

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Parking Boom Will Sustain NYC Motoring

Despite the Bloomberg administration's rhetoric on sustainability and transit expansion (*MTR* #'s 546, 552), the city's actions seem more interested in promoting the convenience of driving.

The huge parking expansion associated with new Yankee Stadium construction has failed to attract any bids from private operators. The city has apparently scaled the seemingly uneconomic plan back by one 900-car garage, but instead of reducing it further, it is adding more public money to ensure that the new, smaller stadium has thousands of additional parking spaces around it.

The city's Economic Development Corp. wants to award **\$186 million in triple tax-exempt bonds** for parking garage construction, significantly **upping public subsidies** for the project. Housing advocates say the shortage of such "private activity" tax-exempt bonding is one reason affordable housing construction in the city lags so badly. Meanwhile, news reports say the MTA is having trouble funding the Yankee Stadium Metro-North station that was added to the stadium project after criticism last year.

Developer Forest City Ratner is about to knock down historic buildings near downtown Brooklyn to construct the borough's **biggest surface parking lot**. On Sunday, April 15th, **Brooklyn Speaks**, a coalition favoring a better Atlantic Yards plan, will hold a rally against the demolition and parking lot. "Providing 1,400 surface parking spaces next to the third largest transit hub in the city is not only unnecessary, it is contradictory to the whole rationale for the project's location," the Tri-State Campaign said in the event's announcement.

The issue of urban parking and traffic may yet be aired in court. The Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association's nearly two-year-old **Clean Air Act lawsuit** against NY City and State recently survived a round of dismissal motions. It claims that the 2005 Hudson Yards amendment to the NYC Zoning Resolution violated clean air law by **relaxing the parking regulations below 60th Street** without first fulfilling the terms of an agreement with the EPA (see *MTR* #500). While the development says nothing about the strength of the allegations or potential outcome of the case, it bodes well that it will be heard and decided on the merits. ❖

NJ Continues Smart Investment Trend

New Jersey transportation agencies unveiled fiscal 2008 construction programs in Trenton last week, outlining nearly \$3.3 billion in roadway, transit and pedestrian investments. The program represents a 7 percent spending hike over the 2007 program, and continues the very positive trend of **high spending on road and bridge maintenance**, bike and pedestrian programs, and transit and rail freight expansion.

The capital program also contained decent news for local groups fighting road expansion projects. The Route 206 widening project in the Highlands' Byram Township won't be fully funded until FY 2010. Also, the extension of Helen Street through the environmentally sensitive Dismal Swamp in Middlesex County won't receive construction funds until 2012.

The program also marked the formal end of the road for the **Bergen Arches highway project** in Jersey City. Once considered one of the worst new highway ideas in the state, the Arches project would have built a new expressway link through the city to the waterfront. Though the idea died a practical death some time ago, it lived on on paper for many years because of a federal earmark. This year that earmark was re-directed to study the feasibility of using the right of way for a new light rail line.

Highway capacity expansion projects account for only 3 percent of total NJ DOT capital spending, while road and bridge maintenance captures the lion's share, receiving nearly 47 percent of the total. Congestion relief projects such as intersection improvements, as well as transportation demand management and ITS receive 13 percent of funds. More than 16 percent is set aside for local aid projects, up slightly from 2007. The remaining funds are allocated to capital program staffing, research, safety projects, and inter-modal programs.

Significantly, rail freight projects received a big boost this year, with \$14.7 million dedicated to goods movement, up 37 percent from the 2007 levels. Still, rail freight receives less than 1 percent of the total NJDOT funds, an alarmingly low figure given the need anticipated with the ongoing surge in truck traffic. Transit highlights include some ARC funding, and money for bus purchases and planning.

Bicycle and pedestrian projects earn a **record \$34.6 million** in the 2008 program, up slightly from the 2007 capital program. Bike/ped projects com-

prise only 1.7 percent of the total capital program, but this is still an improvement. We expressed concern last year (*MTR* #528) that the state's bike/ped program was in danger of becoming dependent on **one-time congressional earmarks**. But, NJDOT has hiked state funding, and also allocated about 10 percent of federal Highway Safety Improvement Program funds to walking and cycling. ❖

Transit Villages & Affordable Housing

In 2005, housing and transportation reform advocates began a campaign to require an affordable housing component be part of municipalities' plans to earn NJ Dept of Transportation's coveted "Transit Village" designation. The Corzine administration listened, and the two most recent transit village awards went to applicants that included affordable housing in their station area proposals.

In 2007, **Burlington City** and **Elizabeth** received the designation and the technical assistance and small grants that come with it. In total, of the 820 new housing units in the two cities, 129 units will be affordable. 700 homes will be constructed in Elizabeth, including 100 affordable units, and 120 homes will be built in Burlington City, with 29 affordable units. Families earning no more than 80% of the area's median income qualify for the affordable homes, and monthly payments must be no more than 30 or so percent of household income. In total, New Jersey has named 19 transit villages. For more on the program, see www.state.nj.us/transportation/community/village/ ❖

Secaucus Junction Parking Remains Hot Topic

At last week's State Senate budget committee hearing on NJDOT's capital program, Senator (and Bayonne mayor) Joseph Doria lit into Commissioner Kolluri and incoming NJ Transit Executive Director Richard Sarles for the lack of parking at NJ Transit's Secaucus Junction. Kolluri and Sarles both agreed that parking would help development near the station. Kolluri seemed to imply that flawed thinking **limited parking construction** when the transfer station was built.

However, the drawbacks of making Secaucus into a **giant park-and-ride** likely to worsen gridlock on the Turnpike and local roads continue to inform local policy in Hudson and southern Bergen counties.

The Mayors' Committee of the Meadowlands Commission recently rejected a zoning change that would allow a truck terminal to make way for a new parking garage. Secaucus Mayor Dennis Elwell was one of the local leaders opposed to the rezoning. A better use for the site would be **expansion** of an adjacent **Norfolk-Southern rail yard**, a change the railroad seeks. ❖

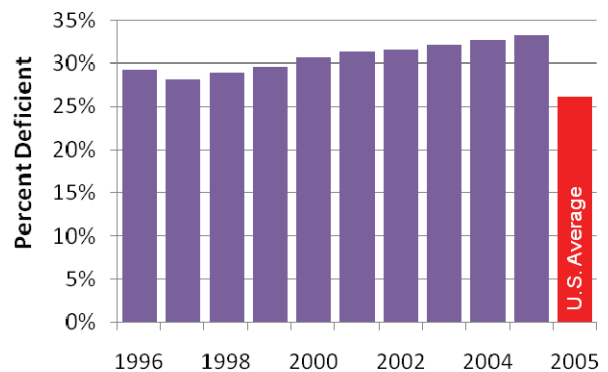
CT Bridges & Roads: Where They Stand

A recent look we took at federal data shows Connecticut's road and bridge conditions lagging national averages. One-third of the state's bridges were rated deficient in 2005, continuing the decade-long **worsening trend**. The vast majority of those deficient bridges are faulted for being functionally obsolete, indicating they don't conform to modern bridge design standards. Nationally, 26 percent of bridges are rated deficient.

Statewide pavement conditions have been improving slightly over the decade. Yet, with nearly 76 percent of major roadway lane miles found to be in "less than good condition," Connecticut's roads are significantly worse than the national average of 47 percent. ("Less than good" roads have an International Roughness Index of 95 or higher.) In fact, Connecticut has the **fifth highest percentage** of roads in "less than good" condition in the country.

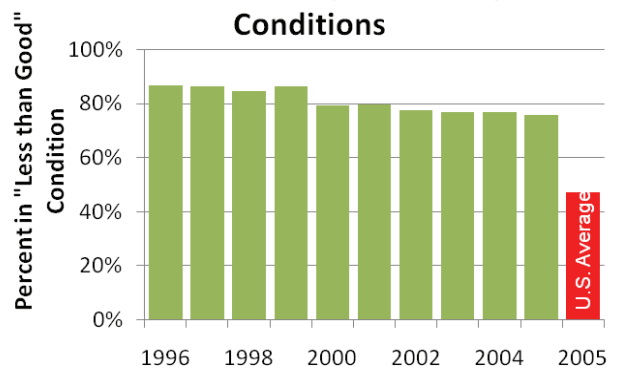
The state's relatively weak showing argues for a stronger commitment to "fix it first." Just a few highway expansion projects are slated to take up a huge proportion of Connecticut's roadway capital spending, according a forthcoming Tri-State Campaign analysis of the statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

Connecticut Bridge Conditions



Source: FHWA. National Bridge Inventory, 1996-2005.

Connecticut Major Roadway Conditions



Source: FHWA. Highway Statistics Series, 1996-2005, Table HM-64.

SAVE THE DATE!

Tuesday, APRIL 24th: TSTC First Annual New Jersey Fundraiser — in Newark's Ironbound neighborhood. Please join us!

Honoring former NJ Transit executive director **George Warrington** and former NJDOT Commissioner **Jack Lettiere** for their major roles in getting NJ transportation policy on track. For info, call us at 212-268-7474.

Highlands Act Affects Transportation Projects

Two and a half years after its passage, the Highlands Act is finally beginning to have an impact on transportation projects in NJ DOT's pipeline.

In Warren County, the DOT claims that the Act's restrictions on development will limit growth along the **Route 57 corridor**, and has developed a variety of pro-active policy measures that they say means the two-lane scenic byway need not ever be widened. NJDOT is now meeting with local officials in the Route 57 corridor to help advise them on clustering development to slow the growth of sprawl development. Many of the current local zoning patterns promote less dense development throughout the corridor — the type of development the Highlands Act seeks to limit.

A second project being affected is the controversial proposed **widening of Route 206** in Byram. Governor Corzine announced last week that his administration will study placing a moratorium on state infrastructure development in the Highlands, including road projects. Given pending lawsuits over the Highlands Act exemption granted for the project, the Route 206 project in Byram should be one of the first ones put on hold until a better analysis can be done.

Additionally, citing poor transit service in rural areas, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority has announced a study to bring **better bus access** to northwestern NJ. It is funded by an earmark of \$1 million from Congressman Scott Garrett. Officials say work may begin this summer. ❖

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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CALENDAR

April 11, 9am. NJ Transit board meeting. NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Floor, Newark. njtboard@njtransit.com.

April 11, 6:30pm. Panel: "The Roads Taken and Not Taken: Robert Moses and Transportation." with Richard Ravitch, former MTA chair; Gene Russianoff, NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign; Elliot Sander, CEO, MTA; and Iris Weinsall, NYC DOT commissioner. Moderated by Robert Yaro, Regional Plan Association. Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Ave, Manhattan. \$. RSVP 212-534-1672, ext. 3395.

April 12, 12:15-2pm. LIRR Commuter's Council meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

April 16, 6pm. Stamford Traffic Calming Master Plan Kickoff. Stamford Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard, Stamford. 203-977-4237.

April 17, Noon-1pm. Presentation: "Promoting Safe Walking and Cycling to Improve Public Health: Lessons from Europe" with guest speaker Dr. John Pucher. NYMTC, 199 Water Street, 22nd Floor, Manhattan. 212-383-7200.

April 17, 6pm. Stamford Traffic Calming Master Plan charrette. Rogers Magnet School, 83 Lockwood Avenue, Stamford. 203-977-4237.

April 18, 6pm. Stamford Traffic Calming Master Plan charrette. Lathon Wider Community Center, 34 Woodland Avenue, Stamford. 203-977-4237.

April 19, 10am-9pm. NY State DOT Kosciuszko Bridge Project Public Hearing. Presentations at 11am and 6:30pm on Draft EIS alternatives, followed by public testimony. Polish National Home, 261 Driggs Ave, Brooklyn. 212-532-4175.

April 19, 4:30-6:30pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

April 19, 6pm. Stamford Traffic Calming Master Plan planning charrette. Our Lady of the Star of the Sea school auditorium, 1170 Shippan Avenue, Stamford. 203-977-4237.

April 24 - Staten Island Conference 2007. Seminars include on a West Shore light rail. For more information call 718-477-1400 or www.siedc.net.

April 26, Noon. New York City Transit Rider's Council meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

More calendar items at www.tstc.org