



Pratt Center for
Community Development

Steuben Hall
379 DeKalb Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11205

Telephone
718 636-3486

Facsimile
718 636-3709

www.prattcenter.net

October 26, 2005

Pratt Center for Community Development
Position on NYS Bond Act, November 2005

2005 Transportation Bond Act:

The New York State "Rebuild and Renew Transportation Bond Act," contains \$2.9 billion in critical investments in the State's transportation infrastructure and will be part of the November 8th ballot for public consideration. The funding from the Bond Act is a component of the State's \$35.8 billion 5-year transportation plan (2005 to 2009) and will be split evenly between capital projects funded by the NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) & the NYS Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). If approved, the NYSDOT share will be spent around the state on highway and bridge repair, and rebuilding needs, while the MTA's \$1.45 billion allocation will be invested in a series of projects contained in its recently approved 2005-2009 Capital Program. \$450 million of the funds will go towards the necessary maintenance of the existing transit system, including track replacement, and the purchase of new buses and subway train cars. The remaining \$1 billion will be allocated for MTA system expansion projects (Second Avenue Subway, East Side Access and JFK Rail Link).

Governor Pataki, Mayor Bloomberg, New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and Comptroller Alan Hevesi all back the measure, as do a range of labor, business, civic and environmental organizations citing the fact that current funding is not adequate to maintain and expand the state's transportation infrastructure. Groups such as the Citizens Budget Commission and the Empire Center for New York State Policy oppose the Bond Act arguing that the state is already burdened with too much debt, and that the measure includes too many 'amenities' along with essential projects.

In 2000 a transportation bond initiative as part of the presidential ballot did not pass. As a result, the pro-bond coalition "Vote Yes for Transportation" has been formed to mobilize voter support for the 2005 measure. To date public opinion has been favorable toward the 2005 Bond Act. A Quinnipiac University survey released the week of October 3, 2005 found that a majority of New Yorkers support the proposal. 56% of those surveyed by the university said that they support the measure to authorize the state to borrow to invest in mass transit and highway infrastructure- 67% of respondents in New York City, 60% in the suburbs and 45% upstate.

Pratt Center Mission:

The Pratt Center works for a more just, equitable, and sustainable city for all New Yorkers, by empowering communities to plan for and realize their futures. In pursuit of our mission, we strive for vibrant quality-of-life, equality and justice, environmental justice and sustainability and community empowerment.

The Pratt Center leverages the professional skills of planners and architects to support community-based organizations in their efforts to improve neighborhood quality of life by advancing equitable and sustainable development through technical assistance, policy analysis, and advocacy.

Pratt Center Position on 2005 Transportation Bond Act:

Transportation systems have a significant impact on the way a region develops, and on the quality of life for its residents by determining access to housing locations and employment opportunities. The Pratt Center supports the concept of regional equity where all residents should have access to opportunities such as good jobs, real transportation choices, safe and stable housing, good education, quality parks and open space.

We also believe that the benefits and burdens of growth and change should be equitably shared across communities, and that all residents and communities should be involved as full and equal partners in public decision-making. The state's transportation network is critical to the health of the economy. Every \$1 invested in public transportation projects generate \$6 in local economic activity, and every \$1 billion invested in infrastructure creates 47,500 jobs. Investments in the public transit system keeps millions of cars off the roads, improving safety, easing congestion and limiting air pollution. New York City's public transit system has not been expanded in over 60 years despite significant demand for additional subway service along Second Avenue in Manhattan, into the Bronx & Brooklyn, as well as an Grand Central terminus for the Long Island Rail Road.

The New York metropolitan region is the largest consumer market in the nation, and yet New York City is the only major city in the United States that isn't connected to the nation's rail system. As a result, nearly all of our goods enter and leave the City by truck, and over 90% of those goods come in over the George Washington Bridge. Our current dependence on trucks congests the metropolitan region's roads, highways and bridges, resulting in high levels of air pollution and the highest asthma rates in the nation. Improvements to New York State's rail freight infrastructure will improve the efficiency of regional goods movement by taking trucks off of over-burdened roads and bridges, as well as promote sustainable economic development.

With respect to the issuing of bonds to improve the state's transportation infrastructure, borrowing funds against its general credit can be considered 'good' debt. However, we agree with the Citizen's Budget Commission that over the long term the State should develop a more fiscally responsible plan for funding transportation and infrastructure projects such as having user fees for highways, or, congestion pricing rather than relying solely on debt. Maintaining a state of good repair for the public transit system is paramount to preventing the deterioration of existing infrastructure. A balanced public transportation investment strategy is to first fix the system that we have by improving the safety and security for riders, and then prioritize expansion projects.

The Pratt Center does not support every project included in the 2005 Bond Act, but supports this measure to provide over \$1 billion in funds for the following 10 transportation projects that will improve the mobility, safety and quality of life for low and moderate-income communities within the New York metropolitan region:

- **East Side Access: \$450 Million.** The LIRR East Side Access project will provide Long Island and Queens commuters with a new rail link to Grand Central Terminal on the east side of Manhattan, saving riders up to 40 minutes each day on their round-trip commute, while alleviating pressure on the over-crowded Penn Station complex.
- **Second Avenue Subway: \$450 million.** The full length Second Avenue Subway will provide 400,000 daily New York City Transit customers with a one-seat ride from 125th Street to Lower Manhattan, relieving congestion on the Lexington Avenue Line, the most crowded subway line in the country. This funding will support Phase 1 of that effort.
- **Bronx River Greenway: \$19 million.** This \$43.3 million project will create a 'green oasis' in the densely populated area surrounding the Bronx River in the South Bronx between Westchester Avenue and East

Tremont Avenue, while providing a key link for the larger Bronx, New York City, and East Coast Greenway bicycle networks. It will improve the quality of life for New Yorkers by adding healthy transportation and recreation choices in a highly congested area.

- **Hunts Point Market Intermodal Capacity Improvements: \$6 million.** The Hunts Point Market generates about 11,000 truck trips per day and the Bond Act would fund intermodal capacity and handling improvements within the market to make the movement of goods more efficient.
- **Long Island Railroad Track & Bridge Rehabilitation: \$14.25 million.** Track improvements are proposed along the Bayridge, Fremont, Montauk Branches & Main Line to allow access for larger modern rail cars to the New York City metropolitan area. It is estimated that 6,000 truckloads of lumber, 8,000 truckloads of aggregates and 2,000 truckloads of newsprint could be diverted to rail annually as these branch lines attain the capacity to accommodate 286,000-pound rail cars.
- **Transit Clean Fuel Vehicle Initiative Purchases: \$25.1 million.** Westchester County, New York County, Nassau County. Statewide, this initiative will provide up to 250 alternative fuel buses to communities across New York State, helping to reduce emissions and enhancing air quality.
- **Nassau County Hempstead Wantagh State Parkway Bikeway: \$7.6 million.** This project will construct a 13.5-mile bikeway adjacent to the Wantagh State Parkway between Cedar Creek Park and the Long Island Expressway (LIE/I-495) in the Town of Hempstead, Nassau County.
- **Nassau & Suffolk Counties Long Island Railroad Capacity Improvements: \$2.25 million.** Upgrade and provide new turnouts to support small intermodal freight operations in Calverton, Suffolk County, and the Bethpage and the Village of Farmingdale in Oyster Bay, Nassau County.
- **Queens County Long Island Railroad Structural Improvements: \$11.25 million.** Upgrade bridges and other structures along the Bayridge Branch of the Long Island Railroad between Fresh Pond and the Bedford rail yard in Ridgewood to allow heavier, larger rail cars to access metropolitan New York City market areas.
- **Suffolk County Long Island Truck Rail Intermodal Facility: \$45.1 million.** This \$55.5 million project will construct Long Island's first modern intermodal freight facility in the Town of Islip, Suffolk County. The facility will help facilitate the delivery of goods by rail throughout Long Island, utilizing existing Long Island Railroad tracks. The project will provide the necessary highway infrastructure to allow truck access between the intermodal facility and the Long Island Expressway (Interstate 495). An additional \$45 million in State and Federal funding will provide for rail infrastructure improvements for the new facility.