

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### NJ Transportation Funding: Here Be Monsters

Early nautical maps warned explorers away from uncharted areas with fanciful drawings of leviathans, sometimes shown devouring wayward ships. The yawning white space beyond 2011 in New Jersey's transportation capital program is a similarly unknown abyss that could also plausibly feature such sea monsters.

Because of the short term fix to transportation financing crafted by Governor Corzine and the legislature in Spring, 2006, which relied on extending and expanding debt to cover the needs of the next five years, the state has **no money for transportation projects beginning in fiscal 2012**, and solutions for the problem have not yet been clearly defined by state leadership.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported this week that Governor Corzine will release his plan to raise money from public assets like the NJ Turnpike and Garden State Parkway in two weeks, and that the plan will not include outright privatization, but the creation of a new "**public benefit corporation**" that would be able to regularly increase road tolls and recruit private investors. In the past five decades, tolls have increased only four times on the Turnpike, and once on the Parkway. Higher tolls could help raise revenue to reduce transportation debt, though Corzine has indicated that the revenue would help pay off debt across a wide array of departments. (NJ has the fourth highest state debt in the nation, after Massachusetts, Hawaii, and Connecticut). It's completely unknown how much such an arrangement could raise in the near and short terms, and how transportation would fare if up-front revenues are distributed across a range of government functions. It's possible that **reducing transportation debt** could free up some portion of gas tax revenues now consumed by service for past bonds. But it's unknown how the public benefit corporation would realize large up-front revenues—will it be yet another form of borrowing?

Let's not forget that NJ's gas tax is still the third lowest in the nation, despite the state's precarious transportation finance situation. ❖

### The Campaign for New York's Future

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign has joined forces with over 80 regional civic, business, environmental, labor, community and public health organizations to form **The Campaign for New York's Future**. The coalition is working on several fronts in support of the goals and strategic direction of New York City Mayor Bloomberg's sustainability proposal, PlaNYC 2030. The Campaign has unveiled its new website, at **campaignfornewyork.org**. It is home to a wealth of resources about PlaNYC's 127 initiatives, including summaries of benefits by topic and geography, as well as information for organizations and individuals that would like to join the fast-growing coalition. ❖

### NYC Commuting: Sticking to the Facts

In his speech at the Regional Plan Association conference this month, Mayor Bloomberg used the late New York Senator Daniel P. Moynihan's admonition that "while you are entitled to your own opinion, you are not entitled to your own facts."

The facts are not on the side of the "regressive tax" crowd in the debate over the mayor's congestion pricing proposal, so they have resorted to disinformation and shouting-down tactics.

The creation of a major new revenue stream for mass transit and infrastructure repair would improve conditions for a large majority of NYC commuters, while offering congestion relief and better streets for the relatively few drivers that need to regularly drive into the Manhattan central business district.

An example of the facts that the **Coalition to Keep NYC Congested** doesn't discuss:

**Commuting data** (2000 Census) from **NY's 9th Congressional District**, which covers parts of southern and central Queens and southeastern Brooklyn:

- ◆ 269,500 from the district employed.
- ◆ 98,560 commuted to the CBD (36.5% of workers from the district).
- ◆ Of those, 19,589 drove to the CBD. Thus, 19.8% of those commuting to the Manhattan CBD from the 9<sup>th</sup> district are driving.
- ◆ Of these, 4,123 commuters traveled in 2-person

carpools and 1,749 commuters traveled in 3-person carpools. Together, the carpoolers comprise 30% of the drivers. Thus, 13,717 commuters (13.9% of CBD commuters and 5% of all employed) from the 9<sup>th</sup> district are drive-alone CBD car commuters who would pay a full \$8 per person under the Bloomberg pricing plan.

◆ 2-person carpools splitting the cost would pay \$4 each, the cost of a flat-fare subway round-trip. Larger carpools would pay less per person.

Since mass transit ridership has risen significantly in this decade, and real gasoline prices have also increased in recent years, the 2000 percentages may be conservative (the driving/transit split may have shifted further in favor of transit). ❖

### Weiner Truck Plan - Nice Try

Congressman Anthony Weiner (D-9<sup>th</sup>) last week offered a counter proposal to Mayor Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan. The Congressman's 6-point plan, which shares several elements with Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC, is an **expanded version** of a program he released over the winter. He cast it as an alternative to PlaNYC's comprehensive congestion pricing proposal. It targets truck traffic with higher peak hour truck tolls, more enforcement for city truck rules, new truck-only toll lanes on city bridges, and building the cross-harbor rail freight tunnel. In his announcement, Congressman Weiner said "the problem of congestion in New York City is much more a truck problem than a car problem."

We have argued for years that trucks — the fastest growing segment of metropolitan vehicular traffic — and their impacts need to be addressed. The Congressman in fact used statistics from a Tri-State Campaign analysis of federal data showing a projected 83 percent citywide increase in truck traffic (see *MTR #548*) in his press release, and we agree with him about doing more with **rail freight** — a missing piece of PlaNYC. But it is a big stretch to call trucks the city's main cause of congestion. NYC DOT data from 2005 show that trucks comprise less than **7 percent of total traffic** entering Manhattan on bridges and tunnels. Even under an assumption that counts each truck as two cars (and most trucks are not big semi-trailers), trucks still make up an estimated 13 percent of the spatial aspect of Manhattan's traffic.

The mayor's pricing plan clearly would do far more — it would promote off-peak deliveries by adding truck tolls to currently free trips, while unclogging streets for more time-sensitive shippers. The **revenue** from a purely truck toll program would be a **small fraction** of what the region would collect from congestion pricing, leaving the problem of infrastructure funding unresolved. ❖

### Charrette Spotlights Key Dimension of Tappan Zee Puzzle

Residents and local officials from a handful of Rockland County towns and villages began to get their hands on the implications of a possible new mass transit line in the I-287-Tappan Zee Bridge corridor last week at a planning charrette convened by the Rockland Economic Development Corporation and the Regional Plan Association.

The day-long session engaged participants in the challenge of creating attractive, walkable transit station areas in an area that features extensive auto-oriented strip and mall development. Five teams looked at likely station areas in Suffern, Airmont/Montebello, Nanuet and at West Nyack's Palisades Center Mall.

The official transit study, now headed up by the NY State Dept. of Transportation but closely involving Metro-North Railroad and the Thruway Authority, has so far identified commuter rail or bus rapid transit as likely mass transit options for the corridor. But a **big missing piece** of the initiative so far has been any sort of look at the **land use implications of adding mass transit**. Significant benefits of a major transit investment could be lost if the stations are left as giant, sterile park-and-ride lots, and siting the latter could indeed generate significant local opposition.

Last week's charrette was a big step in a positive direction that we hope the state will build upon. Participants outlined a range of in-fill development, transportation connections, greenway corridors, traffic calming and parking opportunities to support mass transit in the course of re-thinking possible station sites and their surroundings. We expect that RPA will outline the recommendations from each team in a post-session report. ❖

### Tappan Zee Bus Rapid Transit Symposium

Another thing the official Tappan Zee study has not done enough of is to explain new concepts like bus rapid transit.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign will hold a half-day symposium on bus rapid transit and its potential in the I-287 corridor on Friday, June 8. The event will feature a distinguished set of presenters:

- ◆ John Bonsall, former General Manager of the Ottawa, Ontario transit system.
- ◆ Robert Cervero of U.C. Berkeley
- ◆ Alan Hoffman of the Mission Group, San Diego

It will also feature a panel of local officials and stakeholders to respond to the presentations by these experts.

Unfortunately, the small **must-have-rail crowd** in Westchester County is taking shots at us just for

convening such a discussion. Clearly the concept of a “marketplace of ideas” is not something they are very comfortable with.

Maureen Morgan, a board member of the **Federated Conservativists of Westchester County** who is also affiliated with Westchester’s Business Council told the *Westchester Business Journal* last week that “it is astonishingly arrogant” for the Tri-State Campaign to hold a conference with a focus on only one of the transit options under consideration in the official study. Ms. Morgan’s definition of arrogance seems to apply to any viewpoint not in complete agreement with her own — she and the Business Council of Westchester long ago decided that cross-county rail was the only answer for the corridor, facts, analysis and the real world be damned.

For a number of years, Ms. Morgan has resorted to public attacks on regional organizations such as the Tri-State Campaign and the Regional Plan Association whenever they do not toe her religious line on building rail across Westchester. A standard Morgan sound bite — unrooted, as usual, in any evidence — is that “Manhattan-based” groups are out to sabotage funding for transit in the Hudson Valley so that all possible resources can be diverted to the Second Avenue subway.

In the same *Business Journal* piece in which they condemn the Tri-State Campaign for holding an event looking in detail at one transit option, Morgan is cited stating that “commuter rail is the only solution for the region in easing congestion on the corridor.” Similarly, the **Business Council’s** Marsha Gordon says “[BRT] clearly does not meet the goals of relieving congestion of [the] corridor.” We ask our readers to decide for themselves who has closed their minds about a T-Z transit option, and to consider what adjective would be the best retort to the charge of “arrogance.”

While the Tri-State Campaign’s interest in bus rapid transit first stemmed from concern that the study would be predisposed toward commuter rail because of Metro-North’s involvement, analysis by the study team to date suggests that bus rapid transit will attract far more east-west riders than other options, for a much reduced cost (see *MTR #524*).

Nonetheless, we are willing to be shown that cross-corridor rail can work. We challenge the Business Council to find three acknowledged mass transit experts willing to come to Westchester and state that a rail option “is the only solution.” ❖

## Connecticut DOT Reform on the Way?

Governor Rell has called for a complete reorganization of the Connecticut Department of Transportation. In an April 30th press release, Rell urged “a more responsive, more responsible DOT and a DOT that will continue to **broaden its focus beyond highways.**” Her announcement was in response to the debacle surrounding the recent I-84 expansion in the Waterbury-Cheshire area, a project which suffered from corruption, poor management, delays and shoddy execution, though the themes cited by the governor also speak directly to the state’s ongoing debate over new transportation priorities.

The Campaign agrees that ConnDOT needs to be overhauled, and that state leaders should energetically embrace the opportunity to foster planning approaches that **connects land use and transportation** and thus addresses the cause of traffic congestion at its root. The current “business-as-usual” model emphasizing new road expansion has failed to reign in the state’s soaring driving growth, even as the roadway and bridge conditions lag national averages. Smart growth oriented planning, a dedication to repairing existing roads and increased investment in bicycle and pedestrian projects would be strong steps away from the endless cycle of traffic congestion that includes sprawling land uses and huge public investment in wider roads.

### CT’s Gas Tax on Summer Break?

As legislators debate a third phase of Connecticut’s ambitious multi-billion dollar transportation initiative (the “Roadmap to Connecticut’s Economic Future” which has so far taken revenue measures to raise up to \$3.6 billion for new transit and other investments during the next decade), Republican legislators are calling for a summer suspension of the state gasoline tax (currently, 25 cents per gallon) in response to soaring gasoline prices. Governor Rell has also called for capping the petroleum gross receipts tax, another source of transportation revenue.

The governor says capping the gross receipts tax would not delay ambitious transportation investments. But they would almost certainly be held back by the loss of \$120 million in revenue from the proposed Republican gas tax holiday.

**House Speaker James Amann** strongly opposes eliminating the gas tax for the summer and says he is willing to hold up approval of the state budget if the Republicans don’t forego the idea. Amann has been working this session for an additional transportation funding measure, strongly supported by transit and environmental advocates, that includes a host of important transit measures, like increased bus service funding, a transit-oriented development program, and more service on Eastern Connecticut’s Shore Line East (*MTR #553*). ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

## NJDOT Walks the Walk on Route 27

After a high-profile accident involving the deaths of two small children (see *MTR* #531), the Route 27 corridor in Elizabeth gained New Jersey-wide attention as one of the most dangerous places to walk. The deadly crash was in fact only the tip of the iceberg, as a **four-mile section** of Rt. 27 stretching through the neighboring municipalities of Linden and Roselle had over **68 collisions** in the three preceding years, 60 of them involving pedestrians.

Accompanied by law-enforcement officials, Tri-State Transportation Campaign staff, and engineers from all three municipalities, NJDOT officials walked the corridor last month to see first-hand how the road could be improved. The walk showed that many intersections lacked proper pedestrian infrastructure: more often than not poles erected for pedestrian signals were missing walk lights; in some areas on-street parking obstructed views; but most egregious were the **speed and attitudes of drivers** who viewed the road as a highway and ignored speed limits and other traffic laws.

At one point, members of the walk, clad in bright orange vests and standing next to a flashing "Yield to Pedestrian" sign, were **unable to cross Route 27** until a police officer stood in the road and physically directed traffic.

While the team came up with dozens of suggestions, ranging from removing parking in certain areas to providing the police with laser guns to better detect driver speeds, a final report and list of recommendations won't be ready until later this summer. In the meantime, it's heartening to see NJDOT working proactively with communities and local officials to address a problem, and recognizing that state roads serve users other than motorists. ❖

## TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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## CALENDAR

**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, Manhattan. \$50, deadline May 30. [www.wagner.nyu.edu/rudincenter](http://www.wagner.nyu.edu/rudincenter).

**June 6**, 6pm. MTA public hearing on eight station access changes in Manhattan and Brooklyn. MTA headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. to pre-register to speak at the hearing, call 212-878-7483, [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info).

**June 7**, 5:30-8pm. New Jersey Future Smart Growth Awards 2007. The Newark Club, One Newark Center, 22nd Floor, Newark. [www.njfuture.org](http://www.njfuture.org).

**June 13**, 9am. NJ Transit board meeting. NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza East, 9th Floor, Newark. [njtboard@njtransit.com](mailto:njtboard@njtransit.com).

**June 15**: Kosciuszko Bridge Project DEIS comment period deadline. Written statements to Norrik Tatevossian, NY State DOT, Hunters Point Plaza, 47-40 21st Street, Queens, NY 11101. Fax to: 718-482-6319; email to [kosciuszko@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:kosciuszko@dot.state.ny.us)

**June 21**, Noon-2pm. NYC Transit Rider's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**July 12**, 12:15-2pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**July 19**, 4:30-6:30pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**July 26**, Noon-2pm. New York City Transit Rider's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**August 9**, 12:15-2pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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