

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NYC Congestion Pricing Moves Forward

Yesterday, the USDOT announced that NYC would receive \$354.5 million from its Urban Partnership Agreement to reduce traffic congestion. Although the announcement does not guarantee that pricing will ultimately be approved, it represents a **major step forward** for the program and a win for transit and environmental advocates.

The money will be awarded jointly to NYC and NYS Departments of Transportation and the MTA. The breakdown for the funds is as follows:

- ◆ \$213.6M for improvements to bus depots, improved pedestrian walkways, upgrading park-ride locations, technology to improve traffic flow at intersections;
- ◆ \$112.7M to begin Bus Rapid Transit throughout the City;
- ◆ \$15.8M for regional ferry service;
- ◆ \$10.4M for technology needed to implement congestion pricing, such as cameras;
- ◆ \$2M for research allocated to the state DOT to support the West of Hudson Regional Transportation Alternatives Analysis/DEIS.

The announcement included some interesting conditions. First, to receive the funds, the State and City will have to approve a traffic reduction program within 90 days of the start of the legislative session. Second, the USDOT won't award the money unless pricing is the primary mechanism used to reduce congestion. Third, the program must reduce vehicle miles traveled in the congested zone by at least 6.3%. Fourth, the congestion pricing plan must be up and running by March 31, 2009.

Pressure will be on the State Legislature and the City Council to pass a congestion program by the March deadline.

Stay tuned for the appointment of the 17 members of the Traffic Mitigation Commission, the body ultimately responsible for recommending a congestion-busting strategy. ❖

MN Bridge Collapse Drives Debate in CT and NJ

Spurred by the recent Minneapolis bridge collapse, state governments across the nation are scrambling to ensure their bridge and road infrastructure is safe. In Connecticut, that discussion has included a strong cry for adoption of a fix-it first policy, though road expansion projects have continued to move forward.

In response to the collapse, Governor Rell recently announced a plan to issue \$100 million in bonds to help repair and replace the state's aging bridges. But this sum is spare change compared to the projected cost of two highway expansion projects on the books—the 8.5-mile extension of **Route 11** from Salem to the I-95/I-395 junction, and the widening of the Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge (a.k.a the “Q” – for Quinnipiac – Bridge). The Route 11 extension is projected to cost between \$850 and \$925 million and despite protests, moved forward in July to the final environmental review phase. Meanwhile, ConnDOT recently raised its estimate of the Q Bridge/I-95/I-91/US 34 reconstruction project by a **half-billion dollars**, bringing the cost of the project to **\$1.4 billion**.

Rell has cited environmentally friendly aspects of the Route 11 plan, such as the preservation of open space alongside the highway in a “greenway” that includes hiking and bicycle paths. Admittedly, the design of Route 11 is better than that of the typical highway. But this only makes Route 11 the hybrid SUV of highways—an **inherently unsustainable** entity wrapped in environmentally friendly garb.

As Campaign board member Toni Gold pointed out in a *Hartford Courant* op-ed, the money spent on these two projects could go a long way towards fixing the state's infrastructure.

Ironically, the second meeting of the ConnDOT Reform panel was held just days after the Route 11 final environmental review was announced. The Commission, set up by the Governor, is charged with reforming the State Department of Transportation's policies and business practices, and “moving its focus beyond highways.” In response to calls from Tri-State and others, the agency recently set up a website with a public comment section (at www.ct.gov/dot; see also MTR # 561) and has in-

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

cluded a public hearing element in its meetings (see calendar for details). At the most recent meeting of the Commission, TSTC staff and others called on the Commission to adopt an approach similar to New Jersey's NJFIT program, which **connects local master planning efforts** with state transportation investment. We hope this Commission will provide a forum for the public to call for a strategy that moves away from irresponsible highway expansion and towards smart-growth-oriented policies.

In NJ, the Minneapolis bridge collapse has reinvigorated the discussion on how to save the Transportation Trust Fund, which is slated for bankruptcy in 2011 (see MTR # 556).

In recent media articles, some elected officials referenced a vague need to do "something," while others, such as South Jersey Senator Sweeney, have referred to the gas tax hike, versus, say toll and fare increases or asset monetization, as an option only if all else fails.

Despite the fact that NJDOT already spends most of its capital budget on infrastructure repair, a recent inspection of all the state's bridges, called for by Governor Corzine, found many including the Pulaski Skyway connecting Kearny and Jersey City in need of immediate repair. In total, state officials estimate **\$7 billion** is needed to fix NJ bridges. This is no surprise given TSTC's State of Transportation 2006 report in which we found that 36.6% of NJ's bridges were structurally deficient or functionally obsolete in 2004..

Interestingly, a Rutgers-Eagleton poll released today found that 61% of respondents disapprove of leasing the toll roads to a non-profit entity to pay off state debt, an idea that has been discussed as part of Governor Corzine's asset monetization plan. Interestingly, the poll also found New Jerseyans **prefer higher tolls** as a method of paying off state debt, versus a higher gas tax or reduction in government services.

It's likely that a poll question that measured support for increasing tolls or the gas tax to pay for transportation system improvements explicitly would have produced a much different response. People are generally more inclined to support higher fees or taxes if they are linked to tangible and specific improvements, like better transit or well-maintained roads. ❖

SAVE THE PLANET (or at least, stop getting MTR by fax) —**SIGN UP FOR MTR E-MAIL ALERTS!**

As announced in MTR # 561, we are turning MTR into a blog! As a result, we will soon stop faxing MTR. Conserve paper; save trees; switch to MTR e-mail alerts at www.tstc.org.

Something to Look Forward To in NYC

If Transport for London's annual report on congestion pricing is any indication, New Yorkers have a lot to look forward to if congestion pricing is approved by the State Legislature. The report was released last month and details results since pricing's implementation in 2003, including:

- ◆ Traffic levels in central London were about 20% lower in 2006 than in 2002, the year before pricing began.
- ◆ Bicycle use in central London rose 43% in the same time period.
- ◆ Since the implementation of the plan, congestion has been about 30% lower than it would be under a "without congestion pricing" scenario.
- ◆ Traffic on major roads in neighborhoods directly outside of the pricing zone has decreased each year since the implementation of congestion pricing.
- ◆ The central London economy has outperformed London's economy as a whole since the implementation of congestion pricing. While this cannot be attributed to congestion pricing, given the many other factors affecting the economy, there is no evidence to suggest that congestion pricing has hurt business in central London.

The report also contains a useful lesson for New York on the importance of public information. City officials, take note: Transport for London used a 14-month, three-stage multimedia campaign to explain the nuances of congestion pricing—how charges were paid, how exemptions could be applied for, and so on. Today, London still uses advertisements to raise awareness of the plan's benefits.

All of Transport for London's annual reports can be viewed at www.tfl.gov.uk. ❖

Future Prez a Transportation Wonk?

It seems that Senator Hilary Clinton is the first presidential candidate to respond to the national mood of concern regarding transportation infrastructure. Her recently announced "Rebuild America" plan is notable in that it not only addresses failing bridges but seems to lay out the candidate's philosophy on transportation.

Clinton's plan would establish a \$10 billion fund for emergency infrastructure repair and provide grants for states to inspect their infrastructure. More interestingly, the plan would increase the annual budgets of USDOT's **Urban Partnerships and Value Pricing Pilot Programs** by 50%, to \$600 million. These programs fund innovative solutions to congestion like New York City's congestion pricing program (see story, first page). Clinton would encourage USDOT to pursue technological solutions to congestion, like high-speed tolling and real-

time travel information.

The plan would increase federal funding for public transit by \$1.5 billion per year, would boost inter-city passenger rail funding by \$1 billion, and would tie federal transit funding to local land-use policies that **encourage transit-oriented residential development** (federal regulations already tie federal funding to policies encouraging transit-oriented commercial development).

As the presidential campaign heats up over the next year, it will be interesting to see if the other candidates will respond in as thoughtful a way as Clinton. ❖

Support for Smart Growth on Long Island

A significant percentage of Long Islanders (43%) would prefer to live within walking distance of a booming downtown, neighborhood schools, and public services, according to a recent Vision Long Island poll conducted by the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research.

The poll found residents of Nassau County are the most supportive of smart growth. They were more likely (49%) than Suffolk County residents (38%) to prefer to live in a mixed-use neighborhood. The demographic groups that favor smart growth are those between 18 and 35 years of age (52%) and those who identified themselves politically as liberals (50%).

NYSDOT, are you listening? Despite repeated requests from groups like Vision Long Island and the Tri-State Campaign, NYSDOT has so far failed to adopt more of a smart growth approach toward transportation projects, linking local land use planning with state investments. Recent public comments by NYSDOT Commissioner Astrid Glynn have espoused smart growth ideals, yet outdated and wasteful approaches to traffic congestion are still the norm for DOT, especially projects under the control of the NYSDOT Long Island Region 10 office.

In fact, a prototype for this type of poor planning, the Route 347 project, which would add lanes and has no land use component, just moved into the final environmental review stage. Construction is slated to start in 2010 (see www.ny347.org). Long Islanders deserve better. ❖

SAVE THE DATE!

Wednesday, October 24th: TSTC Annual New York Gala in Midtown, New York City. Please join us!

NYCDOT Commissioner **Janette Sadik-Khan** will speak. We will be honoring **Jon Orcutt**, senior policy advisor to Commissioner Sadik-Khan and former Tri-State Campaign executive director. For information, call us at 212-268-7474.

Staten Island Update: SI-Bayonne Bus Arrives, as does Verrazano Traffic Hell

Last month the MTA announced that a bus link between Staten Island and NJ Transit's Hudson-Bergen Light Rail station in Bayonne will finally begin service in the fall after **eight years of demands** from Staten Island officials and community members (see MTR #s 266, 271, 304, 323, 331, 519, 532, and others). This agreement is the latest sign that transit agencies have embraced the cooperation required to build a regional transit network (see also MTR #s 558 and 561).

The new bus route, the S89, will offer weekday peak-period service running in both directions between Staten Island and Bayonne and will cost \$2 for a one-way fare. The MTA reportedly considered charging a \$4 fare for the route. According to the *Staten Island Advance*, the MTA and NJ Transit plan to offer a joint monthly ticket valid on both the bus and the light rail. In addition, the Port Authority chipped in \$2 million towards the purchase of buses on the route.

Praise deserves to be spread around. Officials and community leaders in both Staten Island and New Jersey kept the issue in the spotlight as NYC Transit bluntly declared it "didn't do interstate service." In 2006, the NYS Legislature removed statutory language preventing MTA buses from stopping in N.J. But it was not until the hiring of Lee Sander as MTA executive director that, as the *Advance* put it in an editorial, "the stars were finally all in alignment."

That they are, and this stellar arrangement is a positive development for a borough that has actually seen several of late. The reactivation of rail freight service to the Howland Hook container port has taken trucks off of the Goethals Bridge (MTR # 541). A third bus depot is slated to open in 2009, and a bus rapid transit route on Hylan Blvd. is in the works.

-VZ Gridlock Underscores Toll Modernization- But all is not well in the borough. In late July, repairs on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge toll plaza led to traffic paralysis around the Staten Island end of the bridge, as drivers were diverted from the Staten Island Expressway to a service road. TSTC and others, including Island politicians like Borough President James Molinaro and Rep. Vito Fossella, have long called on the MTA to catch up to the Port Authority and NJ Turnpike Authority by switching to high-speed tolls (MTR # 541).

While the MTA is studying nonstop and cashless tolls as part of a study of two-way tolling on the Verrazano, faster tolling, unlike re-implementing the two-way toll, is **almost completely uncontroversial**; and the two need not be moved forward in tandem. Its possible political opposition to the two-way toll could ease if bridge travelers experience nonstop tolling and faster commutes, for example. ❖

File Under: Self-Congratulation

A few small, recent TSTC successes worth noting:

Primping Newark Streets

Bloomfield Avenue in Newark is starting to transform into the pedestrian haven imagined by community members when La Casa de Don Pedro walked the road with Tri-State staffers last year. Since the walk last fall, NJ Transit has promised to add bus rapid transit to the street, and the City of Newark and Essex County have teamed up to provide better signage and crossings for pedestrians.

In meetings with Essex County, the Campaign and La Casa asked for repainted crosswalks at 11 different intersections. So far eight have been re-striped. New signs designating pedestrian areas have been erected at two intersections near schools (although crosswalks along Bloomfield Avenue are still coveted by locals). Most encouragingly, the problematic five-way intersection at Mount Prospect and Bloomfield Avenues has had an extreme makeover: new painted intersection and road signs are visible and old crossing signals have been replaced by timed signals that have extended the crossing time from 10 seconds to nearly 30.

Re-Routing Queens Trucks

The Campaign's truck advocacy in New York City also won a small victory last month. Working with Councilman Joseph Addabbo and the Ozone Park Civic Association, Teresa Toro of the Campaign successfully lobbied the DOT to install truck route signage at Cross Bay Blvd. Previously, trucks were illegally turning off Cross Bay Boulevard onto 96th Street, which dead ends. Those trucks would have to back up and maneuver out, causing local congestion and often sideswiping parked cars.

Peanuts, Cracker Jack, and a Metro-North Station

The Campaign attended the groundbreaking for the Yankee Stadium Metro-North station last month. On game days, service will be provided by the Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven Lines; on other days only the Hudson Line will stop at the station.

Though one wouldn't know it from the dozens of elected officials who attended the event, advocacy of groups like the Campaign and allies like Save Our Parks, New Yorkers for Parks, and Good Jobs New York, helped solidify support for construction of the long coveted station (MTR # 523). Unfortunately, we did not succeed in dramatically reducing the parking supply around the stadium, though the state is still struggling to find a bidder for the parking garages. The garages are largely money losing propositions, as both *New York Times*, *NY Daily News*, and *Metro* articles have pointed out. ❖

CALENDAR

August 16, 4:30-6:30pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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

August 28, 6-8pm. Auto-Free New York invites you to "Ride Downtown Newark's New Light Rail Line" as a way to imagine how light rail might work in New York City. Meet at the main waiting room at Newark Penn Station. 212-475-3394.

September 6, 2pm. Governor's Commission on the Reform of the Connecticut DOT meeting and hearing. Stamford (specific location TBD, see www.ct.gov/dot for details).

September 8, 9am-2pm. Discover Hartford Bicycling and Walking Tour: A day to explore and learn about Hartford's historic past and promising future. Choose between a 2-hour walking tour and 10- and 25-mile bicycling tours of Hartford's historic and modern landmarks. Hosted by the Central Connecticut Bicycle Alliance and the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society. Visit www.hartfordbiketour.org for details.

September 8, 1pm-5pm. New Jersey Conference of Mayors 16th Annual Executive Summit & Jersey Seafood Fest. Viking Village at Barnegat Light on Long Beach Island. Meet one on one with top state officials and enjoy fresh New Jersey seafood and vegetables. Register at www.njcm.org.

September 18, 8:30am-1pm. Transit-Oriented Development Conference, sponsored by the South Western Regional Planning Agency. Learn about transit-oriented development and how Connecticut and other states are working to advance the concept. UConn-Stamford Campus, One University Place, Room 109. Early registration is \$10 or \$20 day of. Registration form available at www.swrpa.org.

More calendar items at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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