

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Business Group Says Fix Traffic Congestion Now

The Partnership for New York City — the city's largest business group — released a report this week that says congestion costs the metropolitan region \$13 billion in lost productivity and jobs annually.

The report states: "The level of traffic in the city and much of the Metro Region has crossed the dividing line that separates economically efficient traffic from **destructive, excess congestion**...Left unchecked, excess congestion will stunt the region's capacity for sustained growth and innovation in the years ahead." The report finds that today, congestion costs the region 37,000-52,000 jobs annually.

The report, *Growth or Gridlock?* says congestion pricing is one policy option that should be considered in light of these woes. Benefits of a congestion charging zone in Manhattan could ripple across the city, according to the Partnership. A 15% reduction of traffic in Manhattan below 60th St would cause reductions in vehicle hours traveled of 29% in Downtown Brooklyn, 24% in Greenpoint/Williamsburg, and 27% in Long Island City.

The report urges other improvements, pointing specifically to bus rapid transit, toll lanes on routes like the Long Island Expressway, ferries, high-tech transit passes, and steeper parking prices. While it advocates these in their own right, clearly they would be easier to afford with the new transportation revenue stream afforded by a congestion pricing policy. See www.pfnyc.org for the full report.

The Mayor Responds?

Mayor Bloomberg told the *NY Times* congestion pricing was not on his agenda because it would never get state approval, though some reports have indicated the city may apply to the FHWA's "value pricing" program for study funds. That would seem to indicate that pricing implementation is off the table during the Bloomberg administration but that a small bone may be tossed to pricing advocates.

The mayor has announced big plans to transform NYC into a model of sustainability. His first address on the plan is next week. It will be interesting to see how or if he deals with transportation, since capacity and liveability will be big problems in the "9 million person city" without major changes. ❖

New Yorkers on Congestion Pricing: The Numbers in Detail

With strong leadership, **congestion pricing could win public support in New York City**, poll results released last week by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign indicate.

The survey found New Yorkers evenly split on the basic question of whether a London-like congestion charge for the Manhattan central business district is a good idea. 44% think congestion pricing is a good idea, 45% think it is a bad idea. The poll, conducted by Michaels Opinion Research in May, surveyed 800 New Yorkers and had a margin of error of 3.5%. The level of support for the concept is impressive given that most of those polled — 81 percent — said they were unfamiliar with it.

The numbers are also notable when compared to initial public responses to congestion pricing programs in London and Stockholm. In London, prior to its February 2003 implementation, the public was evenly split on congestion charging. In 2004, YouGov, a market research company, found that 60% supported the new charge and 32% opposed it. In Stockholm in 2005, 69% opposed congestion charging. The policy was imposed in January 2006 and in September 2006, voters approved a continuation of the program with a 52% support level. The program has reduced traffic significantly in both cities, increased bus speeds, reduced pollution, raised millions in revenue for transit, and has not impacted businesses within the pricing zone (according to a recent Partnership for NYC study — see left).

Who Supports Congestion Pricing and Why?

According to the TSTC poll, nearly three-fourths (73%) of New Yorkers, whether they support congestion pricing or not, think it would reduce traffic in Manhattan below 60th street.

New Yorkers who work in Manhattan are more likely to support congestion pricing (50%), than oppose it (41%). Support rises in those who work below 60th street (52%), and declines in those who work north of it (46%).

Not surprisingly, people with a vehicle in their household are less likely to want to pay a fee a drive into Manhattan. Still, 41% of vehicle owners polled support congestion pricing in New York City, as

compared to 47% of those who do not own a motor vehicle. About half of transit commuters (49%) think it's a good idea, with fewer (40%) opposing. Surprisingly, 39% of those who drive to work support pricing. 55%, however, aren't in favor.

Staten Island residents were most positive toward pricing, perhaps thinking that they already pay coming and going so that it's time for others to pay up (SIers were also the most dissatisfied with city government performance on traffic congestion in another part of the poll (see *MTR* #537). Brooklynites viewed road pricing the most warily.

Support and opposition to pricing, by borough

Is congestion pricing...	..a good idea?	.. a bad idea?
Staten Island	58%	38%
Manhattan	49%	39%
Queens	44%	45%
Bronx	42%	48%
Brooklyn	37%	49%

Overall, **48% of New Yorkers** think congestion pricing will have **no impact on them or their families**, with a quarter (24%) believing it will have a positive impact or negative impact. 45% think it will have a positive impact on the overall economy of NYC. More than half (54%) of New Yorkers think congestion pricing revenue should be dedicated only to transportation. Most people thought taxis should pay no toll or a reduced toll.

Perhaps some of the most interesting results were seen in arguments for or against congestion pricing. New Yorkers are clearly highly receptive to congestion pricing when it is linked to improving emergency response times and improving health, safety and overall quality of life (see chart at right). Overall, New Yorkers seemed to identify with arguments for congestion pricing more strongly than with arguments against it.

Similarly, when asked an open-ended question about why congestion pricing was a good or bad idea, the most commonly cited positive response, with 28% citing it, was reduction in traffic jams. The most commonly mentioned negative mention was "too many tolls and taxes already," with 15% of respondents mentioning it.

It's clear that New Yorkers can be engaged in an intelligent discussion of road pricing, far beyond the apocryphal pleas for the "working stiff who must drive to Manhattan" of Queens politicians or moronic TV news "reports" that consist of sticking a microphone into a driver-side window with the question: "do you want to pay more?" But only leadership at the mayoral level will be capable of taking the issue beyond such base levels. ❖

New Yorkers' agreement with statements for and against pricing, all responses

Arguments for congestion pricing	% agreement citywide
Improve emergency response time	91
Reduce air and noise pollution	77
Increase travel time for buses, taxis, and cars	78
Create safer pedestrians conditions in Manhattan	74
Be a good way to raise money for transit, roads and bridges	70
Result in an overall improvement in quality of life in the city	66
Arguments against congestion pricing	
People in Manhattan shouldn't have to pay extra if they choose to drive	50
Enforcement would be too expensive	49
Traffic will increase in areas surrounding Manhattan	47
Traffic congestion isn't bad enough to start a program like this	42

From Tri-State Transportation Campaign Telephone Survey of NYC Residents, Conducted by Michaels Opinion Research, May 2006.

Connecticut Responds to Relentless Increases in Truck Traffic

In Fairfield County, the Connecticut Citizens Transportation Lobby recently won a two-year struggle to obtain highway I-95 truck inspection station data from the state. After numerous request refusals and runarounds from CT police, the group filed a complaint with the Freedom of Information Commission, which ruled in the group's favor. The data shows that only 1% of trucks I-95 are inspected – but a **shocking 92%** of those trucks receive summonses for violations. The group's next advocacy step is to win traffic enforcement cameras to discourage speeding trucks. But speed cameras would require state approval — unfortunately, a bill to allow municipalities to use them was defeated in the Connecticut House this past March.

In New Haven, transportation authorities will soon begin a truck traffic impact study to review trucks' impacts on roadways and residential properties; the study will also look to optimize the overall truck route network and identify needed enforcement and signage improvements to minimize truck-related

impacts, apparently similar to the large and lengthy process undertaken by the NYC DOT.

The Town of Seymour in New Haven County made news headlines this year, as **residents fed up with truck traffic** have sought to reclaim their streets. This fall, Seymour's Board of Selectmen voted to ban through-trucks, which has become a favored shortcut for truckers heading to and from a construction site in the next town. Seymour also has an inspection station on Route 8 to ensure truckers are compliant with safety and weight laws. ❖

Environmentalists Sue NJDEP Over Highlands Road Exemption

Community activists in Byram Township have filed suit to overturn a Highlands Exemption granted for the Route 206 widening project in Sussex County.

The NJ Dept. of Transportation applied for the exemption to excuse the project from the Highlands permitting process, claiming that the widening of a road from a two-lanes to four or five lanes with an 80-foot right of way is "routine repair and maintenance."

New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection disagreed, rejecting the argument that a widening of that scale could be defined as "routine." However, the DEP granted the permit anyway, claiming that the project qualified for an exemption under a separate category that DOT had not even identified — DEP called the project a "safety" measure. Outraged local activists immediately filed suit with the aid of the Rutgers Environmental Law Clinic, claiming that because DOT never justified the project on safety grounds, the public was denied its right to comment on the application. North Byram Concerned Citizens, Tri-State Transportation Campaign and Township of Byram input on the application all focused on the "routine maintenance" aspect of the project.

While the case will be watched closely by locals, it will also be monitored by state smart growth advocates. If exemptions to the Highlands permitting process are granted often and irresponsibly, protection efforts in the area could be threatened. ❖

Transportation Alternatives Holiday Party

Music, drinks, and more!

Thursday, December 14th

7:30pm-10pm

Fire Museum, 278 Spring St. Manhattan

www.transalt.org

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Rebuffed by Courts,

NJDOT Tries Again to Manage Trucks

In 1999, Governor Christine Whitman's administration announced new truck rules, designed to keep trucks passing through New Jersey off of local roads. The rules were billed as an important safety precaution after Routes 31, 206, 29, 518, 1, and 130 became clogged with truck traffic and unsafe for pedestrians in the mid nineties, after the connection of the New Jersey and New York segments of I-287. The new link changed traffic patterns in northern Jersey as more trucks avoided the Turnpike and George Washington Bridge, heading instead to and from the Tappan Zee.

Over the next six years, the rules were challenged by the American Trucking Association in federal court, and after a series of losses, NJDOT convened a committee to create new rules after the US Supreme Court refused to hear the DOT's final appeal.

In November, New Jersey released its new truck rules, drafted by a task force that included the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, New Jersey Motor Truck Association, League of Municipalities and local mayors along the most traveled truck routes.

The proposed rules creates a hierarchy of roadways for truckers. Drivers of large trucks are required to use the National Highway Network (Interstates, the NJ Turnpike, Atlantic City Expressway) if they can. If they cannot, they must try to use the New Jersey Access Network (comprised of State highways and some county roadways). Local roadways are a last resort. Exemptions apply if drivers need food, fuel, rest, or repairs. When finished with such a side trip, the trucks must return, ideally, to the National Network in as short a distance as possible. Without these rules, trucks would be allowed to use any road, even one-lane local roads, for any reason whatsoever without sanction, even if to save a minute on a trip or avoid a toll.

Unlike the rules approved in 1999, the updated rules apply to all heavy trucks traveling in New Jersey not just those with out of state origins and destinations. Judges viewed the old rules as unconstitutional under the 4th Amendment because it placed an "undue burden" on interstate trucking.

There are still questions about the effectiveness of the rules. Mayors along Routes 31 and 130 **worry that the new rules don't go far enough** to protect their towns. As a *Star-Ledger* editorial in support of the new rules noted, the real test of the regulations will be whether police can effectively enforce them. Only state police have the power to pull trucks over to check their routing; local police must notice the truck breaking a traffic law, such as driving with a broken tail light or speeding. The comment period on the proposed rules ends December 18. ❖

Hempstead's Master Plan Focuses on Walkability

Safer, more walkable streets and more productive uses of land now covered by parking lots are two potential recommendations of Hempstead Village's master plan update. The draft of the new planning goals and principles was presented in a community meeting last month. The next public forum will be held in early 2007, with a final plan approved in the spring.

The concepts presented also include **traffic calming techniques**, such as high visibility crosswalks, bulbouts to extend sidewalk into parking lanes, and landscaped islands to make the village more pedestrian friendly. The transit center is a clear place that generates pedestrian trips, and should be treated accordingly, according to draft documents.

The plan argues that the village has more parking than it needs, and that lots could be used for weekend events like farmer's markets. Over time, they should be permanently redeveloped into housing or other uses. Generally, according to documents, zoning should **allow mixed use development**, so apartments can be permitted above retail establishments, and should enable higher density units in the downtown. We would add that the plan should encourage affordable housing near mass transit stops.

The only negative aspect of the plan has been its lack of publicity and lack of public input. Only a handful of people attended the November meeting. Local advocacy groups, like Long Island ACORN, were not notified of meetings, even though they submitted comments and have been in touch with the village about the issue. The thrust of the plan is good, but if it is going to work for Hempstead, residents must feel ownership of the plan. ❖

NYC Transit Ridership: Up, Up and Away

New York City Transit enjoyed record subway ridership in September, with **average weekday ridership reaching 5.076 million**, the first month since 1970 (when the agency first started tracking monthly data) that weekday ridership topped 5 million. Combined average weekday bus and subway ridership reached 7.61 million, the highest level since December 1970.

Record ridership has contributed to the \$938 million in unanticipated revenue for the MTA, though unexpected gains from real estate transaction taxes have fueled the bulk of it. MTA chairman Peter Kalikow has promised, "no fare increase, no service cuts..." in 2007, according to *AM New York*. But looming deficits could spell fare hikes and/or service cuts for 2008. ❖

CALENDAR

December 11, 7pm. Connecticut DOT public hearing regarding a new railroad station proposed for West Haven or Orange. High Plains Community Center, 525 Orange Center Road, Orange. 860-594-3062.

December 11, 6-8pm, American Planning Association New York Metro Chapter Holiday Party, CUE Arts Foundation, 511 West 25th St. of-
fice@nyplanning.org.

December 12, 6-8pm. Auto-Free New York presents "Strategies for Reducing Car Use in Manhattan" with Megan Shane, Deputy Policy Director, 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 13, 12pm. NYMTC Special Brown Bag Presentation. Topic: "Transportation Federalism: Up Here and Down Under" with guest speaker Dr. Cameron Gordon of the University of Canberra. NYMTC, 199 Water Street, 22nd Floor, Manhattan. RSVP to Gretchen Riederer at 212-383-7258 or griederer@dot.state.ny.us.

December 14, Transportation Alternative Holiday Party, music, drinks, and free bike valet parking, honoring Karen Overton, former director of Recycle a Bicycle. Fire Museum, 278 Spring St. 212-629-8080 or www.transalt.org

December 14, 7pm. Connecticut DOT public hearing regarding a new railroad station proposed for West Haven or Orange. Savin Rock Conference Center, Rafelli Room, 6 Rock Street, West Haven. 860-594-3062.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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