



# Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

REGIONAL PLAN ASKS \$60 BILLION FOR TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION IN U.S.  
OVER 30 YEARS, RAISED FROM 2¢/GALLON GASOLINE TAX

New York Region Share Would Reconstruct Subway Stations, Complete  
Queens, Second Avenue Lines, Lift Ride Quality to Other Cities' Standards

Regional Plan Association told the National Transportation Policy Study Commission today that the nation would gain by raising transportation standards in New York City to standards other cities enjoy.

This means building Westway and also providing more space for subway riders, rebuilt stations, elimination of elevated lines and completion of the Second Avenue and Queens lines, already begun, the Association statement said.

The improvements, according to the Association, should be part of a national program of public transportation investment financed by gasoline taxes--2¢ a gallon for capital investment, which would provide \$60 billion over the next 30 years, and 2¢ a gallon for operating subsidies, which would equal all transit subsidies now being paid.

(MORE)

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Raising the transportation quality in New York to the standard that federal funds are achieving in other American cities is fully justified in cost-benefit ratios, the Association observed. By helping the City compete for jobs with the suburbs, it would also lead to national goals of keeping urban centers strong so jobs are accessible to all; stopping the trend toward segregating black and white, rich and poor, young and old; saving farmland, energy and water; and reducing total wastes in air and water.

Boris Pushkarev, Vice President of Regional Plan Association for Research and Planning, testified today before the Commission. The Association is a 50-year-old civic organization planning for the 20 million people living in the Tri-State Urban Region between New Haven and Trenton.

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February 23, 1978

Statement by

Boris S. Pushkarev

Vice-President, Research and Planning

Regional Plan Association

before the

National Transportation Policy Study Commission

Federal Building

Monday, February 27, 1978

New York City

My name is Boris Pushkarev. I represent the Regional Plan Association, a 50-year old civic organization concerned with the development of the tri-state, 31-county Region surrounding Manhattan. The Association has been closely allied with federal transportation policy ever since 1961. Our study for the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee that year contributed to Senator Williams' bill which provided subsidies for urban public transportation for the first time. More recently, we produced the book, Public Transportation and Land Use Policy, funded in part by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration. UMTA then asked us to go into greater detail on conditions appropriate to rail transit investment and downtown people movers--studies now in progress.

We have been asked to focus this testimony on the arguments favoring Westway, the controversial replacement for the defunct West Side Highway. To do so it is necessary to place those arguments in the context of the dominant issue that these hearings should focus on -- the future of America's cities and specifically today, on the future of New York and other cities of this Tri-State Urban Region.

Transportation decisions will determine, in large measure, whether cities become again the centers of American life or continue their trend toward becoming little more than reservations for the poor, the old and the

handicapped. Nearly two decades of Regional Plan research and public participation programs have convinced us that the trend must be turned toward re-centralizing key parts of the national economy in cities. This conclusion justifies, on the one hand, an end to expressways that open vacant land to scattered urban development, encouraging long trips by auto, and on the other hand, heavy investment in city transportation--both short highway connections and transit. This view of the urban future explains Regional Plan Association's support for both the Westway and for expansion and substantial upgrading of rail transit.

Opposition to Westway has taken two basic forms: (1) that Westway is like any other urban highway: i.e., it will divert riders from public transportation and increase the number of vehicles travelling in Manhattan; and (2) that Westway may be good, but transit should have a higher priority, ergo the City should turn in the Westway funds for transit improvements.

To the first argument, we would reply that vehicular gateways to Manhattan will not be enlarged; so we are not talking about a great expansion in West Side traffic, only expediting existing auto and truck traffic more safely, speedily and efficiently and diverting some traffic from local streets. Perhaps more importantly, Westway will provide an essential bypass around Manhattan when the City gets serious about implementing auto-free zones in the center of Manhattan, to reduce auto traffic where it hurts most, as Regional Plan recommended in 1971. Regional Plan has had a long record of supporting public transportation and limiting auto access to the Manhattan central business district. But we do not take the extreme position that the second largest downtown in America, Lower Manhattan, does not need an expressway link to Midtown and the rest of the Region when it serves a Region where the great majority of trips are by auto.

While 70 percent of the people entering Manhattan do so by public transit, the needs of the remaining 30 percent cannot be overlooked; Westway will help retain jobs in Manhattan by expediting auto access for those who require it or demand it and whose decisions to remain or to leave Manhattan are influenced by auto use.

However, if we are to build an urban freeway in this day and age it cannot be an intrusion, it must be a positive contribution to urban amenity and urban design, opening new opportunities for high-quality urban

development, making Manhattan a more attractive place to live as well as to work. Westway indeed provides an unprecedented opportunity to open the Hudson River waterfront to people for recreation, parks and housing, as Regional Plan advocated in its report The Lower Hudson in 1966. By providing a large waterfront park in the core of Manhattan, it goes a long way to compensate for all those takings of parkland that urban highways have perpetrated in New York in the past 30 years. It is the features of quality that make Westway much more than a highway.

Westway opponents do not deny the need for some road access along the West Side, but believe that all of the highway's urban development features should be sacrificed to gain some money for public transportation. We believe this is a false choice that will achieve neither end. Rudimentary traffic improvements on the West Side, without waterfront access, without parkland and without putting the bulk of the auto traffic underground will doom the West side to continued slow decay, foreclose significant development in the future and make the implementation of auto-free zones in the center of Manhattan difficult. The added funds for the subway system will not be enough to make a significant impact.

For the needs of the Region's rail system are great and deserve major national attention in their own right. The Tri-State New York Region still accounts for 40 percent of all passenger-miles of travel by public transportation in the nation; it accounts for almost 70 percent of the nation's travel by subways and commuter rail. If the nation is concerned about increasing travel by public transportation, it should be concerned about keeping jobs in Manhattan and improving the quality of the Region's transit system. The most cost-effective way to increase national ridership is to increase it here, in this Region: in some recent years, our annual loss in ridership has equalled the entire annual ridership on the BART system.

The service quality provided in this Region is far below the standards in the rest of the nation. Despite declines in patronage, trains remain overcrowded. Of the 21 rapid transit tracks feeding Manhattan, 70 percent provide less than 5 square feet of vehicle floorspace per passenger; in the rest of the country, only 24 percent of the 30 tracks entering the other eight downtowns with rail provide less than this standard. Service frequency is not commensurate with our level of transit use;

only three lines entering Manhattan operate anywhere near the number of trains they could during the peak hour; long waiting times in the off-hours are increasingly common. Between 1971 and 1976, the Transit Authority cut subway service by 22 percent as an economy measure. This has not made urban life easier.

Improvement requires more operating funds -- yet the Region has been consistently shortchanged. Our Federal Section 5 operating assistance in 1976 amounted to about 0.8 cents per passenger-mile, much less than half the national average. Since we are talking about national transportation policy, we might point out that this is one-tenth of the per passenger-mile subsidy that Amtrak riders received that year. Undoubtedly, interstate rail travel is important; but so is the support of the nation's premier downtown. The new formula for operating grants proposed by Secretary Adams is an improvement -- but it would still allocate only about 18 percent of the funds to our Region, which has 40 percent of the nation's transit travel.

The Region's needs for capital construction remain similarly unmet. On the subway system alone, we have 265 underground stations, many of them over 70 years old. Only two of them have been completely rebuilt, and half a dozen have received some structural improvement. One can easily visualize spending \$2 billion on improving the station environment alone, to bring it up to the standards of Washington, San Francisco or Atlanta. Then we still have 70 miles of blighting elevated lines, most of which will have to be replaced with modern routes in the coming decades, as a part of the City's reconstruction. This is worth several billion in addition to our current need to complete unfinished ongoing projects, such as the 63rd-Street--Southeast Queens line and the Second Avenue subway. Altogether, as we have previously testified before Congress, a capital outlay on the order of \$17 to \$20 billion in constant 1977 dollars for rail transit in the New York Region over the next three decades or so is not unreasonable, if judged by measures of cost-effectiveness applicable nationwide. It could amount to about one-third of the nationwide need for this purpose. It should be made clear that we are not asking for special treatment -- merely for an equitable application of nationwide standards. Many New Yorkers nowadays seem to feel that what is good for the nation is far too good for New York, and that we should resign ourselves to mediocrity. We do not believe that, from the national viewpoint, this is a statesmanlike outlook for the nation's largest urban region.

The policy principles outlined above should be applicable nationwide, altering the perspective of nationwide transportation policy. From the first transcontinental railroads to the interstate highway system, federal transportation policy has had a decisive effect on the nation's settlement. More often than not, the changes in land use reflected explicit national objectives: the settlement of the West in the mid-nineteenth century, the development of suburbs so as to accommodate urban growth at lower densities -- in the mid-twentieth century. With these objectives achieved -- some would say even over-achieved -- we stand once more at a turning point.

Despite lack of consensus in current debates, Regional Plan Association submits that a new settlement policy is implicit in four commitments the nation has made over the past decade: jobs for the underprivileged, equality of opportunity, energy conservation and environmental quality. The settlement policy these commitments spell is simple: channeling economic growth toward central cities, and putting the brakes on scattered, exurban development.

We must clearly recognize that cities are in the national interest -- whereas continued dispersed development is not. Putting jobs in urban centers means making them accessible to the urban unemployed, rather than to second wage-earners for whom a job is optional. Rerouting the mainstream of American life back through the central cities is essential if we are to have one society, rather than segregated enclaves of black and white, rich and poor, young and old; downtown is now pretty much the only place where all of them can meet. Putting new development back into urban areas will save resources: energy, water, farmland, natural open space and will accordingly reduce total emissions into the environment.

The main reason cities save energy is transportation. City residents take fewer trips than residents in spread development, and those they take are shorter and more likely to be on foot or by public transportation. Only substantial downtowns can support good public transportation on which people without automobiles can rely for mobility. By contrast, the lower the density of development -- the greater the need for travel -- specifically auto travel -- and the greater the energy consumption per person.

This is particularly true of gasoline consumption, which reaches a peak of some 700 gallons per person annually in sparsely settled states such as Wyoming, Nevada, or North and South Dakota, compared to only half that amount -- some 340 gallons -- in New York State or in the District of

Columbia. Within the New York Region, we find similar differences between low-density, exurban counties, such as Ocean in New Jersey, with 450 gallons per capita, compared to 150 in urban counties, such as Brooklyn and the Bronx.

Local concentrations of the wastes of combustion are higher in the urban counties, but what matters from the viewpoint of our global biosphere is also the total amount of foreign matter released into the environment; that amount is reduced when the population lives in a more clustered manner and thereby consumes fewer material resources.

Of course, changes in settlement will not achieve the kind of immediate reductions in resource use that can be attained by technological change -- such as small cars -- but they are the next step. This next step is urgent, because as population growth diminishes, opportunities to affect the growth pattern diminish also. Once built, a pattern of settlement commits a particular way of life and a particular pattern of resource use for nearly a century or more into the future. It is not at all clear that the present suburban pattern will survive the end of the gasoline era; cities will, if we let them live that long.

In the highway area, a national transportation policy in support of cities means an end to those projects which mainly open new land for development and create new long-distance travel. For example, Regional Plan Association has opposed the completion of Interstate 287 in Northern New Jersey, or the Rye-Oyster Bay Bridge across Long Island Sound on these grounds. In this Region, we have several examples of employers who moved out from Manhattan now seeking highway widening and new interchanges so that their suburban campus sites can work. Providing Federal aid for such projects is a clear example of an anti-urban policy, which negates federal aid for the central cities.

However, a policy of stopping highway projects that encourage urban dispersal does not mean an end to all new urban highways; some short links will be needed to enhance downtown access and to improve urban amenity. The Westway in Manhattan, discussed above, is an example.

For other than highway investment, the same principle applies nationally: shifting emphasis from those modes which serve or encourage dispersed development to those which support the clustering of activities. This means preference for rail freight over trucks; preference for air carrier over general aviation; and expanded investment in urban mass transit by rail.

Of course, the high-density modes alone cannot serve the pattern of land use that we have now evolved, and that means more emphasis on inter-modal coordination, clearly defining the role of feeder modes. For example, the present conflict between Amtrak and intercity buses would be removed, if intercity buses acted clearly as feeders to the more heavily travelled Amtrak routes, while lightly travelled routes reverted to buses, both with some through ticketing arrangements. Trailer-on-flatcar service demands similar attention, to remove unnecessary long-distance truck movement from highways.

The shift toward resource-conserving transportation does require capital and operating subsidies, and the last question is where this money should come from. If we recognize that urban dispersal is not only the cause, but also the consequence of excessive travel demand, we can say first that net subsidies from the general treasury to transportation as such are counterproductive, for they encourage more travel than would otherwise take place. The idea not of separate modal trust funds, but rather of a general transportation trust fund is reasonable; if such a fund is established, we can talk not about outside infusions of money into transportation, but rather of reallocating transportation revenues among modes. This will provide a system for raising the taxes on those modes of travel that encourage urban dispersal, thereby dampening the demand for travel and for dispersed settlement. This will also provide a system for financing the resource-conserving modes of travel.

To turn the powerful tide of present trends, incentives alone are not enough; disincentives are needed to discourage the trends that are destructive of our society in the long run. That means higher fuel taxes, as one example. Because of the predominance of automotive transportation, the revenue potential of such taxes is large: for example, a surcharge of only 2¢ a gallon would replace all existing federal, state and local subsidies for operating urban public transportation. These subsidies amount to roughly half the cost of operating public transportation. Another 2¢ a gallon would raise \$2 billion a year for capital investment in urban transit. Needless to say, any surcharge should be expressed as a percent of the gasoline price, so that it rises with inflation. If stated this way in constant dollars, \$2 billion a year over 30 years would raise the roughly \$60 billion that might be a reasonable national goal for urban rail transit, with about one-third of it in the Tri-State New York Region.