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## \$1B Cost Defers Light Rail Idea

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*Albany Times Union – August 10, 2008*

**ALBANY** - Bringing light rail or commuter rail to New York's Capital Region has long been a widely-accepted solution to solving area concerns about traffic jams, clean air, high gas prices and suburban sprawl. Transit advocates say such a system, while incorporating existing heavy rail infrastructure, would provide clean, affordable and convenient transportation while revitalizing cities and smoothing daily commute. The main roadblock for such a project is the price tag: it would cost roughly at least \$1 billion to build. But rail supporters say the region needs to take the challenge.

"I think it's the way to go," said Albany County Public Works Commissioner Michael Fanchini, who chairs the Capital District Transportation Committee's planning group. He said in his personal opinion, not the county's, "If you don't start planning for these things now, you start creating hurdles and roadblocks to a future system."

The CDTC's 20-year construction cost quote for a bus rapid transit system and regional light rail comes to \$2.1 billion, including \$40 million per mile to build the light rail portions. That is a much higher investment than Capital Region residents have previously been willing to support, even with major state or federal assistance.

## No Congestion Tolls for Golden Gate Bridge

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**SAN FRANCISCO** – Transportation officials have called off plans to charge a congestion toll on the Golden Gate Bridge. The plan would have increased the cost of crossing the bridge to as much as \$7 during peak travel times.

Instead, officials are now considering increased parking meter fees along the route to the bridge. The variable rates would be higher during the busiest times, which officials say will free up more spaces and reduce the number of cars looking for parking.

“It’s so that people think twice about where they need to go and where they need to park and what time of day to do it,” said San Francisco Transit Authority spokesman Jose Luis Moscovich. The congestion toll plan was tied to a \$158 million Bay Area federal transportation grant which included money to renovate the seismically unstable Doyle Drive approach to the bridge.

Federal officials wanted the toll dollars to help pay for the \$1.1 billion Doyle Drive replacement, which is still \$470 million short until a congestion charge plan has been implemented. “We’re getting pretty close to a deal,” said Moscovich, declining to elaborate. Some local agencies will still receive money for Doyle Drive, but the exact amount has not been determined.

## Governors Approval Declines with Turnpike Monetization Plan

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Reuters – August 12, 2008

*New Jersey* - Many voters disapprove of Gov. Jon Corzine, partly because of his plan to “monetize” the New Jersey Turnpike, and he is now facing a tough race against a possible Republican gubernatorial candidate, according to a recent poll. Forty-eight percent of those polled do not approve of the way the Democratic governor is fulfilling his responsibilities, compared with 42 percent approving, said the most recent survey of 1,519 voters by the Quinnipiac Institute. The poll had higher results for the governor’s approval rating compared to a June survey, which showed a disapproval rating of 52 to 38 percent.

“It may be unfair, but voters view Corzine’s plans to use the New Jersey Turnpike to reorganize state finances as blue smoke and mirrors,” said the polling institute’s assistant director, Clay Richards, in a statement.

Corzine’s plan to cut the state’s debt by 50% by turning the Turnpike over to a public benefit corporation which would significantly increase tolls has faced strong opposition from lawmakers and voters. The governor’s state privatization plan is among several that have stalled, despite strong interest shown by banks both in the U.S. and overseas.

Federal prosecutor Christopher Christie is the Republican threatening Corzine’s re-election, and would get 40 percent of the vote – just one percentage point less than the governor – if the 2009 gubernatorial election took place now.

# Driving Declines for Eighth Consecutive Month

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Connecticut Post, CT – August 13, 2008

U.S. - Americans have cut back on driving for the eighth consecutive month, in a trend that has left the highway trust fund nearly empty while trains are fuller than ever. Since last November, people have driven 53.2 billion miles less compared to the same period a year earlier, surpassing the 1970's total decline of 49.3 billion miles.

"We can't afford to continue pinning our transportation network's future to the gas tax," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters. "Advances in higher fuel-efficiency vehicles and alternative fuels are making the gas tax an even less sustainable support for funding roads, bridges and transit systems."

The U.S. Department of Transportation reported this week that Americans consumed almost 400 million fewer gallons of gasoline during the first quarter of 2008 than in the first quarter of 2007. Diesel sales dropped by 318 million gallons during the same period.



*At 18.4 cents per gallon, 400 million fewer gallons adds up in a hurry. Add to that the amount that states didn't collect and there is a substantial hole in the revenue stream for transportation projects across the country. Simple math turns this into nearly \$75 million. That doesn't include taxes on diesel. While gas prices are moderating, the revenue trend won't reverse anytime soon. The Highway Trust Fund disbursements weren't sustainable under the historical levels of fuel consumption. This only makes the situation more challenging in terms of finding a fix. TW*

# Northeast Governors Blast Bush on PPP Policy

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Land Line Magazine – August 13, 2008

Five northeast governors denounced the Bush administration's policy to privatize and toll infrastructure, saying it does not do enough to solve their transportation problems. This week, during the Council of State Governments Eastern Regional Conference in Atlantic City, N.J., the governors of Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Vermont discussed the transportation-funding crisis. Among the topics discussed was the federal and state role in transportation funding as well as public-private partnerships.

Governors Jon Corzine and Ed Rendell, of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, respectively, have both proposed plans to lease state-owned infrastructure to private investors to supplement funding shortfalls. Both Corzine and Rendell said they support the establishment of a federal infrastructure bank that would finance the private sector to build and maintain transportation systems. The governors noted that the estimated \$3 billion shortfall in the federal Highway Trust Fund is expected to occur during 2009 if Congress does not take action. Rendell added that the federal government is unlikely to raise the federal fuel tax in the near future, a move which U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters says would be ineffective.

Corzine also used the conference to call off his plan to raise tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike by 800 percent during a 75-year period to bail the state out of debt. He has not declared his next

move, but says public-private partnerships are among the options on the table.

## First Hydrogen Refueling Station Opens in Massachusetts

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*Boston Globe* – August 12, 2008

*Massachusetts* - The first hydrogen refueling station in Massachusetts has opened in Billerica, also the location for the U.S. corporate headquarters of Nuvera Fuel Cells, which makes hydrogen fuel cells and operates the new refueling facility.

"A fuel cell is like a battery because it makes electricity, but unlike a battery, you don't charge it up," said Mitchell, who was on hand to celebrate the milestone. "As long as you give it oxygen from the air and hydrogen from the bottle, it creates electricity." Supporters say drivers can fuel up for the equivalent of about \$3 per gallon of gasoline, and the vehicles' emission is water vapor.

The majority of the nation's 60-plus hydrogen refueling facilities are located in Southern California, which makes the vehicles unrealistic for most people in the immediate future. Honda is leasing a limited number of its Clarity vehicles in California for \$600 a month; however, most manufacturers don't plan to have models in showrooms before 2010 or later.

Experts say the more difficult part of making the hydrogen-powered vehicles a realistic option for consumers is building enough refueling stations. Producing the fuel itself should not be a challenge, according to Brad Bradshaw, president of the Massachusetts Hydrogen Coalition, a group that works to promote the hydrogen fuel industry in the state. "You can produce hydrogen from landfills, from wastewater treatment plants," he said.

## Electronic Tolling Vulnerable to Hackers, Researcher Warns

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*Land Line Magazine* – August 12, 2008

Electronic tolling transponders could be a means for hackers to breach certain firewalls, according to a California researcher. Nate Lawson, of Root Labs in Oakland, Calif., who was one of the designers of digital security layers for products including Blu-ray discs, told attendees of an annual technology security conference that he believes California's FasTrak system could be hacked and "cloned" by criminals at the account holder's expense.

In Lawson's seminar, "Highway to Hell: Hacking Toll Systems," he described how he purchased a transponder at the grocery store, took it apart and was able to breach some firewalls. "I'm reasonably certain an attacker can send a couple messages to a FasTrak transponder and wipe its internal ID," Lawson stated.

FasTrak is only used by Transportation Corridor Agencies in Southern California, but Lawson said all existing electronic tolling systems are similarly designed, although he had not researched E-ZPass or SunPass. "They're very similar in terms of basic protocol, but I haven't taken them apart

yet," he said.

A spokeswoman for TCA said people's personal information, including credit card information, could not be stolen from the transponders if it were hacked. "Certainly, someone with the right equipment could pull a number off one of the transponders, but it's only a number," spokeswoman Lisa Telles said, adding that the agency encourages users to track their transactions regularly. "What people are most concerned about is can credit card information and personal information be obtained, and it can't."



*Security of personal information will be a growing problem and we need to plan for it. When I was Deputy Director of the Arizona DOT, my experience with drivers licensing and motor vehicle registrations showed that the "bad guys" can outdo, duplicate or otherwise compromise almost anything we are doing. That doesn't mean we don't try, but we should never be over-confident about how good our security systems are.*

*On a personal note, I was looking into signing up for the Clear Card to speed my way through the TSA security checkpoints in airports a week or so ago. Clear Card promises faster processing in exchange for a lot of my personal information. Their website was down at the time and I didn't get to complete the process. Later that day, I learned that a TSA laptop had been lost and over 30,000 people's personal information, including fingerprints and iris scans, for Clear Card had been lost. The TSA assured everyone that there was nothing to worry about. A couple of years ago my US Army records were on a laptop lost by the VA. Later they sent me a letter saying that the laptop was recovered and my personal information was secure and hadn't been compromised. Of course, the letter was from the same people who lost the laptop in the first place. It wasn't very reassuring. TW*

## Maine DOT Finishes I-295 Work Early

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*Brunswick Times Record - Aug 11, 2008*

**BRUNSWICK** – Drivers in Maine praised the state department of transportation this week when the agency finished the I-295 southbound rehabilitation project 20 days ahead of schedule. The project began in mid-June, and involved a closure of 18 miles of highway.

Project spokesperson Meg Lane said the massive closure "has generated a lot of interest nationally because it is unheard of to shut down 18 miles of interstate highway." But Maine DOT officials said the move was best because it made the early completion possible.

"When you can completely close down a road, and you take all the risk of working in live traffic off the table, it is amazing how (the workers) are able to organize themselves," said Joyce Taylor, assistant director of project development.

During one of the wettest construction seasons ever, 181,000 tons of asphalt were put down, five bridges were rebuilt and seven miles of guardrail installed. The project was also designed by Maine DOT and Pike Industries to conserve, reuse and recycle whenever possible without compromising quality. The 55,000 tons of waste generated by the concrete, which would normally be hauled to a fill site, was instead recycled to revitalize the paved shoulders. An additional

30,000 tons of old shoulder pavement will be reused to make new hot mix asphalt.

## Bill would Reward Use of 'Smart Growth' Projects

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*San Diego Union Tribune - Aug 7, 2008*

**SACRAMENTO** – Environmentalists and builders in California, typically opponents, are uniting behind comprehensive legislation that could essentially change how the state grows and where. The bill would use a variety of rewards, including better-defined environmental reviews and priority for transportation dollars, to decrease sprawl, create affordable housing, reduce commute times and cut greenhouse gas emissions tied to global warming.

The measure, a compromise after months of development, could have a long-term impact on construction in San Diego County, where regional developers are working to guide residential development closer to jobs. "This creates greater incentives to provide more affordable in-fill housing along transit corridors," said San Diego City Councilman Jim Madaffer, who helped craft the compromise in his role as president of the League of California Cities. "We're trying to center housing by the jobs."

To enforce that goal, Senate Bill 375 would redefine how \$5 billion in state transportation funds are allocated by using incentives. Transportation projects that help communities fulfill "smart growth" objectives would be first in line for a bigger portion of the money. The bill is said to have a strong chance of getting to the governor's desk, with powerful supporters inside and outside the Legislature. Although Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has not taken a stand on the measure, he is a strong advocate for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promotes building more homes within urban cores to slow sprawl.



*This is worth watching and could become a national pattern. TW*

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