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## Transportation advocates are bracing for the worst

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Albany – Last month, the state's task force on transportation policy warned of "trouble ahead" in a report that called for "bold leadership "

This month, Gov George Pataki delivered a State of the State address that used the word "bold" some 20 times – but avoided the word "transportation "

This after Joe Boardman, his transportation commissioner, appointed that high-profile task force to canvass public opinion across the state in preparation for drafting a new master plan.

And this after the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which he largely controls, raised fares and tolls for the second time in less than two years. This after the New York State Thruway Authority, which he appoints, proposed raising tolls for the first time in 17 years.

Now, the governor is getting ready to present his 2005-06 budget and transportation advocates are bracing for the worst – another lost opportunity to rethink how Boardman's department and other agencies are funded

"The amount of money we're talking about is mind-boggling – it's tens of billions in just the next five years," said Pat Gilchrest, executive director of the Orange County Citizens Foundation and a member of the task force "And it's not going to be easy to get the Legislature's attention – not when they're preoccupied with education and Medicaid – even though there's a direct relationship between the condition of our transportation infrastructure and public safety and the economy "

Ross Pepe, who testified at task force hearings, lauded the report and encouraged commuters, municipalities and businesses to become advocates for its recommendations

"Transportation doesn't have a readily organized constituency like health care or education," said Pepe, president of the Construction Industry Council in Tarrytown "There's our industry – and I know our interest can be viewed as self-serving – and relatively few others Unless we get more people [to lobby the Legislature], I'm afraid nothing is going to change "

Peter Graves, a spokesman for the DOT, said the department is still analyzing how to incorporate the task force's recommendations into the master plan that will guide it through 2025 He added no decision has been made about whether the task force will be asked to revisit the communities where it held hearings to discuss its report, as originally planned

In many ways, the report echoes the dialogue that informed the MTA's own call for new sources of revenue as it debated the fare and toll increase. (A copy of the report can be downloaded at [www.utrc2.org/publications/](http://www.utrc2.org/publications/) )

According to the task force, the state has ignored transportation funding to the point that it doesn't have enough money to maintain systems and networks in a state of good repair – much less expand them Only a small amount of the taxes on gasoline before and after it gets to the pump – already among the highest in the country – is dedicated to transportation.

And most of that now goes to pay the debt service on the money the state borrows regularly to compensate for its failure to increase transportation funding through new or higher fees and taxes

Finally, Congress is a year-plus late in adopting a new multiyear transportation bill and there is every indication that new formulas for allocating the aid will hurt New York. Federal aid supplies more than half the Department of Transportation's budget

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