

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 555

May 3, 2007

NEWS

Bloomberg 2030 - The Transportation Plan Beneath the Headlines

While Mayor Bloomberg's embrace of congestion pricing has predictably become the banner issue of the 2030 plan he announced on April 22, it's worth a more detailed look at the many other transportation-related elements that the mayor and his planning team have proposed. A total of 127 initiatives constitute PlaNYC, as it is called. It is certainly bold, but it is heavily researched and attempts to respond directly to looming challenges. New Yorkers who support the plan's overall vision and key elements should **contact their state legislators** and let them know.

Below we list most of the plan's transportation and land use initiatives (several others are discussed in further articles below). However, it's important to keep in mind that many of these proposals will not be realized without a new source of revenue. As Felix Rohatyn wrote in the *Financial Times* this week, congestion pricing "is not simply an option." It is indeed a cornerstone of the whole effort. Find the entire document at: www.nyc.gov/html/planyc2030/.

- ◆ Increasing funding for Second Avenue Subway, third track on the LIRR Main Line, Access to the Region's Core (ARC), Moynihan Station Project, and a second express bus lane through the Lincoln Tunnel.
- ◆ Expanding transit service into new neighborhoods, such as Staten Island's North Shore, the West Side of Manhattan, and the Nassau County Hub, and bringing Metro-North into Penn Station.
- ◆ Improving access to transit. For example, a "Sidewalks to Buses" initiative will help provide easier access to bus stops and improve sidewalks around certain transit hubs.
- ◆ Achieving a state of good repair on both transit and roads, using funds raised via congestion pricing.
- ◆ Over next two years, studying nine corridors that experience congestion and pedestrian safety problems to make them safer and more livable, including Church Ave. in Brooklyn and Northern Boulevard in Queens.
- ◆ Expanding ferry service.
- ◆ Rezoning areas around transit lines, such as Jamaica and Coney Island.
- ◆ Decking over the rail yards and highways to make way for housing and other uses. The Sunnyside Yards

in Queens, the 36th street rail yard in Brooklyn, the Staten Island ferry terminal in St. George, and the Brooklyn Queens Expressway in Carroll Gardens are mentioned specifically. (We would add that demapping the Sheridan Expressway in The Bronx should be a similar land development candidate.)

- ◆ Creating a new public plaza in every neighborhood and expanding the Greenstreets program.
- ◆ Creating 1,200 new on-street bike parking spaces by 2009, and completing the 1,800 mile bike master plan.
- ◆ Expanding the muni-meter system.
- ◆ Facilitating freight movement by improving access to JFK and exploring high occupancy truck toll lanes, perhaps in highway medians or service roads.
- ◆ Waiving NYC sales tax on clean vehicles, and doubling the taxi fleet's fuel efficiency.
- ◆ Constructing a hydrogen fueling station and launching a small hydrogen vehicle fleet.
- ◆ Introducing bio-diesel to the city's truck fleet.
- ◆ Reducing idling of taxis, trucks, and black cars.
- ◆ Decreasing ferry and school bus emissions.
- ◆ Through these transportation measures and an extensive energy efficiency program, achieving the cleanest air quality of any big city in the U.S. and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30%.

Congestion Pricing: Details of the Plan

There was no shortage of coverage on congestion pricing, but many news stories described the issue very generally, without details of the actual proposal. This perhaps led to some mistaken impressions, not to mention more than a few jerking knees.

Zone boundaries: Manhattan below 86th St. except West Street, the FDR, Battery Park underpass, and the East River bridges and their approaches.

Hours of pricing: 6am-6pm, Monday-Friday.

Daily Charge: \$8 for cars entering the zone, \$4 to for cars driving within the zone. \$21 for trucks entering the zone, \$5.50 for travel within the zone.

E-ZPass rebate: drivers paying EZPass tolls at other facilities will only pay the difference between the toll and the \$8 pricing charge. For example, if a car is charged \$4 at the Triboro Bridge, it will only pay an additional \$4 to enter the congestion zone.

Exempt from Charges: emergency vehicles, taxis, livery cabs, cars with handicapped license plates. ❖

Congestion Pricing—Media Watch

A review of media coverage in the run-up and immediate aftermath of congestion charging's start in London found that "the issue became something of a **near-hysterical obsession** with the London-wide and national media." The *Driven to Distraction* report, by a professor of media studies, recounts a climate in which the "majority of the media fell upon each and every prediction of chaos, gridlock and 'the end of civilization as we know it' with relish. There was hardly a suggestion that congestion charging was a rational response to London's ever-worsening traffic congestion."

Happily, this has generally not been the case with city and regional press reaction to Mayor Bloomberg's proposal for a three year trial of congestion pricing in the Manhattan central business district. **Editorial boards** have largely said the step is overdue and have indeed gone after some of the proposal's knee-jerk critics. *Newsday's* sub-headline declared: "Bloomberg's vision deserves regional support, not reactionary carping." The *NY Times*, weighing in for the second time in a week, said "Opponents of the plan are flat wrong in calling the fee a tax on the working class."

News coverage has been more or less balanced, with both opponents and supporters cited in many stories. But reporters in many cases have **failed to question** opponents' claims of huge costs imposed on "the average commuter," versus the heavily-researched and fact-based case laid out by City Hall and groups like Transportation Alternatives. It's not "balanced" if one group is freely permitted to conduct a disinformation campaign. Queens *Ledger* articles, for instance, maintain a drumbeat of "aggrieved borough" coverage without even looking at how and in what numbers Queens commuters reach Manhattan. And we're still waiting for a news reporter to ask **Congressman Weiner** to actually back up his "regressive tax" refrain with some data.

Some reporters do not seem to inform interviewees of key features of the city's proposal, such as the fact that E-ZPass bridge and tunnel tolls would be netted out of the \$8 charge, or that it would only be levied once per day per vehicle. Initial **Bergen Record** editorial and news coverage was in this vein, additionally failing to note that if the Port Authority raises tolls during the next year, as it has publicly indicated, some New Jersey tolls may be \$8 before Bloomberg's plan takes effect. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

TSTC Trustee is New City Transportation Chief

Mayor Bloomberg announced last week that Janette Sadik-Khan will take charge of the NYC Dept. of Transportation starting May 14. She is currently senior vice president for transit industry projects at Parsons-Brinckerhoff and was previously Deputy Administrator at the Federal Transit Administration and a transportation policy advisor to Mayor David Dinkins. She served on the Tri-State Campaign's board of directors for the past two years, but has stepped down owing to her new appointment.

In her remarks at the mayor's announcement ceremony Commissioner Sadik-Khan pointed to a strengthened sense of shared purpose on transportation issues among environmentalists, transportation reformers, city business and labor communities and city government, and said she hoped to reflect this sentiment in work to implement the mayor's 2030 plan. She said a strength of the plan is its embrace of critical transportation improvements including safety, congestion relief, expansion of "green" transportation and repair of roads and streets. ❖

NYPD: Missing Link to Better City Transportation?

Mayor Bloomberg's plan to improve city transportation relies in the near-term on adding and improving bus service, and in **getting buses through traffic** more quickly.

For instance, it calls for five bus rapid transit routes to be completed within two years (and five more BRT routes by 2014), better intermodal connections, bus priority traffic signals, bus/HOV lanes on East River bridges to speed new express bus services and better bus and rail station access. It also offers a significantly **expanded bicycling network**, which could take up some of the slack of many short trips, if NYers can be made to feel safe two-wheeling on city streets.

But the city's record with special lanes is weak. Painted lines on streets are ignored by drivers and not enforced (indeed, are often parked in) by the police, leading to a general cynicism by all street users about the worth of such designations.

A *NY Times* story last week on the city's new experiment with bus bulbs on Broadway (bus stops that jut into the parking lane so that buses need not pull in and out of traffic) cited bus drivers who said **bus lanes in the city don't work**. "It doesn't work on Madison. It doesn't work on Fifth Avenue because **people park in the lane**. Or cabs drop off in the lane." The article also noted significant amounts of parking in bus stops along Broadway.

Although police cited enforcement statistics, the *Times'* reporter pointed out that they in fact posed

no deterrent because they totaled only **24 tickets per day** so far in 2007 for the **three separate violations** of driving in bus lanes, parking in bus lanes and parking in bus stops. [When the Tri-State Campaign inquired last year about tickets issued for driving cars in the new Staten Island Expressway bus lane, the NYPD replied that such tickets were “not recorded as a separate category.”]

Mayor Bloomberg’s plan does in fact acknowledge that traffic **law enforcement** should be stepped up. It says 100 more traffic enforcement agents will be added this year (currently there are 500), and that they will be charged with issuing block-the-box violations. The city also wants to further expand the number of red light cameras.

We urge that the new agents also be empowered to **enforce special lanes** for buses and bicycling. Even more important, however, are new designs for priority lanes that are more self-enforcing. Bus bulbs are a good start. They can still be blocked, but not with as much impunity as a standard curbside bus stop, and when they aren’t blocked they improve both streetscape and bus travel.

More imaginative and ambitious street designs for bus rapid transit routes than the city has developed so far (they rely only on painted lines), and ways to develop cycling facilities that resemble the West Side Highway bike path (and **bikeways in bike-friendly cities around the world**) more closely than they do the appalling painted-line 8th Avenue bike lane would represent great strides forward for sustainable NYC transportation. ❖

Westchester’s Bus Riders Meet MetroCard

Westchester County’s Bee-Line bus riders are now able to transfer to New York City subways and buses for free, thanks to implementation of MetroCard earlier this month. Just two weeks after the NYC Transit-based fare medium was introduced, **more than half of riders** were using the fare cards, according to the *Journal News*.

After Long Island Bus introduced MetroCard with free subway transfers in the late 1990s, ridership on that system soared. Long Island Bus ridership has never stopped growing. Transit advocates expect that the ridership may do the same at Bee-Line, which could bode well for more attention and funding for the system.

One rider noted on a *Journal News* forum, “for one extra buck over what I previously paid for a monthly pass on Bee-Line in Westchester, I now get 30-days of unlimited riding on Bee-Line PLUS unlimited riding on NY City buses and subways. For that I want to **thank the powers-that-be** from the bottom of my heart!” ❖

Legal Morass Around Pedestrian Safety

A survey by the Voorhees Transportation Institute at Rutgers finds that inconsistent enforcement of pedestrian safety laws has roots in “**failure to yield**” laws that police officers find confusing and also difficult to prosecute unless an officer directly witnesses a collision or violation. For these reasons, there were only 2,200 failure to yield tickets written in all of New Jersey in 2006.

The analysis offers some solutions to encourage better reporting and stronger prosecuting of pedestrian safety laws. For instance, municipalities should add a space on all traffic tickets for officers to note if the incident imperiled or injured a pedestrian. Any fees collected from these incidents could go back into a local pedestrian safety program. It also notes that the state has three different databases to keep track of reported crashes, and each has a different standard for recording pedestrian-related data — the disparities make tracking incidents from collision to courtroom difficult.

Surveyed police officers offered some of their own suggestions. They asked for more support from municipal leaders in the form of better training on enforcement of pedestrian laws and for a policy of refusing to plead down or excuse driver misconduct.

Former Campaign Executive Director **Janine Bauer** presented the work, which she undertook under contract with Voorhees, at a pedestrian safety issues session at the TransAction conference last month. Email vtc@policy.rutgers.edu for more information. ❖

New Jersey’s Optional Speed Limit

The Campaign wishes Governor Corzine well as he recovers from the injuries he suffered in a horrific Garden State Parkway crash. But we wonder how New Jersey will ever make progress in reducing its **nearly 800 annual road-related deaths** if the state’s leadership continues to behave as if traffic laws are optional. We first expressed this sentiment in January 2006 (see *MTR* #s 519 and 537) after Governor Corzine appointed notorious traffic scoff-law Zulima Farber to the Attorney General post, who proceeded to joke about her driving habits at her confirmation hearing.

Governor Corzine has been roundly criticized for failing to wear his seatbelt (apparently a regular practice for him). He seems to have gotten the message that disregarding the state’s seatbelt law set a very bad example. In a news conference after his release from Cooper University Hospital, Governor Corzine acknowledged his negligence, and has since asked for, and paid, a \$46 summons for failing to wear his seatbelt.

But the Governor hasn’t said anything about his

motorcade's dangerous speed (91 mph in a 65 mph zone) that precipitated the crash. And the Governor's drivers apparently **still haven't gotten the message** that they must **obey the speed limit**. His motorcade was clocked by motorists driving alongside going 70 mph in a 55 mph zone while taking the Governor home from the hospital. A police spokesman said the drivers had been instructed to obey speed limits, though it seems that speeding is normal for many elected officials. The *NY Times* quoted Pete McDonough, press secretary for former governor Christine Whitman, explaining that speeding "was just part of the culture."

Such a statement is not at all surprising—what's less well-known is that 60 percent of New Jersey's **traffic deaths** were caused, at least in part, by **speeding or reckless driving**, according to a Tri-State Campaign analysis of 2005 federal fatality data. The governor obviously needs to lead by example. We hope that when he returns to an active work life, he will take up the cause of traffic safety and work harder to reduce the carnage on New Jersey's roads. An easy first step would be to require official vehicles to obey the speed limit. ❖

Occam's Razor and Toll Roads?

Bemoaning the poor long-term outlook for the state's **Transportation Trust Fund**, New Jersey transportation commissioner Kris Kolluri cited the Occam's Razor principle, stating the "simplest solution is usually the right one," at a forum at TransAction last month. He said the easiest way to fix a funding problem is to raise more money. Obvious enough, but Kolluri seemed to be building support for the complicated concept of leasing state assets like the NJ Turnpike. Would increasing the low state tax on gasoline be more straightforward?

Assembly Transportation Committee Chair **John Wisniewski** argued that "it doesn't sound either simple or correct to give our toll road proceeds to a foreign owned company." In a partisan role reversal, Assembly Minority Leader Alex DeCroce supported the Commissioner's call to cease criticism of the road privatization concept until the state's detailed proposal for it is announced.

New Jersey's Transportation Trust Fund will be insolvent in four years. ❖

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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CALENDAR

May 4, 8am-2:30pm. Regional Plan Association's 17th Regional Assembly: "A Bright, Green Future: Climate Change, Energy and Growth in the Tri-State Metropolitan Region." The Waldorf Astoria, 301 Park Avenue, Manhattan. www.rpa.org

May 8, 6:30-8pm. Public forum: Plans for the Hudson Rail Yards. Sponsored by the Hudson Yards Development Corporation and Manhattan Community Board 4. Hartley House, 413 West 46th Street, Manhattan. 212-736-4536.

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

May 10, 12:15-2pm. Long Island Rail Road Com-muter's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhat-tan. 212-878-7087.

May 17, 4:30-6:30pm. Metro-North Railroad Com-muter Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhat-tan. 212-878-7087.

May 18, 8-10am. Annual Transportation Awards Breakfast. Transportation Person of the Year: An-thony Coscia, Port Authority of NY & NJ. The New-ark Club, One Newark Center, 22nd Floor, Newark. Reservations required. For more information call 973-242-4203.

May 21, 6pm. Stamford Traffic Calming Master Plan planning charrette. KT Murphy School auditor-ium, 19 Horton Street, Stamford. 203-977-4237.

May 22, 6pm. Stamford Traffic Calming Master Plan charrette. Julia Stark School auditorium, 398 Glenbrook Road, Stamford. 203-977-4237.

May 23, Noon-2pm. New York City Transit Rider's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

June 6, 8am-12:30pm. "Delivering the Goods: The Freight Needs of a Growing Population" with Astrid Glynn, NYSDOT Commissioner. NYU Wagner Rudin Center. 60 Washington Square S, Manhat-tan. \$50, deadline May 30. www.wagner.nyu.edu/rudincenter.

June 13, 9am. NJ Transit public meeting. NJ Tran-sit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Floor, Newark. Information: njtboard@njtransit.com.

More calendar items at www.tstc.org