



For immediate release: June 22, 2012

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Albany Fails to Protect Dedicated Transit Funding, Again

With the close of the legislative session yesterday, Tri-State Transportation Campaign and a diverse group of advocates have expressed disappointment in Albany's failure to pass a transit funding lockbox bill, legislation that would make it more difficult to divert funds dedicated to public transit systems across New York State. Over the past several years, state diversions of dedicated transit funding have caused service cuts and increased fares for New Yorkers upstate and down.

The statewide transit lockbox bill, sponsored by Senator Marty Golden and Assemblyman Jim Brennan, would have strongly discouraged raids on dedicated transit funding by requiring a "diversion impact statement" whenever taxes and fees created to fund public transit were spent for other purposes. This statement would provide a detailed explanation of the impacts of diverting dedicated transit funds on transit safety, service, and capital construction—vital information for those that are making the decision to divert funds. The bill was supported by over 100 organizations, including transit advocacy, planning, and environmental groups, as well as AARP, transit labor unions, and construction industry groups.

"There is no choice: Albany must safeguard transit funds to protect the state's commuters, families, and manufacturers. A recession is the worst possible time for Albany to drain the coffers of the transit agencies that get people to work. And yet, in 2009 that is exactly what happened—legislators stole money dedicated to transit and spent it on other general fund needs," said Nadine Lemmon of Tri-State Transportation Campaign.

“The failure to pass the transit funding lockbox bill this year is a missed opportunity to strengthen transportation options for many in the transit-dependent community who have so few other alternatives,” said Peter B. Fleischer, executive director of Empire State Future.

There has never been a time when steady support for transit was more necessary than now: demand for transit is rising across the state, but transit agencies face rising operating costs and immense capital needs. Furthermore, irregular state operating assistance has forced New York’s transit systems to choose between investing in capital infrastructure or providing adequate service at affordable fares.

“This bill is about protecting jobs—the jobs of transit commuters, bus drivers, and manufacturers. If Albany is serious about economic development in this state, they need to protect dedicated transit funding from the madness of last-minute Albany budget deals,” stated Tom Carney, chairman of the New York State ATU Legislative Conference Board.

Tri-State thanks Senator Golden and Assemblyman Brennan for their efforts, and pledges to keep fighting to protect funds dedicated to transit.

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Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation system in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.