

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Old-School Planning Along the G.S. Parkway

Undaunted by recent objections of the NJ Department of Environmental Protection that its permit applications were “neither timely nor complete” (MTR #538), the New Jersey Turnpike Authority is quietly and quickly moving forward with its plan to add **100 lane miles** to the Garden State Parkway between exits 30 and 80.

While the Parkway is certainly congested, will the widening plan put forth by the Turnpike Authority really solve the problem, or is it **futile in the long run**? Generally, road expansion has not led to sustainable congestion relief (see MTR #542). As we have reported frequently (most recently in MTR #543), NJ DOT has recognized the folly of trying to build our way out of congestion and received plaudits for its efforts to link land use development and transportation investments. It’s time for this more thoughtful approach to find more purchase at the Turnpike Authority.

Environmentalists are concerned that the only study done on the Parkway expansion project uses data as much as **a decade old** and contains no genuine analysis of secondary impacts, such as increasing development pressures in rapidly growing southern New Jersey. Neither does the slim EIS offer any look at strategies such as High Occupancy/Toll (HOT) lanes that can head off the **re-congestion** that inevitably follows standard road widening in busy metropolitan areas (MTR #542).

The weakness of the project is in part due to the complete lack of public input — it has not been the subject of a single public meeting, even though the Turnpike Authority would like to begin construction on it next summer.

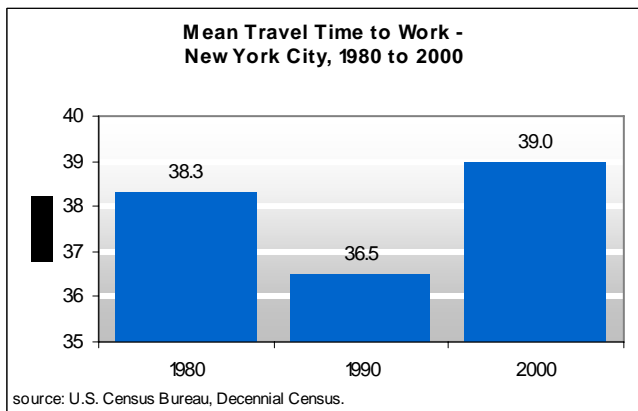
It’s not clear at this point whether Governor Corzine supports the project as is, or is even very aware of it. We urge the state administration to take a hard look at where the Turnpike Authority is headed and inject a strong measure of the intelligent planning perspectives and stewardship over public investments that have become the hallmarks of New Jersey DOT and NJ Transit. Some technique for minimizing the effects of induced traffic of controlling congestion on the Parkway, expanded or not, must be implemented. ❖

### The Bloomberg Sustainability Agenda: Reading the Transportation Tea Leaves

Mayor Bloomberg’s kick-off of his sustainability initiative last week addressed transportation with only the broadest of brushes. The thrust of his speech was that New York City is poised for unprecedented growth, but does not now possess the infrastructure needed to accommodate the potential 1 million additional New Yorkers the city could see by 2030.

Clearly the transportation system is not ready for that sort of influx. Transit lines such as the L subway are **already over capacity** due to a boom in just a few Brooklyn neighborhoods that caught city government and NYC Transit napping.

But the mayor mentioned only two broad transportation-related goals — bring the subway system to a state of good repair, and **improve travel times** over today’s levels by adding mass transit capacity. Urbanists and pedestrian advocates looking for a statement about more efficient and convivial use of city street space were disappointed. The main outstanding question in that regard is what the implica-

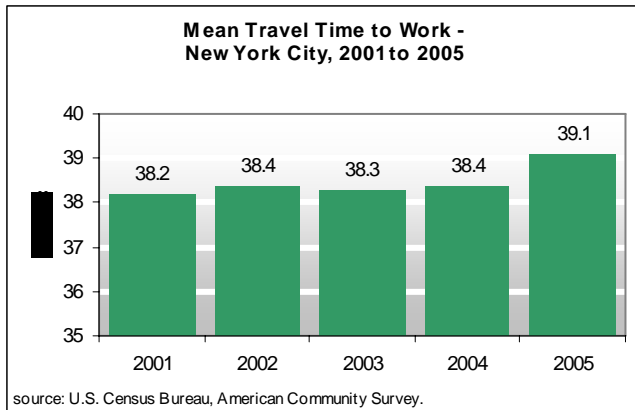


tions are for adding enough transit capacity to meet the projected growth while preventing travel times from worsening.

Data on city travel times shows that the challenge of meeting the mayor’s goal is a big one. The chart above shows that commute times in NYC dropped over 3% from 1980 to 1990, almost surely a result of recovery of the subway system from its low point via massive public investment. But **commute times rose thereafter** — by nearly 7% in the decade to

2000 — as gains from transit reconstruction flattened and ridership and street traffic boomed.

A second set of data, released annually but not collected as intensively as the decennial census, indicates NYC commute times have at best failed to



improve significantly since 2000, and are likely to be worsening further.

Meeting the mayor's goal will require holding the line on travel times, and likely reversing a worsening trend. It's arguable that the bus rapid transit deployment and anti-congestion measures needed to do this will necessitate a shift of street space away from private autos. But it may also be that the Bloomberg team will leave it to **future mayors** to draw that implication for city residents. ❖

### Port Authority Plan Bodes Well for Region

The Port Authority intends to invest \$4 billion in new mass transit capacity in New York and New Jersey, according to its recently approved 2007-2016 capital plan. \$2 billion will go towards a new NJTransit commuter rail tunnel under the Hudson. Another \$2 billion could go towards transit priorities identified by Governor-elect Spitzer — perhaps contributing to implementation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue subway and/or LIRR East Side Access .

To pay for the plan, Port Authority Chairman Anthony Coscia told reporters says that **toll and fare increases** will be necessary, though the PA has pledged to hold rates stable in 2007. The PA's 2007 and 10-year capital programs are **online for the first time** at [www.panynj.gov](http://www.panynj.gov).

Other significant investments in the plan include:

- ◆ \$8 billion for World Trade Center projects, including the PATH hub and Freedom Tower.
- ◆ \$639 million for new PATH cars.
- ◆ \$985 for a new Goethals Bridge.
- ◆ Numerous airport projects.
- ◆ \$175 million for port terminal rail improvements .
- ◆ \$100 million to expand bus-priority capacity at the Lincoln Tunnel — good news for the 62,000 people who ride buses through the tunnel every morning. ❖

### New Look for Newark Bus Routes

A new three-year NJTransit study will update Newark's bus routes, including NJ Transit's 47 routes and four others run by Coach USA. The study is good news. The last time NJTransit reviewed bus routes in the area was 25 years ago. Newark has 8 of the 9 most used routes statewide.

An early focus of the study will be to improve bus **connections with rail and light rail service**, and increase access to Newark's downtown and other core areas such as Penn Station, Market Street and Broad Street. Ultimately, the study will issue a series of short, medium, and long term recommendations, including some exclusive **bus lanes** and bus rapid transit service.

To get the most out of the study, NJTransit should consider more than routing. Pedro Nunez of La Casa de Don Pedro, a local community development group, told the *Star-Ledger*, "**We need shelters** in some places, especially in winter, and we need better signs." The Tri-State Campaign and La Casa de Don Pedro staff have joined together to conduct a few community walks, detailing improvements needed to make Newark streets safer and more pleasant for pedestrians. Bus shelters and bus schedule information are two of the resulting recommendations. To view results of the walk, see [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org). ❖

### Congestion Pricing: What's the Problem with Queens?

Discussion about congestion pricing in New York City continued over the past few weeks, with the Manhattan Institute releasing results of focus group discussions of the issue. Bruce Schaller, the transportation consultant running the groups, found that support for congestion pricing among New Yorkers is mixed but not the political hot potato many think it is. The study found that New Yorkers are especially attracted to congestion pricing if they think it will increase travel choices, be equitable, and reduce travel time in severely congested corridors. Overall, the findings were consistent with a Tri-State Transportation Campaign survey that found New Yorkers evenly split on applying a London-like congestion pricing plan to New York (MTR 545).

Schaller recommends a plan that includes congestion pricing for the Manhattan CBD, high occupancy toll lanes on key city highways and higher parking rates.

**Knee-jerk opposition** to congestion pricing in any form came as usual from Queens politicians, now coalesced with the AAA and parking industry as the Committee to Keep New York City Congestion-Tax Free. The committee is headed by former NYC City Council member Walter McCaffrey. The

group says it supports improvements in transit service though offers no way to pay for them nor identifies clear entry points for discussion of such plans, such as the next MTA capital program.

Strangely, six of the seven bridges or tunnels that connect Queens to other boroughs (and most of Queens to the Rockaways) **already have tolls**. So is the big fuss in Queens really just about keeping the chronically-clogged Queensboro Bridge toll-free? It is true that Queens connections to some of the free bridges in Brooklyn are pretty direct (if one were driving from eastern Queens to City Hall, for example) but the big shifts in free versus paid car access to the central business district under the Manhattan Institute plan would be in Brooklyn and The Bronx, rather than in Queens.

McCaffrey told the *New York Post* that congestion pricing is a tax that would "hurt those just trying to make ends meet" who "have no choice but to drive."

But the data contradicts such statements, as Bruce Schaller noted recently in the *Gotham Gazette*. Most people who drive in New York are in fact wealthier than those who take transit. Schaller notes that Manhattan-bound auto commuters from the outlying parts of Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island **earn 35% more** than their more numerous counterparts who take the subway. And the fact that, according to the Census, only 28% of Manhattan-bound commuters who live in eastern Queens, southeastern Brooklyn or Staten Island drive to work proves that most people do, in fact, have access to transit. Driving into Manhattan is a choice, not a necessity.

According to the Tri-State Campaign public opinion poll, **Queens residents are not overwhelmingly opposed** to pricing policies to reduce congestion, as McCaffrey's group would like the rest of the city to believe. In fact, Queens' residents are evenly split on the issue, with **44% for** and **45% opposed**.

See [www.manhattan-institute.org](http://www.manhattan-institute.org) and [gothamgazette.com](http://gothamgazette.com). For further results of Tri-State's poll, [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org). ❖

## TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

[www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

## Earth to Staten Island: Stop Voting for Worse Traffic

Recent news from Staten Island clearly manifests the Island's split personality. One headline announced the start of construction of a new mall along the **West Shore Expressway** that is slated to be the "second-largest shopping center" on the Island and looks like it would fit into any sprawling suburban retail landscape across the U.S., while within just a few days, the NASCAR track proposed for a site near the Goethals Bridge went down to defeat because of traffic fears.

Staten Islanders often express concern about population growth creating traffic, but have turned a relatively blind eye to the effects of proliferating large retail projects and big-box stores, even though they have a larger overall impact on the number of cars on the road.

Community boards and elected officials on the Island need to listen to voices like activist Dee Vanderberg's, who wrote recently to the NYC Dept. of Buildings that "We want to see comprehensive planning and we want all agencies involved before one more thing is built on Page Avenue" (on the South Shore). There may be hope in the NASCAR aftermath — elected officials have begun to express concern about the site's retail project, proposed by Related Companies, that would add to daily traffic on the Staten Island Expressway and other roads. ❖

## CALENDAR

**January 17, 9am.** NJ Transit public meeting. NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Floor, Newark. [njtboard@njtransit.com](mailto:njtboard@njtransit.com).

**January 18, 1:15pm,** NYMTC Program, Finance, Administration Committee (PFAC) meeting. Guest speaker: Gary Toth, NJDOT. Transportation planning for smart growth. 199 Water St, 22nd Floor, Manhattan. RSVP 212-482-4551 or [AMiles-Cole@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:AMiles-Cole@dot.state.ny.us).

**February 14, 9am.** NJ Transit public meeting. NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Floor, Newark. [njtboard@njtransit.com](mailto:njtboard@njtransit.com).

**February 15, 6-8pm.** NYU Rudin Center for Transportation Policy & Management, The Council on Transportation, and the University Transportation Research Center-Region II will sponsor "The Annual Leadership Awards in Transportation." Rosenthal Pavilion, NYU Kimmel Center, 60 Washington Square South. 212-998-7545.

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