

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Shock of the Week: Jon Orcutt Appointed Senior Policy Advisory at NYC DOT

After 13 years with the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Jon Orcutt joined the staff of the New York City Dept. of Transportation on Monday to serve as senior policy advisor to new city transportation commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan.

The Tri-State Campaign's board of directors has appointed Kate Slevin as acting executive director.

Jon's new position is a testament to how far **transportation reform themes have advanced** in New York City and the metropolitan region. Mayor Michael Bloomberg's PlaNYC sustainability program for 2030 embraces congestion pricing for Manhattan south of 86th Street and a host of improvements to mass transit and the city's bicycling and walking environments. Congestion pricing to manage demand for metropolitan roadway travel was a founding principle of the Tri-State Campaign.

Jon has extensive experience as a transportation reform advocate in the New York region. He was executive director of Transportation Alternatives from 1989 to 1994, the Tri-State Campaign's associate director from 1994 to 2003 and executive director until June 8th, 2007. Last fall he served on the transportation advisory committee to Gov. Spitzer's transition team.

"I've always had the highest regard for Commissioner Sadik-Khan's abilities, vision and drive and am excited to contribute to the transportation aspects of PlaNYC under her leadership," said Jon. "Meanwhile, I'm confident the Campaign will not miss a beat in Kate's capable hands."

Jon thanked the Campaign's present and past staff members for their tenacity and invaluable contributions to the organization's success, and the organization's directors and funders for the incredible education and innumerable opportunities that working at the Campaign provided him.

Jon was a tremendous mentor for many of us here at Tri-State. We will miss you, Jon, but wish you the best of luck in your new position! ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Dud of the Week: NYS Assembly

NYS Assemblymembers keen on thwarting Mayor Bloomberg's congestion pricing and sustainability plan gave news outlets this week their own half-baked alternatives, none of which would provide the environmental, congestion beating, and revenue generating benefits of Bloomberg's proposal. They offered one obstructionist reason after another why the plan wouldn't work.

Assemblyman Richard Brodsky touted **congestion rationing**, a scheme which would restrict driving in certain parts of Manhattan based on a vehicle's license plate. For example, cars with license plates ending with an even number would only be allowed to drive on Tuesdays. **Brodsky has clearly not done his homework:** a World Bank study, entitled *Rationing Can Backfire: The 'Day without a Car' in Mexico City*, of a similar scheme in Mexico City found that it actually increased gasoline consumption and driving, and reduced transit use, because many people bought a second car to beat the system. Rationing schemes have also proved exceedingly difficult to enforce.

Furthermore, telling people they cannot drive on certain days goes against our economic and societal norms. When there is competition for scarce resources, such as apartments, roads, or parking spaces in Manhattan garages, the price of those commodities increase to reduce or spread out demand. The government doesn't place a moratorium on buying apartments in coveted neighborhoods or enact laws to make driving illegal. While rationing takes the choice out of the equation, congestion pricing encourages certain behaviors (e.g. taking transit or driving during off-peak hours), while still offering commuters the choice to drive into the city if necessary.

Equally uninformed is Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who told papers this week that congestion pricing would hurt environmental justice communities like the South Bronx, because commuters would drive to these neighborhoods, park, and take transit into Manhattan. As we pointed out in MTR # 557, this scenario is not based on fact, since no city with congestion pricing has seen such problems.

Assemblymembers should listen to their constitu-

ents: recent polls show that most New Yorkers favor the Mayor's plan, and 130 groups are now part of Campaign for New York's Future, the coalition supporting the plan. See campaignfornewyork.org.

Please **contact your Assemblymembers** and tell them to **support the PlaNYC**: the end of the legislative session is June 21st, so time is running out! ❖

Port Authority Plan Leaves MTA Four Steps Behind on Toll Collection

A new project by the Port Authority could make cash bridge and tunnel toll payments history, further modernizing toll collection and ending toll-related bottlenecks at Hudson River and Staten Island-New Jersey crossings.

The cashless system would use E-ZPass readers and cameras to record the license plates of vehicles without electronic toll tags. Bills would be mailed to the latter.

Cashless toll collection would **eliminate the need for toll plazas** altogether, allowing highway lanes to function unencumbered approaching bridges and tunnels by anything other than overhead technology. The need for vehicles to stop, slow, weave and sort into various lanes would be eliminated.

The PA said that the system could also allow for a more fine-tuned system of congestion pricing, allowing the agency to charge different toll prices based on actual volumes at the crossings rather than simply by time of day, as it does now. Traffic authorities near San Diego use such "dynamic pricing" today in a special toll lane on I-15.

Port Authority director Anthony Shorris predicted cashless tolls could be in place within five years.

Unlike the MTA, the Port Authority has already moved ahead with various applications to speed vehicles using E-ZPass through its toll booths (MTR #s 442, 462). The MTA still drops a gate in front of every vehicle that passes through its toll system, even the E-ZPass-equipped majority.

Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro said last week that the MTA ought to get with the program. "These [gate] arms are antiquated, and in today's world of technology, are simply no longer useful. The removal of the arms will allow a more even and measured flow of vehicles across the plaza," he told the Staten Island *Advance*. An *Advance* editorial a few days later called Molinaro's plan an "excellent idea." ❖

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

Tappan Zee Symposium Showcases Bus Rapid Transit

Last week, a Tri-State Campaign symposium on bus rapid transit and the Tappan Zee corridor made the case that **BRT is not simply a cheap substitute for light rail—it has capabilities that rail does not**. In low-density areas like the suburbs of Ottawa, Canada or the I-287 corridor, BRT's flexibility allows it to serve more riders than rail. Buses can pick up riders near their houses, enter the busway to beat congestion, then leave the busway to drop riders off close to where they work—all without requiring a transfer. The result is a ride that is more convenient than rail and reduces the need for large park-and-ride facilities.

The symposium, *Finding Transit That Fits in the Tappan Zee Corridor: The Case for Bus Rapid Transit*, brought international experts to the Westchester County Center to share their knowledge and expertise. Speakers included John Bonsall, the former head of the regional transit system of Ottawa, Canada, and consultant on Brisbane and other internationally BRT projects; Robert Cervero, an international renowned expert and professor of city and regional planning at UC-Berkeley; and Alan Hoffman, the founder of planning firm The Mission Group, an innovative planning firm in San Diego.

The speakers highlighted that **BRT can offer first-rate service and performance for long and short distance trips**. Bonsall noted that despite the city's relatively suburban character, Ottawa's BRT system carries 10,000 passengers per hour per direction during peak hours—more than any light rail system in North America— and has 5,900 kilometers of routes. High-end BRT systems create a truly rail-like experience: passengers pay their fares before boarding, step onto a bus level with the boarding platform, enjoy a congestion-free trip, then exit to an enclosed station that often includes amenities such as convenience stores or retail outlets.

Quality service means that BRT can get people out of their cars. A 2002 survey of BRT riders in Brisbane, Australia, found that **31% had previously made their trip by automobile** (and 17% had switched from rail to BRT!). Hoffman noted that **smart service plans** that use a network of local and express services to quickly connect destinations on and off of the busway are vital to BRT's success.

Bus rapid transit can offer this level of service at a **fraction of the cost of rail**. Bonsall estimated the cost of building grade-separated BRT at about \$15 million/km, compared to about \$50 million/km for light rail. At-grade BRT is similarly cheaper than at-grade light rail. The Tappan Zee study team has estimated that building at-grade full corridor (from Suffern to Port Chester) BRT would cost \$5-6.5

billion, compared to \$11.5-14.5 billion for full corridor commuter rail.

All three presentations cited multiple examples of transit-oriented development centered around BRT stations. Because BRT can connect more activity centers than rail, Hoffman showed, it can create more opportunities for transit-oriented development. Cervero argued that this same quality allows BRT to act as “development-oriented transit”—transit that effectively serves existing land uses without seeking to change them. To maximize the potential of transit, he said, **municipalities must first envision their desired urban form**, and then plan transit to help shape that form. Interestingly, Bonsall noted that from a developer’s perspective, transit is a better bang for the buck than parking spaces.

After the presentations, in a respondents panel, Orangetown Supervisor Thom Kleiner said that BRT seemed like the most appropriate transit option for the corridor. Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee rightly noted the NIMBYism could stall any transit option, including bus, and local officials and the study team will have to work together to overcome such barriers.

Scenic Hudson’s President Ned Sullivan offered a keynote address that invoked broader issues of sprawling land uses that destroy open space, and said the Tappan Zee study was a wonderful opportunity to promote transit-oriented development as a way to bring about a walkable, smart growth oriented future.

The dozens of attendees—who included representatives of the New York State Senate and Assembly, Rockland and Westchester county legislatures, environmental groups, foundations, the Thruway Authority, Metro-North, and the NYS Department of Transportation—reacted enthusiastically to the presentations. The NYS Dept. of Transportation is currently considering four transit options for the future of the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 corridor, the 30 mile stretch from Suffern to Port Chester.

We hope that the symposium, along with Regional Plan Association’s station area design workshop on May 18th, **raised the bar for public education** and discussion from here on out, and that New York State Department of Transportation will work hard to bring a strong land use component to future discussions about transit along the I-287 corridor. ❖

Reminder: Streetsblog First Birthday Party Tonight!

Friday, June 15th, 6:30- 9:00 pm
The Open Planning Project, 349 W. 12th St, 3rd Fl.
Manhattan, between Greenwich & Hudson Streets.
For info, email tips@streetsblog.com.

Welcome Erosion of Regional Rail Barriers

MTA chief Elliot Sander's recent announcement that the MTA and NJ Transit are exploring a pilot program for through trains between Connecticut and New Jersey's Giants Stadium was the latest sign that **transportation policy in the region is finally in thoughtful hands**. Though truly regional train service has been discussed as a possibility for decades, getting big transit bureaucracies and their workers to cooperate with one another, and navigating bi- or tri-state politics have been daunting tasks.

Sander said that by 2009, trains from New Haven destined for NFL games could reach NJ Transit's Secaucus Junction station, and of course NJ Transit is working on a Secaucus-Meadowlands rail link (MTR #s 430, 503). The plan would route Metro-North trains over Amtrak's line through The Bronx and Queens to Penn Station and then through the Hudson tunnels to Secaucus, representing an unprecedented blending of regional transit assets to deliver new service and access. Sander also mentioned the possibility of running through trains from Riverdale in the Bronx to Long Island's East End. Metro-North or LIRR trains would use Amtrak's West Side line to reach Penn Station and then continue east along LIRR tracks.

Metro-North "west side access" is a long term MTA planning goal that relies on opening up capacity in Penn Station via the LIRR-Grand Central access project (MTR #516). Metro-North's Hudson and New Haven lines already connect to the Amtrak Hudson River and Northeast Corridor tracks that serve Penn Station. West Side Access is viewed as a key transit development in New York City's new sustainability plan.

Governor Rell Calls for Regional Rail

On a similar note, on Wednesday, Governor Jodi Rell called on Connecticut’s Department of Transportation to study “every available option and potential obstacle” for rail service for Connecticut residents into Penn Station.

“Service to Penn Station will be a huge boost with new trains, ample seats, and new service to Manhattan,” Governor Rell said in a press release. Connecticut is in the process of purchasing 300 new rail cars, as part of a state-wide push for greater rail capacity and better service.

She also asked ConnDOT to study whether or not it was feasible for the state to purchase double-decker rail cars for Penn Station access. New Jersey first purchased the double-decker rail cars last year and has additional funding lined up for future purchases. Rell wants ConnDOT to look into the possibility of the two states cooperating on the acquisition of the double-decker cars.

Governor Rell has set an August 1st deadline for the study. ❖

Stop Stalling NYC Solid Waste Management Plan

The NYC Solid Waste Management Plan (MTRs # 536, 480) faces one more hurdle before implementation: at a recent press conference, Mayor Bloomberg, Council Speaker Christine Quinn, several City Council members, and environmental groups called on the State legislature to pass a bill amending the Hudson River Park Act, which would permit the City to build a marine transfer station (MTS) at Pier 52 on the Gansevoort Peninsula in Manhattan.

The new Solid Waste Management Plan requires each borough to handle its own garbage and recycling via transfer stations in each borough. The result would create real relief for the South Bronx and Williamsburg, which currently handle around 80% of all of the city's waste. The plan will also reduce truck trips overall, thereby improving air quality and safety on city streets. However, a pocket of resistance by Manhattan residents who don't want the Gansevoort marine transfer station in their meat-packing district neighborhood remains. Without the Gansevoort transfer station, Manhattan's recyclables would have to be trucked to other boroughs – both defeating the trash-truck equity goals of the plan, as well as affecting the efficiency of the other waste stations.

The Bloomberg administration, city elected officials, and environmental activists asked the **State legislature to pass the bill (A9005/S5988)** during this legislative session. ❖

Gary Toth Leaves NJDOT

The New Jersey Department of Transportation announced the departure of Gary Toth, Director of the Division of Project Planning and Development, and hero to the transportation reform community.

Under Toth's leadership, the Project and Planning division founded NJFIT, NJDOT's Future in Transportation Program, which married land-use and transportation planning and brought all stakeholders to collaborate, at the early stages of a project's planning process. The NJFIT program has become a national model for state agencies looking to promote progressive transportation policies. We hope NJDOT replaces him with someone equally skilled in collaborative, smart growth oriented planning.

Gary's skills will be missed at NJDOT, but will be well tapped at his new post at Project for Public Spaces, a non-profit "placemaking" consulting firm based in New York. ❖

CALENDAR

June 19, 7:30-9:30am, Visit a letter writing stations to support PlaNYC, sponsored by Campaign for New York's Future. Gorilla Coffee, 97 Fifth Av. (at Park Pl.), Brooklyn or Think Coffee, 248 Mercer St. (at W. 3rd St.), Manhattan. For more see streetsblog.org or call Transportation Alternatives at 212-629-8080.

June 19, 5:30-7:30pm, Visit a letter writing stations to support PlaNYC, sponsored by Campaign for New York's Future. Visit Second Av. F / V Subway Station in Manhattan; Bedford Av. L Subway Station in Brooklyn; or Park Slope Food Co-op, 782 Union St. in Brooklyn. For more see streetsblog.org or call Transportation Alternatives at 212-629-8080.

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

June 26, 5:30-8pm. Westchester County DOT Open House for Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Assessment Study. Presentation at 6:30pm. Westchester County Center, 198 Central Avenue, White Plains. 914-813-7761.

June 26, 5:30-8pm. Westchester County DOT Open House for its Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Assessment Study. There will be a formal project presentation at 6:30pm. Westchester County Center, 198 Central Avenue, White Plains. 914-813-7761.

June 27, 4:30pm. MTA public hearing to solicit comment on federal funding proposals. To view or download the MTA's description of projects PDF form (154 pages), [click here](#). MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. To view the public hearing notice in PDF form, [click here](#). 212-878-7483.

July 10, 8am. Connecticut Transportation Strategy Board meeting. Location TBA.

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

More calendar items at www.tstc.org