

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Broad Coalition Announces Four-Point Agenda for ConnDOT Reform

A coalition of transportation, environmental, business and civic groups held a press conference in Hartford Monday, announcing a four-point platform for the ConnDOT Reform Commission to recommend to Governor Rell. The Reform Commission, set up by the Governor in April of this year to review the structure and operation of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) and **expand its focus “beyond highways,”** is expected to release its recommendations in December (see *MTR* # 560).

Joining the Tri-State Campaign were the Connecticut Citizens Transportation Lobby, 1000 Friends of Connecticut, the Business Council of Fairfield County, Connecticut Fund for the Environment, CT Sierra Club, CT League of Conservation Voters, Partnership for Stronger Communities, and the National Corridors Initiative. State Sen. John McKinney (R-28) and State Reps. David McCluskey (D-West Hartford) and Tom Kehoe (D-Glastonbury) were also present to support the groups’ message.

The coalition called for the ConnDOT Reform Commission to include the below agenda below in its recommendations to Governor Rell:

1. Broaden the mission of ConnDOT staff by incorporating smart growth concepts into design, development, and implementation of transportation projects, while additionally targeting state dollars towards municipalities that are open to such ideas.
2. Invest in existing road and bridge infrastructure, and adopt a strategy that focuses on reducing vehicle-miles traveled. Move away from large and expensive highway expansion projects that fail to solve long-term congestion problems.
3. Consider innovative methods of raising transportation dollars, such as roadway pricing and high-occupancy toll lanes.
4. Speed implementation of priority transit projects.

“Governor Rell wants to be a leader on smart growth and transit-oriented development,” said Kate Slevin, Tri-State Campaign executive director. “The ConnDOT Reform Commission’s recommendations should reflect that.” ❖

Support Congestion Pricing and Speak Out for Better Transit!

Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission Hearings:

Bronx: Oct. 31, 6 pm. Hostos Community College - Main Theatre "C" Building, Corner of 149th & Grand Concourse.

Brooklyn: Nov. 1, 6 pm. New York City Tech Klitgard Auditorium, 285 Jay Street.

Staten Island: Nov. 5, 6 pm. College of Staten Island - Williamson Theater Center for The Arts, 2800 Victory Boulevard.

Prepared testimony is preferable, and 20 copies for testimony should be submitted. For details, visit <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/CongMit/20071017/>.

Data Proves NYC Congestion Pricing is Progressive Policy

Congestion pricing is progressive policy, the Tri-State Campaign told the Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission as public hearings on a potential congestion pricing plan began last week.

Some anti-pricing politicians seem to have dressed up for Halloween as populists defending “working stiff” from a “regressive tax” on driving. But an analysis of Census data by TSTC and the **Pratt Center for Community Development** shows that, in all but one State Assembly district in NYC, vehicle-owning households are **50% wealthier than households without a vehicle**; in nearly half of districts, average income is twice as high.

Furthermore, only a small minority of commuters drive alone to the proposed congestion pricing zone (CPZ); this is true not only in Manhattan but in the outer boroughs and the surrounding suburban counties. For example, only 5.1% of workers from Rockland County drive alone to the proposed CPZ. In Westchester, 3.4% of workers drive alone to the CPZ. In Nassau and Suffolk Counties, the percentages are even lower.

Fact sheets containing a breakdown of commuting patterns by mode and destination, vehicle ownership statistics, and the average incomes of vehicle-owning households and non-vehicle-owning households are available online at www.tstc.org. The fact sheets cover counties and City Council, state As-

sembly, state Senate, and U.S. Congressional districts in the New York metropolitan area.

-Commission Hears Agency Presentations-

The Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission held its second meeting last week and heard presentations from the MTA, NYSDOT, and NYCDOT.

The MTA's William Wheeler detailed the transit improvements the MTA would enact in response to a congestion pricing plan, including new express bus routes in the "outer outer boroughs," more frequent service on the 1 in Manhattan and the E and F in Queens, and longer trains on the C in Brooklyn. Wheeler said that diversions to transit in the suburbs would be minor and could be handled by existing commuter rail service. He concluded by calling congestion pricing a "**unique opportunity**" to grow transit ridership in the city and region.

NYCDOT's Bruce Schaller explained the workings of the NYMTC Best Practice Model, which has generated much of the data underpinning the city's congestion pricing plan. Commission member Assm. Richard Brodsky was skeptical. "It's a good model, but it's a model," he said. On that point, we agree. More compelling than the model data are the **real-world successes** of congestion pricing in London and Stockholm. The best way to determine whether congestion pricing will work in NYC is to try it.

NYSDOT's presentation focused on transportation improvements outside of NYC, including traffic information signs on major highways, expansion of MetroCard to buses in Rockland County, and additional park-and-ride lots in suburban areas. These suggestions would complement congestion pricing, but do not seem critical to the plan's success. ❖

Newark's Children Call for Safer Streets

Earlier this month, the Tri-State Campaign joined the community group La Casa de Don Pedro and students of Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in a community walk in Newark's North Ward. The walk highlighted the need for the city to "design streets that are safe for the children and adults who live, work, and go to school in Newark," Tri-State executive director Kate Slevin told the *Star-Ledger*.

NJDOT has targeted state pedestrian funding to Newark, and gave the city nearly \$3.5 million last year, thanks in part to the efforts of the Tri-State Campaign and La Casa (see *MTR* # 542).

There's still much to be done, however. Missing sidewalks and crosswalks were in abundance on key walking routes to school. Also missing were pedestrian signals and flashing lights which would call attention to school zones.

For more details and pictures of the walk (some adorable), visit blog.tstc.org. ❖

NJDOT: Keeping Up the Good Work

While the NJ Turnpike Authority pushes forward with misguided plans to widen the Garden State Parkway and NJ Turnpike (see *MTR* #s 553, 552, 546, and others), NJDOT continues to set the bar for smart planning in the tri-state area.

Oct. 5 marked the completion of Washington Borough's Route 57 streetscape. This hallmark NJDOT project includes the installation of sidewalks, trees, ornamental trash receptacles, a mid-block crosswalk, bike racks, benches, and other improvements that not only add to the aesthetics of the downtown, but also ensure the safety of the many children who cross Rt. 57 on their daily walk to school. The Conceptual Corridor Plan initiating the improvements sets forth **detailed and progressive design options that should be replicated statewide** (*MTR* #s 526, 543). NJDOT deserves acknowledgement for the clarity and scope with which the Rt. 57 plan was developed and implemented.

The Route 57 plan is part of the NJFIT program which **coordinates land use and transportation**, a connection that is still largely unattainable for other transportation agencies in the region.

NJDOT has also continued to improve its commitment to pedestrian safety. In 2006, Governor Corzine launched a five-year, \$74 million statewide pedestrian safety initiative, which included additional money for traffic calming infrastructure, "traffic-stat" technology, and increased inter-agency coordination. (see *MTR* #539)

Included in Corzine's pedestrian safety initiative was a \$15 million contribution to the state's Safe Routes to School program. This year NJDOT awarded \$4.15 million in Safe Routes to School grants, including a **\$250,000 grant to Roselle** that will go towards new sidewalks and crosswalks, as well as safety education and awareness efforts. Roselle lies on the Rt. 27 corridor, which has seen horrific collisions involving pedestrians (*MTR* # 556).

Similarly, Corzine's initiative included \$5 million over five years for a new **Safe Streets to Transit** program, which announced its first-ever grant this year, a \$280,000 to Union County for shuttle service across a busy highway. The Safe Streets to Transit Program funds pedestrian safety improvements including infrastructure, education, outreach and planning guidance in areas surrounding transit facilities. *MTR* supports the Union County shuttle, but also hope future dollars will improve walking and biking conditions to and from transit centers.

NJDOT has made great strides toward reducing the transportation system's environmental impacts on the state of NJ. *MTR* hopes that the agency's progressive spirit will spread to one of its sister agencies, the NJ Turnpike Authority. ❖

Report Looks at BRT, TOD in Tappan Zee

The NYSDOT should take a leadership role in connecting land use and transportation in the I-287/Tappan Zee Bridge corridor and do more to educate the public about bus rapid transit, according to a new Tri-State Campaign report, *Getting Up to Speed: A Case for Bus Rapid Transit and Transit-Oriented Development in the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Corridor*. (Available at tstc.org.)

Getting Up to Speed documents how and why traffic growth has skyrocketed along the I-287 corridor in the past few decades, and discusses the difficulties in providing transit service in scattered, suburban areas.

NYSDOT data examined in the report demonstrates that the full corridor bus rapid transit alternative would attract the highest east to west ridership from Suffern to Port Chester. Therefore, the report argues, this is the alternative most likely to reduce traffic on the Tappan Zee Bridge. During the morning rush, most drivers on the Tappan Zee Bridge are coming from Rockland and Orange counties, and traveling to jobs in Westchester County and Connecticut. Only 7% of drivers go to Manhattan (see *MTR # 521*). Full corridor bus rapid transit also has the lowest capital and operating costs of any transit alternative being considered.

The report explains what bus rapid transit is, why it may be the most effective transit mode for suburb-to-suburb trips, and how it has succeeded in growing transit ridership and fostering transit-friendly development around the country and the world.

The project team is expected to release a draft environmental impact statement, with a preferred transit alternative for the I-287 corridor, early next year. For more information, check the official website at www.tzbsite.com. ❖

Blogging the Region

We at Tri-State have always prided ourselves on our ability to keep abreast of the latest fashion trends and technological advancements. That's why, in November (two years after Streetsblog and five years after William Safire discussed the etymology of the word "blog" in his *NY Times* language column), *Mobilizing the Region* will become a blog. Better a little late than never!

Please note: this is our second-to-last edition of the fax version of *Mobilizing the Region*! Starting in November, we will no longer be sending the fax version! Instead, we will be blogging and sending out weekly e-mails with blog highlights.

We will officially launch the blog in November, but you can check out what we've done so far at blog.tstc.org. please sign up for MTR electronically today at www.tstc.org. ❖

Groups Ask MTA to Hold the Fare Hike

Earlier this month the Tri-State Campaign joined the Straphangers Campaign and several other advocacy organizations, NYC Comptroller Bill Thompson, and 22 NYS Assemblymembers in calling on the MTA, in a letter, to delay any decision on raising fares and tolls until April 15, 2008. The *NY Daily News* has reported that **80 state senators and assemblymembers**, as well as MTA board members Mitch Pally and Norman Seabrook, now support a delay in the fare hike.

In the letter sent to the MTA, the signatories urged the agency to give the legislature "a chance to provide additional funds needed in order to avoid a fare increase." The MTA currently plans to raise fares and tolls by an average of 6.5% in early 2008.

Delaying a fare increase would also make sense because, by April, the fate of congestion pricing—and the hundreds of millions of dollars it would contribute annually to MTA capital projects—will be known (see *MTR # 564*).

State Assm. Jim Brennan and State Sen. Tom Duane sought to jump-start the discussion by introducing bills in their respective chambers which would substantially increase aid to the MTA. The first bill would provide almost \$665 million in operating assistance to the MTA (provided in a 50-50 state-local match), while the second would provide \$39 million to subsidize fares for school children.

Public hearings on the proposed MTA fare and toll increases will begin in early November. See mta.info for details. ❖

Port Authority Takes Over Cross-Harbor Tunnel Project

The long-called for cross-harbor rail tunnel between Jersey City and Brooklyn took a substantial step towards becoming a reality when the Port Authority agreed to take over the project from the NYC Economic Development Corporation and complete an environmental impact statement earlier this month.

The PA seems the most logical home for a cross-harbor tunnel study, as the tunnel must win support in both New York and New Jersey. Congressman Jarrod Nadler, a long-time proponent of the project, helped secure \$100 million in federal funds for the Port Authority to study the cross-harbor tunnel in 2005, but the agency did not accept the money until this year.

In the NYMTC region (NYC, Long Island, Rockland, Westchester, Putnam) only 1% of freight is carried by train. A cross-harbor rail tunnel would act as a vital link in the national rail freight network, and take up to a million trucks off the road annually, according to NYCEDC's draft environmental impact statement. ❖

TSTC Rider Report Cards: Steven Higashide

As noted in the press, NYC Transit has been passing out "rider report cards" on its subway lines to gauge customer satisfaction. We'll be publishing a few staff report cards over the next few weeks:

Communications associate Steven Higashide has the shortest commute of the Campaign's staff members—a quick B/D/F/V jaunt from **47-50 Sts. Rockefeller Center** to **34 St. Herald Square**, followed by a two-block walk to the Campaign's offices on 31st St. and Eighth Avenue.

Steven filled out a report card for the F, which he uses not just for commuting but also for trips to the grocery store and hanging out in the Lower East Side. "The F had a terrible reputation a few years ago," he said, "but I've been surprised by the amount of service I've seen on the line." The frequency of service and the amount of space on board ("The train clears out at Rockefeller Center, which is when I get on.") led to an overall grade of B-.

Areas Steven pointed out for improvement include working station escalators. "The Herald Square escalator I use every day broke at the start of September and was originally scheduled for repair on Sept. 14." The escalator is currently scheduled to be repaired in early November. ❖

F	Minimal delays during trips	B
	Reasonable wait times for trains	B
	Adequate room on board at rush hour	B
	Sense of security in stations	C
	Sense of security on trains	C
	Working elevators and escalators in stations	D
	Signs in stations that help riders find their way	B
	Signs in subway cars that help riders find their way	C
	Cleanliness of stations	C
	Cleanliness of subway cars	C
	Station announcements that are easy to hear	D
	Station announcements that are informative	D
	Train announcements that are easy to hear	D
	Train announcements that are informative	D
	Lack of graffiti in stations	B
	Lack of graffiti in subway cars	B
	Lack of scratchitti in subway cars	C
	Courtesy and helpfulness of station personnel	C
	Comfortable temperature in subway cars	C
	Ease of use of subway turnstiles	B
	Availability of MetroCard vending machines	A
	Overall performance	B-

West Side Parking Debate: SIP Update

MTR was already impressed by the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation's show of backbone in resisting NYC's plan for more parking on Manhattan's far west side; the plan requires a revision of NY's State Implementation Plan for attaining carbon monoxide (CO) levels in accordance with EPA standards (see MTR # 565). We are happy to report that DEP has even more spine than originally thought.

In a letter to NYC Dept. of Environmental Protection Comm. Emily Lloyd, DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis made it clear that the parking management study required by the CO SIP of 1979 (and by subsequent court order) must be produced before any SIP revision would be considered. While a 1981 version of the study has been produced, a contemporaneous letter from the EPA rejects the nearly 300-page report for inadequately addressing the issues delineated by the court. Grannis's current request is a tall order given the condition of the study and, barring miraculous intervention, may kill the proposal outright.

NYSDEC is also currently drafting the NY SIP for Particulate Matter (PM2.5 SIP), which would logically include the parking plan as one strategy for attaining compliance with EPA air quality requirements. Some lobbying is in order to ensure that the parking strategy is included. ❖

CALENDAR

November 1, 12:15-2pm. LIRR Commuter's Council meeting. MTA HQ, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Fl. Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

November 5, 5:30pm-8pm. ConnDOT Listening Session for the State's Long-Range Transportation Plan. This session will focus on rural eastern Connecticut. Eastern Connecticut State University, Johnson Room (Library), 83 Windham Street, Willimantic. For more information, visit www.ct.gov/dot.

November 5, 6pm. Public Hearing on Proposed MTA Fare and Toll Increases. Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge, Grand Ballroom, 333 Adams Street, Brooklyn. Registration is open until 8 pm day of. Details available at mta.info.

More calendar items at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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