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NY to Replace, Not Repair, Tappan Zee Bridge

The New York Times – September 26, 2008

New York - The Tappan Zee Bridge, one of the busiest Hudson River connections, should be replaced, not repaired, New York state officials said Friday, after years of debate over what to do with the 1950's-era span. The state Department of Transportation announced ambitious plans to build a new bridge in place of the current span, including room for bus rapid transit service and commuter lanes.

Replacing the 30-mile east-west section of interstate between Rockland and Westchester counties northwest of New York City would cost about \$6.4 billion. The addition of a high-speed bus corridor linking Suffern to Port Chester would cost \$2.9 billion. Another \$6.7 billion would be required to build a new commuter rail lane to carry passengers to Metro North railroad stations and on to Grand Central.

Groundbreaking on the new bridge could begin as early as 2012 following a series of design and environmental studies and public hearings, according to state officials. The plan was developed in cooperation with federal highway and mass transit agencies and was endorsed by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the New York State Thruway and Gov. David Paterson.

The DOT said it was "finalizing a contract" with Wall Street firm Merrill Lynch "to develop options for funding the project and will release the initial phase of a finance study soon." Officials also confirmed that all financing options were on the table, including using private developers.

New Funding Announced to Improve Intercity Passenger Rail

U.S.D.O.T. News Release – September 30, 2008

RICHMOND, Va. – The federal government is supporting Americans' transition from driving less to using more rail and transit with a new approach to funding intercity passenger rail projects to help improve service and increase on-time performance across the country, U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters announced this week.

She also released new data indicating Americans are continuing to drive less, with 62.6 billion fewer miles driven from November 2007 through July 2008 than the same nine-month period a year earlier. In the meantime, transit ridership is risen 11 percent, according to Secretary Peters, and in July, Amtrak carried more passengers than in any single month in its history.

"At a time when transit and rail are seeing record growth, the very way we finance these systems is at risk. That is because our transit investments come from the same source as our highway investments – federal gas taxes," Secretary Peters said. "Federal transportation policies that rely almost exclusively on gas taxes are failing our state and local governments."

In its new plan, the Department will provide \$30 million to match local investments in 15 rail capacity enhancement projects across the nation, which are designed to cut delays and expand capacity on existing intercity rail corridors and establish new services where none exist right now. There has previously been no way for states to qualify for federal funding to match local investments in rail capacity because all federal funds have gone to Amtrak, Secretary Peters said.

The 15 intercity passenger rail grants will be awarded by the Department to projects in Arizona, California, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.



Mary is right. The way transit projects are funded is broken. You just have to look at how long the list of projects vying for New Starts money is and you know that something has to change. However, this isn't just a federal problem. States are going to have to change their view of transit funding since even if federal money was available to handle the capital side of these projects the states must still raise the money to subsidize the fare structure in every case. TW

Caltrans Wants to say it with Flowers

Los Angeles Times – September 29, 2008

Calif. - The California Department of Transportation is trying to squeeze every possible dollar out of the state's freeways in a recent letter to the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, which suggests some creative, and controversial, ideas. One such idea reported last week by the Los Angeles Times was to allow commercial ads on the state electronic messaging signs.

Caltrans Director Will Kempton also proposed letting companies that pay for freeway landscaping

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to plant vegetation in the form of commercial logos. A federal waiver of rules involving commercial usage on freeways, "would allow sponsors to use vegetation to include commercial logos as part of the displays," Kempton wrote.

"It is our expectation that sponsors would recognize the value of the program, exercise diligence in designing and maintaining displays that directly represent their business, and be willing to increase their financial participation," said Kempton's letter. The U.S. DOT and Kempton are still considering the concept and have not given final approval, but the plan already has its opponents.

"It's part of the commercialization of our open spaces," said Dennis Hathaway, president of the Coalition to Ban Billboard Blight. "The open spaces belong to people, and this kind of auctioning off of it to corporate interests is a terrible trend."



I found this article interesting. A few years ago we did a study sponsored by the FHWA and AASHTO through the NCHRP program that looked at commercial uses of state rights of way. Once word got out that we were doing this research we had many calls from individuals and companies who had ideas for us to consider. Some were interesting. Others were scary. One wanted to put a message board at stop lights to overcome the boredom of sitting at a red light. Another wanted the advertising rights for signal cabinets at intersections. Still another wanted to put their name on the backs of signs in the hopes that someone going the other direction would notice. Some worry about advertising in the rights of way. I think we crossed that bridge when Adopt-a-Highway signs changed to what they are today. TW

Penn. Turnpike will not be Leased this Year

Land Line Magazine – October 1, 20080

HARRISBURG, Pa. – The \$12.8 billion bid to lease the Pennsylvania Turnpike for 75 years expired on Wednesday, and the partnership offering the bid did not seek an extension, citing inaction by state lawmakers. Leaders of both General Assembly chambers have indicated there would not be floor votes on what would have been the nation's largest infrastructure deal, as there are only a few days left of session before the election.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike commission lobbied aggressively against the bid to lease the 500 miles of interstate. Opponents criticized the bid as too low.

Jim Courtovich, spokesman for the partnership between Abertis Infraestructuras of Spain and Citi Infrastructure Investors, said that although they would be open to pursuing a similar deal in the future, the decision not to extend the offer for a third time came after it became clear it would not get a floor vote.

Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell requested bids for the lease as an alternative to adding tolls to I-80, a plan which was rejected Sept. 11 by federal regulators. The governor released a joint statement with Citi-Abertis saying they hope to enact a lease between the partnership and the state eventually.

"Since our team, I believe, has significant experience on the road and has spent a great deal of time with the people of Pennsylvania, we're looking (for) any opportunities that might arise from this, should enabling legislation be enacted," said Courtovich.



Last week it was the Missouri "Safe and Sound" bridge program. This week it is the PA Turnpike. It would be naive for us to think these will be the only casualties of the current financial crisis on Wall Street. TW

N.Y. Gov. Seeks to Lease State Assets

Associated Press – September 30, 2008

ALBANY, N.Y. – The governor of New York has requested proposals by January to lease state assets, such as the lottery, highways and bridges, as a means to provide a steady revenue stream and cut state costs. Gov. David Paterson announced he is forming a commission with members of the Legislature to study public-private partnerships around the world and come up with ideas on the concept. He said he wants specific recommendations by January, before his first State of the State address and state budget proposal.

Paterson said his administration's creation of the commission is an important step to ensure the state continues to make critical long-term investments. "Public-private partnerships are not the only answer, but we need to honestly assess whether they can be part of the solution," the governor said in a statement. "I believe the private sector can be a source of innovation, allowing us to increase the value, efficiency and safety of assets like our aging infrastructure system."

The governor's idea is being called a 100-year investment, with the 11-member commission required to report back in 90 days, and a final report due in 180 days, before the end of the 2009 Legislative session.

Grant to Fund Study of Phoenix-Tucson Light Rail

The Arizona Republic – October 1, 2008

Arizona - The federal government has awarded the Arizona Department of Transportation a \$1 million federal grant to help fund a study of passenger rail service between Phoenix and Tucson. The grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation requires the state to match the money with \$1 million from state, local, tribal and private investors. The money will pay for the first year of an environmental impact statement.

A rail link between the cities has been discussed for years. The concept was most recently proposed under a statewide transportation funding initiative that did not make it to this year's ballot. Officials say the planned line would be built through a developing "megapolitan" - an uber-urban mass of development that would connect the two cities.

Hi-Tech Traffic Upgrades Deployed on Utah Roads

Utah - Traffic signals in urban areas of Utah are getting an upgrade from magnetic and RADAR technologies that allow greater traffic control while reducing congestion and increasing safety.

The Utah-based firm Wavetronix manufactures the devices which can be installed in 10-15 minutes with minimally invasive procedures, according to Utah Department of Transportation Traffic Operations Director David Kinnicom said. "(They) can be installed without running wires," he said. "This is part of a program UDOT is doing to improve traffic flow."

The palm-sized magnetic sensors, which work best on low-speed roads, communicate with the traffic signal via an electronic repeater that is buried in the pavement so cars don't have to wait when there is no traffic. When a higher than usual number of vehicles is detected, the sensor tells the signal to turn green.

The RADAR devices, which perform best on high-speed roads, read 500 feet ahead of the signal to adjust the timing of the light. Using digital wave radar when the device detects a vehicle within the 500-foot zone, it will signal the light to stay green to allow the car time to get through the intersection. If a car is beyond the 500-foot zone, they will get a yellow light and have time to stop.

Kinnicom said the both devices allow intersections to work as efficiently as possible by minimizing unnecessary stops and delays. UDOT plans to phase in the devices, which some research shows may cut down on motorists running red lights by 75 percent.

California Bills Finalize Transit Questions on Ballots

Land Line Magazine – October 10, 2008

California – Two transportation initiatives in California have received approval by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to appear on the November ballot, including a half-cent sales tax increase for Los Angeles County voters to pay for mass transit and road projects. The proposed increase – AB2321 – will raise the county's sales tax from 8.25 percent to 8.75 percent to generate about \$40 billion over the next 30 years.

The measure requires a two-thirds majority vote authorizing bus and rail expansion, as well as a route connecting downtown Los Angeles and Santa Monica, highway improvements, and local transportation projects.

Schwarzenegger previously approved changes to a \$9.95 billion bond proposal intended to help pay for a \$42 billion transit system that will enable a 200 mph high-speed train to travel between San Francisco and Los Angeles in about two hours and thirty minutes. If voters approve Proposition 1 on the statewide ballot, the construction of the 800-mile track could begin as early as 2011.

Advocates say the high-speed train would reduce the number of people driving by nearly 93 million drivers a year.

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