

Transportation Alternatives Questionnaire

Question 1:

New York State spends fewer federal dollars on pedestrian and cyclist safety projects per capita than most other states. Ranking #44, NY spends 1% of federal funds (\$0.73 per capita) on pedestrian safety, while 22.5% of New York traffic fatalities are pedestrians (over 21,000).* Do you believe that New York State should make a greater investment in pedestrian and bicycle safety and if so, how?

*Michelle Ernst and Lilly Shoup, Dangerous by Design, available at http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous_by_design.pdf (2009).

Fair Share for Safety – I support dedicating the same proportion of road and highway funding for pedestrian and cyclist safety as the proportion of pedestrians killed in traffic accidents, about 25%. 21,000 deaths to pedestrians a year is inexcusable and preventable by retrofitting existing roads with sidewalks, cross-walks, crossing signals, traffic calming, speed bumps, multi-use paths, street trees, pedestrian refuge medians, protected bike lanes, and other safety measures.

Complete Streets – The dedicated funding for pedestrian and cyclist safety should focus on retrofitting existing roadways and designing new roadways for safe use by pedestrians and cyclists.

Safe Routes to Schools – The top priority for retrofitting roadways for pedestrian and cyclist safety should be for school children walking and cycling to and from school. These projects should be designed and funded first.

Walkable Communities – Designing and retrofitting our communities so homes, shops, schools, parks, and other neighborhood functions and amenities are within walking distance requires removing zoning from the town level to the county and metropolitan level, which I discuss in more detail under Question 5.

Question 2:

Drivers with suspended or revoked licenses are nearly 4 times more likely to be in a crash and are involved in 10% of all fatal crashes in New York State. Given that 75% of drivers with suspended licenses report that they continue to drive,* do you support stronger sanctions or policies to keep these drivers off the road? If so, please list specific ideas or legislation.

*Transportation Alternatives, Terminal Velocity: New York City's Speeding Epidemic. 2009

I support stronger sanctions for drivers who continue to drive after their licenses have been suspended or revoked.

I also support policies that will redesign city streets for slower speeds, particularly in New York City, and that will provide public transit alternatives, particularly outside of New York City.

Stronger Sanctions:

- 1. New York State should pass legislation empowering police to immediately impound the vehicle of anyone caught driving with a suspended or revoked license.**
- 2. Penalties against unlicensed drivers who injure or kill should be strengthened. The New York State Legislature should pass Assembly bill #5124, introduced by Assembly Member Lentol, which would make it a felony offense for any driver to commit two or more dangerous moving violations within the 18 months before an accident that results in an injury or fatality.**
- 3. New York City should create an Office of Road Safety to increase and target enforcement of moving violations by NYPD officers.**

Policies:

Many people drive too fast in New York City because the road designs and traffic patterns encourage it. Many people upstate continue to drive despite suspended or revoked licenses because there are poor or no public transportation alternatives and driving is the only way to meet work and family responsibilities. In addition to stronger enforcement and sanctions for moving violations to deter dangerous driving, we need to improve road designs for vehicle, pedestrian, and cyclist safety and to increase public transit alternatives.

In New York City:

- 1. Install speed enforcement cameras to increase enforcement of speed limits.**
- 2. Redesign streets for slower speeds with traffic calming measures.**
- 3. Compile comprehensive statistics on moving violations in order to prioritize enforcement and street redesign measures.**

New York outside of the New York City region:

- 1. Public Transportation Alternatives: Invest in a massive expansion of public transportation alternatives across New York State, including complete streets that enable safe pedestrian and cyclist transit, bus and light rail service, including inter-urban light rails for short to intermediate trips, and high-speed rail service between major cities.**
- 2. Walkable Communities: Designing and retrofitting our communities so homes, shops, schools, parks, and other neighborhood functions and amenities is a longer term project that requires changes in zoning and land use decision-making, which I discuss under question 5.**

Question 3:

Public transportation is integral to our region's economic and environmental health and, even with a recession, ridership is near record highs. Real estate analysis has indicated that proximity to rail transit increases property values, spurs local business growth and boosts local tax revenues.* However, cuts to state and local budgets have led to cuts in transit service and higher fares—forcing riders to pay more for less—and capital and operating needs of our system far outweigh the available resources. Beyond finding efficiencies within the regional and local transit agencies, if elected what will you do to ensure that transit is adequately funded?

*See Roderick B. Diaz, Booze Allen and Hamilton, Inc., Impacts of Rail Transit on Property Values, available at http://www.rtd-fastracks.com/media/uploads/nm/impacts_of_rail_transit_on_property_values.pdf, and Juliette Michaelson, Regional Plan Association, Transit Investment and Home Values, available at <http://www.rpa.org/2005/05/transit-investment-and-home-values.html>.

As immediate measures I support the following legislation to maintain operating budgets, service levels, and transit employment:

- 1. The state MTA Stimulus bill (S7433/A10345), introduced by Senator Perkins and Assembly Member Millman, which would direct the MTA to use 10% of over \$1.3 billion in stimulus grants for capital projects received from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).**
- 2. The federal Transit Flex spending bill (HR2746, Carnahan & Matsui/S3189, Brown), which would allow New York City to spend up to 30% of its capital funds for operating expenses.**
- 3. The Public Transportation Preservation Act (S3412), introduced by eight senators, which would deliver \$2 billion in emergency funding to transit systems nationwide, including over \$350 million in operating funds for the New York City metropolitan area.**

Beyond this immediate relief, the MTA needs a dedicated funding for operating expenses and a fully-funded capital plan. The riders need the service reliability and enhancement it provides. Workers need the construction and transit jobs.

We need a new funding source for transit in New York City. I support the congestion pricing plan developed by Ted Kheel and Charlie Komanoff to raise \$1.5 billion a year for the MTA while reducing or eliminating fares and increasing ridership. (See http://www.nnyn.org/kheelplan/kheel_komanoff_plan.html)

We also need increased, long-term dedicated transit funding from the federal government from gasoline and carbon taxes.

For federal transportation funding, the US tax on gasoline has been reduced to \$19 per 1000 miles driven, half of what it was in 1975 and the lowest it has ever been since the tax was instituted in 1929 in inflation-adjusted dollars. For immediate increased funding, the federal

gas tax, which is dedicated to transportation funding, should be raised. More of it should be spent on expanding mass transit and pedestrian and bicycle enhancements of roads, instead of roads and highways dedicated strictly to cars and trucks. Pending a federal gas tax increase, New York should increase its gasoline tax to help fund mass transit and highway maintenance.

A better and more equitable solution would be a carbon tax. It would tax fuels based on their carbon content. The revenues would be rebated to consumers on a per capita basis, with perhaps a portion of the revenues dedicated to investments in the efficient use of clean renewable energy, including mass transit. The tax would be escalated gradually, giving businesses and households predictable prices that will incentivize investments in energy conservation, efficiency, and renewables. Ideally a carbon tax should be harmonized internationally. Next best would be a federal carbon tax. In the meantime, New York State should implement a carbon tax, as British Columbia has done, to get a jump start on the conversion to clean energy and a world class system of convenient, low-fare mass transit and multi-use roadways throughout the state.

I oppose Wall Street's carbon pricing solution, cap and trade, which opens up a huge market of trillions of dollars in which Wall Street will make money off of fees, commissions, and derivatives. Cap and trade will create volatile carbon prices that make planning investments in energy conservation, efficiency, and renewables highly risky and uncertain, as the experience of the European carbon market has demonstrated.

Question 4:

The growth of freight and truck traffic is having an adverse impact on our communities -- safety, congestion, air pollution, wear and tear on our transportation routes. What would you do to address this issue, and would you support shifting more freight onto sustainable transportation modes like rail and barge?

For reasons of safety, reducing road maintenance costs, and energy efficiency, we should shift as much freight traffic to rails and barges as possible. This will require public investment. We should demand more federal investment in rail and canal systems and undertake investments in New York State's rail and canal systems by New York State. A publicly-controlled, state-owned bank is needed to make these and other needed investments in a sustainable green economic reconstruction of the state's economy.

In a study recently presented to the National Academy of Engineering, the Millennium Institute calculated that an investment of of \$250 billion to \$500 billion on improved rail infrastructure would get 83 percent of all long-haul trucks off the nation's highways by 2030. It would also create the capacity needed for high-speed passenger rail.

The study also found that if high-traffic rail lines were electrified and powered in part by renewable energy sources, that investment would reduce the nation's carbon emission by 39 percent and oil consumption by 15 percent.

As publicly traded companies, private rail companies are not building the new tracks, tunnels,

switchyards, and other infrastructure for this infrastructure improvement and expansion because Wall Street will not finance the investments. Wall Street is mainly interested in short term returns, not these kinds of long-term investments and payoffs. With the notable exception of Warren Buffet's big long-term investment in the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, the dominant Wall Street strategy is exemplified by the hedge funds that have tried to gain control of CSX in order to cut its spending on tracks and equipment in order to maximize short term returns. Railroads like CSX are starved for capital from Wall Street. Transportation companies like UPS that find rail cheaper and faster than trucking to move its freight and packages are calling for government investment to step in where private investment will not.

If government does not step up and invest in improving and expanding the railroads' overwhelmed infrastructure, it will pay anyway through the ever-increasing shipping demands on the highways and in environmental costs, from disease producing air pollution to global warming.

We should study all options for public investment and ownership. Public ownership would enable the government to take advantage of the full social value of railroad investment and regulation. If New York State owned its railroads, for example, it could do like Switzerland and require all trucks crossing their territory onto trains.

At the least, New York should push the federal government to invest in our rail and canal systems to increase the proportion freight that they carry. In the meantime, New York should establish a state bank to, among other investment needs, pull together investment consortia in public/private partnerships to enable capital starved carriers like CSX to improve their rail and canal infrastructure in New York State. The Commonwealth of Virginia, for example, is investing in a rail line to parallel Interstate 81 in order to take truck traffic off the interstate and reduce wear and tear on that roadway.

These public investments should prioritize electrified railways and locomotives, which are two and a half to three times more efficient than diesels, more powerful, cheaper to maintain, last longer, accelerate faster, and have much higher top speeds. Electric railroads are twenty times more fuel efficient than trucks.

In addition to investments by a state bank expecting a reasonable return on investment, public grants, like the federal highway grants, should also be part of the mix, since they would directly reduce the amount of money needed for highway construction and maintenance and provide many other economic and environmental benefits.

Among the services improved railroads could provide would be a revival of express mail and package services like the old high-speed Railway Post Office and the Railway Express Agency, which provided express delivery with sorting in the rail cars at speeds, prices, and energy efficiencies that are not matched today by carriers like FedEx and UPS, which ship express by air to hubs for sorting and further shipping. Another service should be auto trains, where drivers piggy back on rails for long distance travel.

The construction of the Erie Canal and its spurs in New York State were a key foundation to the state's economic development and should play a significant role in its future. The canal system spurred the development of New York City into the nation's largest port and made many upstate agricultural and industrial enterprises possible. Barges are even more fuel efficient than rails, releasing about 30 percent less carbon per ton-mile than diesel rails and 75 percent less than diesel trucks. While New York State Canal System is enjoying a revival as a recreational and historic resource after losing freight traffic to trucks and rails in the latter half of the 20th century, commercial shipping should remain a high priority and opportunities for infrastructure upgrades to increase commercial barge shipping should be studied.

Question 5:

In Pennsylvania, PennDOT is taking the lead in incorporating land use decisions with transportation needs through its Smart Transportation program, redefining the mission of the Department in the process. The program "seeks to encourage transportation projects that foster sustainable communities, reduce sprawl, encourage alternative modes of transportation and reduce vehicle miles traveled."* Achieving this broad mission means ensuring that the DOT designs projects that link land use and transportation choices, target limited resources to the right projects and appropriate locations, and seek maintenance of bridges and other infrastructure first. If elected, what, if anything, would you change to ensure that the New York State DOT coordinates transportation decisions with land use?

* see <http://www.smart-transportation.com/about.html>

The New York State DOT does not have the jurisdiction to make land use decisions. It must and should partner with local governments to encourage transportation decisions that develop walkable communities where homes, shops, schools, parks, and other neighborhood functions and amenities are within walking distance and easily accessible by public transit.

Because land use and zoning jurisdiction is now at the town and municipal level, tax jurisdiction competition for a larger taxable property tax base leads to sprawl development and discourages smart transportation policies and walkable communities. A 2003 Brookings Institute study, "Sprawl Without Growth: The Upstate Paradox," found that this system of land use planning and zoning made sprawl development in upstate New York among the highest in the nation.

In order for the New York State DOT to effectively partner with local communities for smart transportation policies and walkable communities, New York State must move land use planning authority from local municipalities to elected metropolitan/regional planning boards. That will enable communities to to end economically and environmentally destructive sprawl, to protect farms, green space, and environmental resources, to reduce intraregional inequities in housing, education and fiscal capacity, and to renew city, town and village centers with transit-linked, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods of mixed homes, shops, jobs, schools, parks, and civic buildings.

In addition to changing land use planning jurisdiction, the state should enact progressive tax reforms and revenue sharing at the state level in order to reduce tax jurisdiction competition

for property tax revenues at the local level. The State Finance Law says the state is supposed to share 8 percent of state revenues with counties and municipalities. But the legislature has annually exempted itself from this requirement in budgets for decades. Higher taxes on the very wealthy, including an end to rebating the Stock Transfer Tax, a 50 percent Bankers' Bonus Tax on their cash bonuses, and the more progressive personal income tax that prevailed before the 1980s in New York State, would provide the revenues needed meet the states revenue sharing obligation, as well as increased funding for transportation alternatives.

Question 6:

In New York, the Federal Highway Administration found 37% of the state's bridges to be deficient, and 54.8% of major roadway miles to be in less than good condition.* As road and bridge conditions continue to deteriorate, funding is becoming scarcer. If elected, how will you ensure that New York's bridges and other infrastructure are safe and properly maintained?

* FHWA, National Bridge Inventory, Deficient Bridges by State and Highway System, 2009. Roads: FHWA, Highway Statistics Series 2008, Table HM-64.

As I outlined in question 3, I favor increasing gasoline taxes back to their historic levels in real, inflation-adjusted terms, as well as a carbon tax and rebate system, with a some of the revenues going to infrastructure investment. We should push the federal government to enact these measures, but we should initiate them at the state level in the meantime. While I favor a higher priority on mass transit than roadway spending, we do need significant investments in existing road and bridge infrastructure and we need to raise the funds for that from taxes on the fuels that enable the use of this infrastructure.