

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 564

September 21, 2007

## NEWS

### TSTC Analysis: Variable MTA Tolls Would Save Drivers Time

A TSTC analysis, done by economist and Campaign board member Charles Komanoff, recommends that the MTA enact variable tolls on its bridges and tunnels, which would create significant time savings for drivers. The MTA has proposed increasing its revenue from fares and tolls by 6.5% in early 2008, but has not yet determined the specifics of this increase (see *MTR* # 561).

In a memo sent to the MTA last month, the Tri-State Campaign recommended the MTA implement a \$5.25 peak-hour toll between 6 am and 6 pm, the same time period the congestion pricing plan proposed in PlaNYC would be in effect. The off-peak toll would remain unchanged at \$4.50. By encouraging some drivers to shift their trips to off-peak times, this toll scheme would reduce peak-hour traffic by 4.9-11.8 percent and save drivers **1.2 – 3.0 million hours** a year. This reduction in total driving time would also create air quality benefits.

A \$6.25 peak-hour toll charged during a narrower peak period (6-9 am inbound and 3-7 pm outbound), coupled with a \$4.50 off-peak toll, would reduce peak-hour traffic by 3.7-10.8 percent and save drivers 0.5 to 1.5 million hours a year.

Both TSTC variable toll schemes would raise approximately the same amount of revenue as a 50-cent raise in the base one-way toll to \$5.00. This flat toll hike would not create an incentive for drivers to avoid peak hours, and so would have very little effect on peak-hour traffic.

The MTA could also reduce congestion on its bridges and tunnels by doing away with its antiquated barrier-arm toll plazas and implementing high-speed electronic tolls. The Port Authority recently announced eventual implementation of cashless tolling on all of its bridges and tunnels (see *MTR* # 558).

To view the memo, visit [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org). ❖

### Will Opposition Doom LI Intermodal?

Community opposition is threatening to derail the Long Island Truck-Rail Intermodal (LITRIM), a truck-rail freight transfer facility being planned on the Pilgrim State Hospital site in Suffolk County. The facility would reduce truck traffic on Long Island, providing regionwide congestion and air quality benefits and reducing shipping costs for Island businesses. **Currently, only 1% of goods delivered to Long Island arrive by train**, according to NYS-DOT.

Many of the complaints of residents and officials from towns bordering the proposed facility seem short-sighted. “I just want them to leave our hometown alone” was a typical quote in *Newsday* from the opposition, which has argued that the project would worsen traffic on local roads, though the proposed site is less than 2 miles from the Long Island Expressway.

These complaints are particularly ironic given that local officials opposed to the intermodal have **done their best to increase traffic** in the area surrounding the proposed facility. A nearby shopping plaza including a Wal-Mart and Home Depot opened earlier this year. Another shopping center in the area has been approved by Babylon town officials, and 452-acre mixed-use “Heartland Town Square” project, which would be built adjacent to the intermodal, is under environmental review. Large shopping complexes planned for Commack and Deer Hills are expected to bring **4,000 cars a day** to the area. Three state senators wrote to NYSDOT Commissioner Astrid Glynn that they felt the intermodal project was infeasible because **“county and town officials [have] so overburdened this area with traffic congestion.”**

NYSDOT should take some blame for the heated opposition. The agency still **designs projects first and seeks input second**, rather than including the community from day one. Such a process doesn’t help win support for even the most worthy projects.

Though Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy supports the increased use of freight rail, he and other officials have asked NYSDOT to build a truck-only access road from the LIE to the facility. While this

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

option would increase the project cost, NYSDOT may need to consider it if the current plan proves politically impossible.

Further complicating matters is a 1987 law that states the Pilgrim site is eventually supposed to become a nature preserve. The impact of this law on the project is still under determination.

The LITRIM was first conceptualized in 1999, though the study process has been plagued with delays (see *MTR* #s 426, 428, 468). NYSDOT has completed the draft environmental impact statement, and has extended the public comment period until Oct. 24, after which work on the final EIS will begin. For more on the project, visit [www.longislandintermodal.com](http://www.longislandintermodal.com). ❖

### Levy TIP Veto On the Horizon?

Long Island insiders say that Suffolk County executive Steve Levy is considering vetoing the 2008-2012 Transportation Improvement Program at next week's NYMTC meeting (see box at lower right). If this is the case, Levy would hold up **\$35 billion in federal transportation funding for the entire region**, endangering everything from bike lanes to bridge repair.

Levy may be lashing out in response to the State Assembly's refusal to renew a 1% county sales tax which would provide Suffolk County with \$300 million in revenue. The renewal would normally be routine, but the Assembly's powerful Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus has declared war on Levy over his anti-immigrant stances on a number of issues, including his opposition to a proposed day laborer hiring hall in Farmingdale.

However, the *New York Times* has reported that the Assembly will likely approve the sales tax renewal—and the construction of a hiring hall in Suffolk County—when it reconvenes in the fall. The Suffolk County fiscal year 2008 budget includes the sales tax revenues, and Levy reportedly believes that the standoff is over.

The last time a similar battle over the TIP occurred was in 1997, when Mayor Giuliani, angry about the Port Authority's plan to build the AirTrain to JFK Airport, refused to approve the TIP (see *MTR* #s 143, 144). Giuliani eventually dropped his opposition in return for reduced rent payments at JFK and a promise that Gov. Pataki would "push" the Port Authority into eventually building a rail link to LaGuardia Airport.

All nine voting members of NYMTC—Putnam, Rockland, Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk County; NYC Depts. of Transportation and City Planning, NYSDOT, and the MTA—have absolute veto power. ❖

### Groups Ask MTA to Look at Big Picture

In a letter sent to the MTA last month and made public this week, the Tri-State Campaign joined the Straphangers Campaign, Transportation Alternatives, and many other local and regional civic organizations in calling on the MTA to postpone a final decision on a fare and toll hike until March 31, 2008. By this date, the MTA's financial situation will be much clearer than in December 2007, when the MTA currently plans to make its decision.

March 31 is the deadline for the New York State legislature and the New York City Council to pass a congestion pricing or other traffic mitigation plan. The plan as proposed by Mayor Bloomberg would ultimately produce billions of dollars for MTA capital projects. March 31 is also the date the MTA will submit its 2008-2013 capital rebuilding plan.

In the letter, the groups write that "the whole range of transit funding—from operations to capital needs—should be considered as a whole, rather than piecemeal." A fare and toll increase will impact **millions of transit riders and drivers**, and it seems premature for the MTA to ask its customers for more money when it is unclear exactly how much it needs.

Also requesting that the MTA postpone its decision on a fare hike are the NY League of Conservation Voters, Environmental Defense, the Regional Plan Association, Citizens Committee for NYC, the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, Vision Long Island, and WE ACT for Environmental Justice. ❖

## SAVE THE DATES!

**Thursday, Sept. 27:** NYMTC Special Council Meeting at Manhattan Community College's Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers Street.

The meeting will feature a panel discussion on the reauthorization of federal transportation legislation with **Lillian Borrone** of the ENO Transportation Foundation, **Anne Camby** of STPP, **William Millar** of APTA, and **Cameron Moore** of NARC. NYMTC will also vote on the adoption of the 2008-12 Transportation Improvement Program. RSVP to Andrea Miles-Cole at 718-482-4551 or [AMiles-Cole@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:AMiles-Cole@dot.state.ny.us).

**Wednesday, Oct. 24:** TSTC Annual New York Gala in Midtown Manhattan, 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.

NJ Transportation Funding's Road to Ruin  
Given the amount of debate over Gov. Corzine's proposal to raise money through "asset monetization"—creating a public benefit corporation that would issue bonds backed by higher tolls, it may be helpful to provide historical context to New Jersey's transportation funding situation.

New Jersey created the Transportation Trust Fund in 1984 as a predictable source of funding highway and transit capital projects. The TTF was funded by a number of dedicated taxes and fees, as well as appropriations from the state general fund, and spent money largely in a **pay-as-you-go** manner. However, in 1991, the fund's spending cap was raised without any additional revenues. The result was increased bonding and growing debt service. The TTF held \$900 million in debt in fiscal year 1993, and \$1.26 billion in FY94.

This trend of increased borrowing continued through the reauthorizations of the TTF in 1995 and 2000. Both times the state legislature dedicated additional revenues to the TTF, but also increased the size of the capital programs funded by the TTF, forcing it to borrow more. Compounding the problem, TTF money **increasingly went to pay for NJDOT and NJ Transit operating budget shortfalls** (see *MTR* #s 374, 481, 533, and others). In FY2000, the TTF held \$4.5 billion in debt and paid \$331 million in debt service.

By FY2007, the TTF would have gone bankrupt, spending all of its revenue on debt service. In 2006, Gov. Corzine and the legislature reauthorized the fund, opting to extend the period of debt repayment, increase the amount of revenue dedicated to the TTF—and have it issue more bonds. The Fund's outstanding debt is now **\$9.3 billion** and will continue to grow through the end of the decade. It is unclear how the Fund's solvency will be maintained after that (see *MTR* # 556).

The few elected officials who have acknowledged the state's transportation funding crisis over the years were unable to overcome the **aversion to tax hikes** engrained in New Jersey's political culture. In 1998, Gov. Whitman proposed a 5 cent-per-gallon raise in the gas tax, but failed to win support from legislative Democrats. In 2003, a Gov. McGreevey-appointed Blue Ribbon Commission recommended a 12.5 cent-per-gallon raise in the gas tax, but McGreevey did not back the recommendation. New Jersey's 14.5 cent-per-gallon gas tax is the third-lowest in the nation, and was last raised in 1988. The last toll hike on the Garden State Parkway took place in 1989.

Would asset monetization put the Transportation Trust Fund on a sound financial footing? Gov. Corzine has already talked about potentially using

monetization revenue to build schools, acquire open space, and fund other programs. How much revenue would go to paying debt is unclear.

Whether monetization happens at all is an open question. Corzine has released no details of the plan and has even suggested that the plan may not be feasible after all. Corzine may be trying to protect legislative Democrats in the upcoming state election. However, the lack of monetization details has not stopped state Republicans from trying to turn toll hikes into a campaign issue. ❖

### CT Needs Long-Term Truck Solutions

After a runaway truck careened into a furniture store on Avon Mountain in Hartford County, a truck inspection blitz on the Avon Mountain section of Route 44 took **21 trucks** off the road and identified over **200 violations** in its first three days. The state traffic commission banned truck traffic on Avon Mountain until January 2008, and is looking into longer-term solutions. Gov. Rell, who ordered the inspections, called the number of violations "horrifying" in a press release.

Even more horrifying is the presumably larger number of illegal trucks which are not being caught in other parts of Connecticut because of the state's lack of enforcement. It seems Gov. Rell has begun to recognize this; she ordered stepped-up inspections across the state and extended hours at the Greenwich weigh station a week after the crash.

Civic organizations like the Connecticut Citizens Transportation Lobby and newspapers like the *Stamford Advocate* have long argued for more effective truck inspections. A bill which would have extended weigh station hours failed to pass the General Assembly this summer after legislative leaders cut it out of the budget.

Connecticut can reduce truck traffic in the state by increasing the use of barges and freight rail, though its ability to do the latter is largely contingent upon improvements to the freight rail network around New York City. ❖

### 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 in the process of 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](http://www.tstc.org).

## Long Island Bus Shortchanged, Again

Fiscal year 2007 has ended, but Long Island Bus still has not received \$300,000 allocated in the FY07 budget to perform a study of bus usage patterns. The county should immediately release the money to Long Island Bus, preferably for increased service.

This money would go to good use, given the disappointing decision by Nassau County to hold its portion of Long Island Bus funding at \$10.5 million for FY08. Not including the unallocated \$300K promised in the FY07 budget, Nassau's contribution has not increased since FY05, which means that in real terms **the county has given less money to Long Island Bus every fiscal year since 2005**. The county's contribution is still less than it was in 1999.

By law, Nassau County must match state contributions made to the LIRR under the State Transportation Operating Assistance program, and its contribution to LIRR station maintenance must increase annually to keep pace with inflation. As we have said many times (see *MTR* #s 267, 290, 430, 434, and others), it is unacceptable that no similarly predictable funding formula exists for Long Island Bus, which has seen explosive ridership growth over the last decade and which serves many of the Island's most transit-dependent residents. ❖

## Transit for CT Bus Efforts Celebrated

Gov. Jodi M. Rell's office declared Sept. 12 "Transit for Connecticut Day" during a meeting with legislators that followed a tour of downtown Hartford on CTTTransit's new hydrogen fuel cell bus.

The event and tour were organized to thank the One Region Funders Group and other supporters of Transit for Connecticut's *2007 Bus Needs Analysis* report, which found that the state needs **1.8 million more hours of bus service** annually in order to fill gaps in frequency, expand weekend and evening service, increase capacity, and provide service to additional destinations.

The event was hosted by **State Sen. DeFronzo**, co-chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, and was attended by Sens. LeBeau and Prague, Rep. McCluskey, and representatives from the offices of Gov. Rell and Sens. Williams and Duff. Transit for CT credited these legislators and Gov. Rell's office for their efforts to secure more than \$10 million for increased bus service in fiscal years 2008-09.

This fall, Transit for CT will host "listening sessions" where residents can speak with elected officials, ConnDOT staff, and state transit advocates about their bus service needs. Visit <http://www.cfenv.org/transportation/> for more details. ❖

*MTR*#564 Contributing: Zoe Baldwin, Michelle Ernst, Kyle Wiswall Editors: Kate Slevin, Steven Higashide

350 West 31st Street #802, New York, NY 10001 tel. 212-268-7474 fax 212-268-7333 [tstc@tstc.org](mailto:tstc@tstc.org) [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

## CALENDAR

**September 24**, 5pm-8pm. New Jersey Turnpike Authority Public Hearing on the NJ Turnpike Interchange 6-9 Widening Program. Crowne Plaza Monroe, 390 Forsgate Drive, Jamesburg, NJ.

**September 25**, 5:30-7:30. Women's City Club of New York presents "PlaNYC: MEETING NYC'S LONG-TERM TRANSPORTATION NEEDS" Speaker: Rohit Aggarwala, Mayor's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability. FPWA, 281 Park Avenue South, New York City. Free for WCC members and students, \$10 for nonmembers.

**September 25**, 6pm-9pm. The Municipal Art Society of New York presents an Opening Party and Special Exhibit Viewing of "Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York," with a toast to the future of New York at 7:15pm. Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Avenue, New York City. RSVP by Sept. 21 to 212.935.2075 or [rsvp@mas.org](mailto:rsvp@mas.org) with your full name.

**September 27**, 8:30am. Governor's Commission on the Reform of the Connecticut DOT, Culture and People Working Group meeting. DOT Headquarters, 2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington, CT. See [www.ct.gov/dot](http://www.ct.gov/dot) for details.

**September 27**, 10am. Governor's Commission on the Reform of the Connecticut DOT, Culture and People Working Group meeting. Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, 450 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT.

**September 27**, Noon-2pm. New York City Transit Rider's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**September 27**, 5pm-8pm. New Jersey Turnpike Authority Public Hearing on the NJ Turnpike Interchange 6-9 Widening Program. Holiday Inn of East Windsor, 399 Monmouth Street, East Windsor, NJ. See [www.njturnpikewidening.com](http://www.njturnpikewidening.com) for details.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*