



7:01 AM
Half-mile back up at Union
toll plaza

7:29 AM
Half-mile backup on routes
1 & 9 at Tennele Road caused
by an accident

7:48 AM
Rubber necking causing
delays southbound around
exit 10 on the NJ Turnpike

7:57 AM
One lane closed on the upper level
of the GWB due to construction

TRAFFIC JAM

CAN WE SOLVE NEW JERSEY'S
CONGESTION PROBLEM?

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8:09 AM
Overturned tractor-trailer at
exit 10 on Route 287W

8:20 AM
Pulaski Skyway backed up in
both directions

8:39 AM
30-minute wait at inbound
Holland and Lincoln Tunnels

8:58 AM
78W is moving again after an ear-
lier oil spill near Hillside Avenue

IF YOU'RE HEADING to Newark Airport to catch a flight, traveling to the shore on the Garden State Parkway or even just going to the mall, the chances are high that you will be stuck in traffic here in New Jersey. Traffic congestion extends beyond the traditional weekday commuter peak hours to the midday, evening and weekend hours. Billions of dollars have been spent on new highway and transit improvements, yet the problem has grown noticeably worse over the past decade. Is the problem solvable and, if it is, what steps can state government, local government, businesses and private citizens take?

A report entitled "Mobility and the Costs of Congestion in New Jersey" was completed by NJIT's National Center for Transportation and Industrial Productivity (NCTIP) in February 2000. NCTIP is a federally funded national transportation research center. Its mission is to increase efficiency and productivity in private and public sector entities and industries through transportation improvements. This landmark study put the cost of congestion statewide at \$4.9 billion. Included in this cost are lost wages for commuters stuck in traffic, additional costs for truck operators for vehicles traveling at reduced speeds and wasted fuel for all vehicles idling on crowded roadways. A more recent update to the study, released by NCTIP earlier this year, found that the cost of congestion had grown significantly over the past few years to over \$7 billion. More significantly, the cost of congestion is expected to double over the next fifteen years if significant steps are not taken to address existing problems. These results should not surprise anyone who commutes on a regular basis in New Jersey.

The study quantified the cost of congestion, but, more importantly, it laid out a plan for addressing it. Congestion is caused by many factors, most notably, the desirability of New Jersey as a place to live, work and raise a family. More and more people have moved to our state, but the roadway and transit capacity has not kept up with the increases in demand. The plan discussed in the NJIT reports and outlined here will certainly not eliminate congestion, but it will help mitigate it as population and employment continue to grow.

The first step in the plan is dedicated funding for highway improvements. The importance of this step cannot be underestimated. Major roadway improvements on the horizon include the Driscoll (Garden State Parkway) and Edison (U.S. 9) Bridges crossing the Raritan River and the reconstruction of the Delaware Memorial Bridge (Interchange 1) toll plaza

on the New Jersey Turnpike. Each of these facilities operates at capacity for many hours throughout the weekday and weekend. The only solution is construction of additional capacity.

The second step in the plan is dedicated funding for transit improvements. There are areas in the state where the density of population and employment would support transit services if they were provided. One example is the Secaucus transfer station currently under construction. This new station will allow commuters from Bergen County and Passaic County to conveniently travel to jobs in Newark and other areas of Essex County and Middlesex County via rail, an option that simply does not exist today. The planned extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail to Hoboken and Bergen County will do the same for access to jobs on the Hudson County waterfront.

The third step in the plan is the use of advanced technology to create additional roadway and transit capacity without construction of new facilities. The installation of high-speed E-ZPass at several locations on the New Jersey Turnpike, variable message signs on our major roadways and interconnected traffic signal systems are all examples of using technology to address congestion.

The fourth step in the plan is increased employer support for programs that reduce congestion. State mandates for employer travel reduction programs have been rescinded, but the need for these programs remains. While it is true that some occupations, such as teaching, do not allow a four-day work week or a flexible schedule, many office workers could be provided the opportunity to work a flexible schedule. The key to the success of these programs is the level of support that is provided. Flexible hours only work when there are day care facilities with extended hours. Car pool programs work when there are guaranteed rides home for employees who must work late or leave early. Transit incentives only work when there are transit services available near both home and work.

The NJIT reports show that the costs of congestion are both real and quantifiable. We must now look at implementation of a congestion-reduction plan to offset these costs. We should focus our efforts on funding a comprehensive program that will simultaneously increase the supply of highway and transit capacity and reduce the demand for travel during peak periods. If such a plan could be implemented, we could begin to address the congestion problem in the state of New Jersey. ■