

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

City Rapid Bus Plans Headed for Trouble?

The public launch of NYC's bus rapid transit (BRT) project for Brooklyn's Nostrand and Bedford Avenues in February was less than auspicious, sparking significant community opposition to the notion of taking parking lanes out of busy commercial corridors. Similar concerns were expressed by both community members and the Staten Island *Advance* regarding the rapid bus plan for Hylan Boulevard, raising the question of whether the NYC DOT/ NYC Transit team that has spent the last few years developing the proposals has found a winning approach for BRT in New York City.

In the Brooklyn meeting, merchants, residents and their elected representatives expressed concern over the **curb-lane BRT designs**, arguing that loss of parking for "buses that will just get stuck in traffic" wasn't worth it. Merchants were predictably worried about access to curbs for both customers and deliveries, while resident parking throughout Brooklyn is ever-more in demand.

The same issues have been raised on Staten Island, with the twist that parking is already banned during rush hour on sections of Hylan Boulevard today. Banning parking for good while shoehorning the additional cars accommodated by the peak parking ban (see *MTR* #290) into fewer lanes has not received rave reviews.

Urban BRT need not necessarily occupy curb lanes. New BRT routes in Paris, for instance, have created transit corridors **down the center of wide boulevards**. San Francisco MUNI is contemplating a similar design for several major avenues, and looks likely to get BRT on the ground significantly faster than New York. Urbanists also argue that the buffer and vehicle-pedestrian transition zone provided by the parking lane facilitates a better sidewalk environment. A recent *SF Chronicle* editorial lauded BRT's efficiency and relative ease of implementation.

NYC is likely proposing curb bus lanes to minimize cost and because of NYC DOT's **preoccupation with the flow of car traffic**. We believe, to the contrary, that the politics of parking and traffic in the city today, given the choice, probably lean in favor of reducing traffic lanes rather than parking. The city's grid systems provide plenty of alternate

driving routes.

One of the biggest problems with curb BRT lanes will be keeping them free from traffic and parked vehicles. The NYC BRT team told the Brooklyn meeting it is working on an **enforcement plan** with the NYPD, but given the city's general lack of traffic law enforcement, we agree with the Brooklyn civic leaders that the notion of painted lanes kept free of obstruction is very hard to credit. If transportation managers can get NYPD to cooperate on new bus lanes, why don't they **get police to enforce the old ones**, such as the one cops routinely park in on Manhattan's Second Avenue?

The boulevard center transit line design, in contrast, can be set off from traffic flow and made self-enforcing. MUNI's comparison of various design options showed that street designs featuring central transit routing had far fewer conflicts with cars and consequently attracted more riders. ❖

Tappan Zee Plan Still Omits High Rider Option

Mass transit options offered by the Tappan Zee bridge replacement and mass transit study team continue to exclude the **commuter rail/bus rapid transit combination** found to attract the highest number of overall transit riders, without explanation.

The T-Z study just released more detailed looks at its four main cross-Tappan Zee transit proposals, earning a large spread in the Hudson Valley daily *Journal-News* and providing a focal point for a round of public "open houses."

According to ridership numbers in the study teams' alternatives analysis, a Manhattan bound commuter rail plus full east-west bus rapid transit service would attract 63,700 daily riders total, and 33,700 cross corridor riders, and is cheaper than full commuter rail (crossing the Tappan Zee, connecting to the Hudson Line and extending across Westchester to the New Haven Line), one of the four alternatives moving forward.

The Tri-State Campaign has requested many times that the study team consider the Manhattan bound rail and east-west BRT alternative, since it arguably provides the best services for **two major travel markets** originating west the Tappan Zee Bridge. In an August 2006 letter the study team said it would

consider the combination as traffic models became available. Apparently, they are now considering an option that would provide a bus service plan in Rockland with Manhattan bound commuter rail, but it's unclear why this option still falls short of the BRT infrastructure anticipated in the full BRT-without-commuter rail option.

How not to plan

We've been critical for some time about the old EIS "design and defend" method the Tappan Zee study has used for a project that could shape Rockland and Westchester counties for many years. The approach, under which the project disappears from view for extended periods and does not include many modern concepts of outreach or communications, now appears to have run up against its political limits in the Lower Hudson Valley. County Executives Andrew Spano and Scott Vanderhoef recently asked Governor Spitzer to intercede in the project and assign someone new to oversee it, after a series of public meetings was scheduled and county leaders **learned of them in the newspapers**. "The process now in place is confusing, unresponsive and in several ways unreliable. It comes across as bureaucratic, provincial, and lacking any sense of regional vision," wrote the elected leaders. A letter to the study team from Rockland elected officials (*MTR # 547*) in November requesting that some money be provided to towns for **land use visioning** and planning around the Tappan Zee new transit service has not received any response, which seems to confirm the county executives' description of how things are proceeding. ❖

A Reversal at Metro-North

The ongoing surge in reverse commuters along the New Haven Line has helped make the 5:52 p.m. train out of New Haven the third most late Metro-North run. The train is late more than 10 percent of the time. (The railroad defines "late" trains as those arriving more than 6 minutes after scheduled times).

Commuters traveling to **Grand Central made up less than half** of Metro North's ridership in 2005, down from more than 65 percent in 1984.

Growth in reverse commuters on the New Haven line causes delays as passengers take longer to board. Metro-North spokesman Dan Brucker told the *Advocate* that the 5:52 train out of New Haven "was socked by the p.m. rush. As we have seen more reverse and intrastate commuters, it does reduce the margin of error." ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

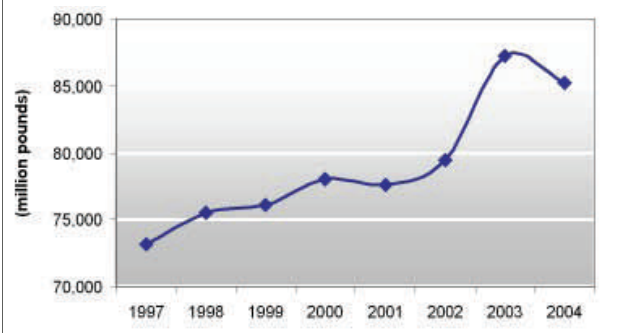
Corzine, Climate and Cars

The greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals that Governor Corzine set for New Jersey in mid-February are very laudable, but it's unclear whether the governor's administration foresees much action on transportation in its implementation plan.

Corzine pledged the state would reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, which he said represented a 20% reduction, and a further reduction to 80% of 2006 levels by 2050.

Transportation references in the governor's release were limited to **inclusion of NJ DOT**

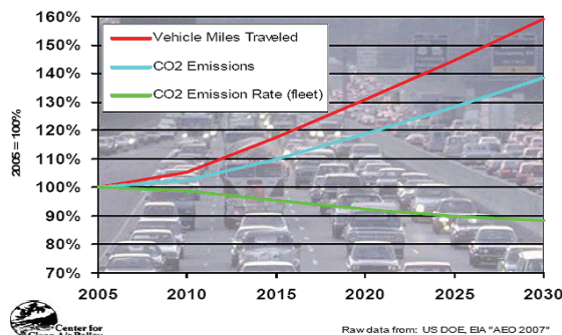
Estimated New Jersey Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Motor Vehicles



among agencies required to develop implementation plans, adoption of greenhouse emission standards for vehicles and hiking the efficiency of the state vehicle fleet.

NJ DOT has adopted policies designed to help forestall radical growth of vehicle-miles traveled (VMT—the measure of total driving in an area). It will be interesting to see if the state recognizes these in its greenhouse reduction planning. New Jersey's current plans to **widen** the southern stretches of both the **Garden State Parkway** and **NJ Turnpike** and

VMT Growth Projected to Outpace CO₂ Emissions Improvements...



its jury-rigged mass transit financing system may make attainment of any sort of VMT stabilization goal by 2020 difficult, and hamper efforts to continue to build mass transit ridership at the pace seen over the past ten years. ❖

Center for Clean Air Policy

Solution in Sight for Long Island Bus?

News reports stemming from recent MTA board discussions said recently that the MTA is considering a takeover of Long Island Bus, Nassau County's bus system. If it provides access to greater resources, such a move would greatly help the Nassau system, which faces nearly **annual threats of service cuts**. Though L.I. Bus is nominally an MTA operation, funding responsibility is shared between the MTA, Nassau County, and the state, yet the three have no functioning agreement about who and how much each should pay. Allocations to the system are therefore subjected to an annual budget process where each side waits to see what it can get the others to pay.

Merging Long Island Bus into a greater MTA bus agency could occasion a **rewrite of the old operating agreement** between Nassau County and the MTA, and provide more stable funding. Long Island Bus desperately needs additional funding: it saw a 3.4% increase between 2005 and 2006, on top of 3% growth from 2004 to 2005. Ridership is good for the county, but lack of funding prevents bus managers from adding necessary service. Long Island Bus President Neil Yellin told the MTA that he will have to cut service this year if he does not receive \$4 million to cover an immediate operating deficit. This number does not even count additional monies needed for new buses, which the agency will have to purchase within the next few years. A more coordinated regional bus system that puts control of suburban bus lines like Long Island Bus, and perhaps Westchester County's Bee Line, under the MTA could be good news for riders and bus operators alike by providing a stable funding source and breaking down barriers to better service across jurisdictional lines. ❖

NY Metro Council Moving up in the World

NY Metropolitan Transportation Council staff say their annual meeting on March 15 will feature a more prominent cast of speakers than has been the case in the past. NYC deputy mayor **Daniel Doctoroff**, MTA executive director **Elliot Sander** and new NY State DOT commissioner **Astrid Glynn** will address the theme of "Challenges of Growth" at the March 15 session. Since the meeting is only about transportation, it may provide a stronger sense of how city government is viewing the transportation aspects of the 2030 sustainability plan the Bloomberg administration is working on. City officials did not provide much detail on this theme at a March 1 City Council hearing.

The NYMTC meeting begins at 11:15 a.m. at NYU, 60 Washington Square South in Manhattan. Rsvp is required to attend: 718-482-4551.

Extending Shore Line East?

Connecticut officials continue to seek ideas to boost mass transit service around the state. Following on the heels of discussion by ConnDOT about extending Shore Line East service to New London, State Senator Andrew Maynard recently offered legislation (SB 450) to get the ball rolling. Testifying February 16th before the Joint Committee on Transportation, Senator Maynard argued that the extension makes regional economic and environmental sense. Offering New London service will help get travelers bound for casinos, the Coast Guard Academy and sub base out of their cars and off of congested I-95, according to Maynard.

Currently, Shore Line East service stops at Old Saybrook, just 18 minutes from New London. Under ConnDOT's proposal, extending **daily service to New London** would cost \$13 million to purchase an additional locomotive and four rail cars. The plan calls for eventually increasing service to add 10 daily trains between New Haven and New London.

Complicating the plan is Amtrak's ownership of the Northeast Corridor and the New London station. Shore Line East would need to negotiate with Amtrak for both track space and use of its station.

The legislation must receive a favorable report from the Transportation Committee by mid-March in order to be considered by the full legislature. Transportation advocates have strongly endorsed the bill. Some have suggested extending commuter service to Providence. ❖

Solutions for West Side Traffic Hell

In January, CHEKPEDS, the Clinton-Hell's Kitchen Coalition for Pedestrian Safety, held a Town Hall meeting and a workshop to kick off the "9th Avenue Renaissance," a street redesign and traffic-calming project for Manhattan's 9th Avenue between 34th and 57th Streets. The event was co-sponsored by elected officials and Manhattan Community Board 4.

The Town Hall meeting took place at Holy Cross School, which, according to NYC DOT statistics, is one of the **most dangerous schools to walk to** in Manhattan. 73% of those who responded to surveys in events held by the group said traffic safety is a major issue, while crime concerned only 6%.

Lincoln Tunnel traffic generally plagues the area: the 9th Avenue corridor from 37th to 47th Streets has the second highest crash rate per mile for trucks in the city. In five years, 500 pedestrians and cyclists were injured in the district. City Health Department statistics show that the district experiences 25% more deaths by chronic lung disease than the rest of Manhattan. In the last two years, pedestrian

and bicycle injuries have increased by 86% at 42nd Street and 9th Avenue. According to Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, the intersection of 38th Street and 9th Avenue is one of the 10 most severely gridlocked intersections in the city.

At the meeting, Stringer drew prolonged applause by calling for a study of **congestion pricing in Manhattan**. Fred Kent of Project for Public Spaces illustrated urban revitalization efforts of other U.S. cities. Tim Tompkins, President of the Times Square Alliance, discussed his Times Square redesign that includes a 50% increase in pedestrian space.

Some at the meeting noted that Hudson Yards rezoning, which provides 54 million square feet of development space west of 8th Avenue between 30th and 42nd Street, adding 12,000 residents to the neighborhood, will only worsen traffic in Clinton/Hell's Kitchen.

This April, NYC DOT will undertake an engineering study of the **Lincoln Tunnel entrances** focused on pedestrian safety along 9th Avenue. The 9th Avenue Renaissance Project will document community needs and propose constructive short-term solutions. The Tri-State Campaign urges the **Port Authority**, to come to the table as part of these proceedings and be a part of work to forge a more sustainable West Side of Midtown Manhattan. ❖

Smart Parking Policy (Not in NYC)

Do sensible urban transportation steps always have to originate somewhere other than NYC? While growth and density increase in the city's boroughs outside of Manhattan, city government maintains **suburban-like** parking construction requirements that add to the overall parking supply, encourage car ownership and more driving.

In **Seattle**, whose Mayor Greg Nickels heads up the U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, the city is **relaxing parking requirements** in transit friendly neighborhoods and **restricting the size of surface parking lots** to 145 spaces (compare to the 950-space surface lot Forest City Ratner wants to build adjacent to downtown Brooklyn, or the 1,400 [about half are surface] slated for the Brooklyn IKEA, just to mention a few of the big surface car parks blessed by the Bloomberg administration).

Planning staff said the policy is a recognition that city neighborhoods allow the opportunity to live without a car, and a way to move the cost of parking to those who choose to own cars rather than have those **costs built into housing prices**. "In theory, people would be more likely to choose alternatives to driving if they're paying directly for the cost of parking," City Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck told the *Post-Intelligencer*. ❖

MTR#551

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CALENDAR

March 5, 6:30pm. PlaNYC 2030 Town Hall Conversation. Bronx County Court House, 851 Grand Concourse, Bronx NY.

March 6, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit fare increase hearing. Port Authority Bus Terminal, Times Square Hall, 2nd Floor, Eighth Avenue, NYC. 800-772-2222.

March 6, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit hearing on fare increase. NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection, Public Hearing Room, 401 East State St, Trenton. 800-772-2222.

March 6, 6:30pm. PlaNYC 2030 Town Hall Conversation. Long Island University, 1 University Plaza (at Flatbush & DeKalb), Brooklyn NY.

March 7, 5-7. LIRR Commuter Council - President's Forum. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor, New York NY. 212-878-8087.

March 7, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit hearing on fare increase. NJ Transit Board Room, One Penn Plaza East, Newark. 800-772-2222.

March 7, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit public hearing on fare increase. Monmouth County Library, 125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan. 800-772-2222.

March 8, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit hearing on fare increase. One Bergen County Plaza, Hackensack NJ. 800-772-2222.

March 8, 6:30pm. PlanYC 2030 Town Hall Conversation. New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th Street, Queens NY.

March 9, 8-10am. Times Square Alliance, NYU Rudin Center, and Transportation Alternatives breakfast discussion: "Can Market-Rate Curb-side Parking Unclog Our Streets?" With Donald Shoup. 229 West 42nd Street, NYC. RSVP at 646-873-6031 or streets@transalt.org.

March 11, 9am-Noon. "Rethinking Grand Army Plaza": Community planning workshop—Grand Army Plaza Coalition. Central Library, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn. RSVP to rsvp@grandarmyplaza.org.

More calendar items at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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