon Orcutt was recently named to Governor-elect Spitzer's Transportation Policy Advisory Committee, which will brief the Governor-elect on the key transportation problems and opportunities he will face upon taking office. www.transitionny.org. ❖

Stamford's Traffic Calming Ambitions

Stamford has undertaken creation of an ambitious traffic-calming master plan, according to a recent *Advocate* article. The goal is to create a citywide blueprint to manage commercial traffic and reduce speeding on residential streets.

Consultants have already convened several **focus groups** with representatives from city agencies. A next wave of outreach will seek citizen input. Overall, the process looks promising for winning **broad buy-in**. City street designs are strongly oriented for fast-moving cars and present a daunting environment for walking. A pedestrian-friendly downtown is a major focus of the plan, though neighborhoods will not be left out.

The *Advocate* noted that Stamford joins Hartford in developing a city-wide approach to traffic calming. A round of hearings will begin in April 2007.

Traffic-calming applications the plan contemplates include speed humps, addition of medians, narrowing streets and other street changes to reduce speed and traffic volume and better accommodate pedestrians, said Mani Poola, a city traffic engineer. ❖

MTA: Reformers Rap Record on Technology

City transit advocates blasted the MTA's history of fumbling technological innovations in October when it was revealed that **real-time subway arrival platform signs** — the subject of a \$160 million contract and that have been in the works for years — do not work.

MTA and NYC Transit spokespeople told the *NY Post* that the agencies were on the verge of firing German contractor Siemens—the company has been unable to implement working software for the signs. Many of the signs were installed in subway stations like Grand Central Terminal years ago, but just display the time.

But a separate system for the Brooklyn-Manhattan L-train, although delayed, should be working by the end of the year, according to NYC Transit.

Advocates pointed to other technology stumbles to suggest that the MTA needs to tighten up its management of technology deployment and contract management. Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee director Beverly Dolinsky pointed to the failure of a bus-locator project using geographic positioning technology to help dispatchers manage buses

and tell riders when the next bus would be. "That contract is 10 years old and we still don't have that system," Dolinsky said.

The Straphangers Campaign's Gene Russianoff said MTA studies show that riders crave more information about train and bus arrivals. ❖

The Trains to the Games

The *Journal-News* reports that Metro-North will break ground in the spring on the Yankee Stadium train station that emerged from controversy earlier this year over the stadium redevelopment plan.

Metro-North planners have dramatically scaled up their estimates of the station's game day use — from **5,000 to 10,000 baseball patrons**, after reviewing LIRR ridership to Shea Stadium during the just-concluded baseball playoff season (what does that say about the railroad's estimation techniques used before the playoffs?).

The railroad now plans 10 trains to and from the stadium station for games. It's unclear whether the higher rider estimates account for the giant increase in stadium parking the Yankees pushed through over community and environmental objections.

The railroad anticipates serving **all three of its major lines** from the stadium station — trains bound for Harlem Valley and New Haven Line destinations would travel south along the Harlem River before turning north. Service along the Hudson Line would be quicker — the trip to Tarrytown from the station is estimated at 20 minutes.

City officials broke ground on the replacement for Shea Stadium, "CitiField," this Monday. On Tuesday, the MTA's Long Island committee approved \$2.3 million to renovate the Shea Stadium LIRR stop (on the Port Washington Line) and study a potential link to the LIRR Main Line. The money is in addition to the \$8 million approved in July to improve subway and LIRR service to the stadium.

The Main Line connection study was requested by **MTA Board Member Mitch Pally** earlier this year after the MTA approved \$40 million for the Yankee Stadium station. Right now, riders from Long Island must transfer at Woodside and inconveniently take the Port Washington Line back east to Shea. — most fans don't, and end up driving. ❖

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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CALENDAR

November 30, 7:30pm. Council of Brooklyn Neighborhoods Public Information Forum on findings and concerns discussed Atlantic Yards environmental impact statement. Lafayette Presbyterian Church, 85 South Oxford Ave., Brooklyn. 718-408-3219.

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 Wylde, 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.

January 17, 9am. NJ Transit public meeting. NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Floor, Newark. njtboard@njtransit.com.

More calendar items at www.tstc.org