



## Plenty of money for economic stimulus, but where's the plan?

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Where are the shovel-ready projects on Staten Island?

\$787 billion. That's the essence of the federal economic stimulus plan - a **huge and largely unread document**.

The bottom-line number is a lot of money by anyone's measure, so apparently we'll spend our way out of this recession nightmare. The plan includes double-digit billions for energy system improvements, science and research, and for bolstering (but not necessarily remaking) the nation's wasteful and overpriced health-care system. There's big money set aside for mass-transportation projects and for stabilizing the nation's education system. All well and good, if a bit warm and fuzzy. There's only one thing the stimulus plan seems to be lacking and that is, alas ... a plan. Instead of moving forward with a grand, sweeping national policy such as the interstate highway system of the 1950s, we're going at it piecemeal and hoping to high heaven the approach works. It's as if Uncle Sam is standing at the curb waving fistfuls of cash and crying "Won't somebody please build something?"

### Keeping some things that have not worked



Associated PressThe economic stimulus plan has incentives for clean energy and money for improving the nation's power grid, but few of those projects are ready to go, so they won't be producing jobs anytime soon.

A good bit of the stimulus spending will simply extend existing tax credits - incentives intended to spur creation of energy efficiencies and better batteries and better windows and doors. Those incentives have been around for a while and so far have yet to send the economy soaring.

There's lots of money for funding research into climate change and biomedical puzzles such as dread diseases. Research is a necessary long-term investment in the future and ought to be encouraged by the government, but the number of researchers who will very soon be added to payrolls by this bill probably wouldn't fill the orchestra seats at the St. George Theatre.

There are billions set aside for extending broadband Internet coverage to underserved areas. That will be a boon to online merchants such as Amazon.com - provided the recipients of this new connectivity have jobs and money to spend online.

On and on goes the list. The money will apparently go to those who can persuade - through merit, perhaps, or more likely political connection - the money-givers to send funding their way.



Associated Press Using technology invented in the United States, this magnetically levitated train has been in commercial use in Shanghai, China, since 2004.

### **Small plans guarantee small results**



Associated Press The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York was frustrated by the small-thinking Washington establishment.

The late New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan once envisioned a magnetically levitated high-speed train system

connecting the Boston-to-Washington D.C. corridor. Moynihan's train would have used existing rights-of-way and employed who knows how many thousands of people to build, run and maintain it. Not only that, it would have transformed travel in the Northeast Corridor and showcased a technology invented in the United States and since ceded to other countries. Moynihan could get no traction on the idea. He was told "We don't do projects like that anymore." China has that maglev train today.

Perhaps, even in these worst of times since the Great Depression, we cannot muster the political will to do more on a national level than try to bail out the predatory bankers and myopic SUV manufacturers. It seems like a conundrum a Catch-22: You can't buy a car, let alone a house, if you don't have a job. Making sure the bankers and CEOs are employed won't likely get the cash registers ringing and assembly lines fired up anytime soon.

How about considering some serious job-generating projects closer to home? Where are the shovel-ready Staten Island infrastructure projects? Here are some possibilities:



Staten Island AdvanceA ship plies the

Kill van Kull, passing near the wreck of Staten Island's North Shore Railroad.

#### • **The North Shore Railroad**

The right-of-way exists. Restoration of the line, abandoned in the 1950s, has been studied and evaluated and deemed feasible time and again. A North Shore commuter line to the ferry would impart the same sort of economic vitality into communities along the route as the rail line to Tottenville has done. Every dollar spent on the North Shore line would be multiplied many times over in economic benefits.



Staten Island Advance Visitors to the Seaview Hospital campus on Staten Island examine one of the many sturdy but abandoned buildings that occupy the historic site.

#### • **Sea View Hospital**

The sprawling historic campus where tuberculosis was vanquished is a landmark but now largely derelict. The buildings on the grounds - effectively a gated community - were built with sunlight and airiness in mind. They would need serious updating, which is a perfect situation for a program intended to create employment. Those buildings not suitable for housing and theaters and public use could become offices and specialty businesses. To see the possibilities, visit the home of the Staten Island Ballet on the main **Sea View campus** or take a look at the Greenbelt Recreation Center, across Brielle Avenue behind the ball fields. If we did nothing more than repair the roofs of these irreplaceable buildings it would provide jobs galore and be money well spent.



Staten Island Advance A long-abandoned wooden barge decays in the mud and debris at the edge of the Kill van Kull off Staten Island's Port Richmond Avenue. The Island's North Shore waterfront is littered with abandoned hulks, rendering the shoreline

an inaccessible eyesore.

#### • **The North Shore waterfront**

Currently a sorry collection of abandoned buildings and **junkyards** and other shabby commercial sites, and derelict vessels, the shore of the Kill van Kull has enormous potential for desirable mixed-use development. By all means preserve the working-waterfront aspects of the place, but clean it up and make it more asset than eyesore. **Shooters' Island**, which played a role in America's War for Independence, deserves a better fate than to be a graveyard for discarded barges. And do we really need to keep that **giant salt pile** hard by the abandoned gypsum plant just down the block from the Snug Harbor Cultural Center? Drive along Richmond Terrace sometime and see the possibilities for yourself.



Sandy Hook PilotsA ship approaches the Bayonne Bridge. The largest ships plying the Kill van Kull between Staten Island and Bayonne, New Jersey, barely clear the bridge. Larger post-Panamax vessels now on the drawing boards will be blocked by Staten island's three Port Authority bridges.

#### • **Staten Island's three Port Authority bridges**

The Bayonne, Goethals and Outerbridge Crossing are all inadequate and should be replaced now. The Bayonne, youngest of the three and still with plenty of life left in it, is capable of carrying a passenger train, but it is too low to accommodate the coming post-Panamax generation of container ships that will drive the commerce flowing through our docklands. The other bridges, also too low for the big ships, are woefully inadequate for modern traffic needs. The bridges have throttled Staten Island's economic prospects. They were cited as a key reason the proposed NASCAR speedway - an enormous economic opportunity that would have located just south of the Goethals in one of Staten Island's more remote and unpopulated areas - was rejected. No project that might conceivably generate large amounts of automobile traffic stands much of a chance of approval here while those old bridges are Staten Island's link to the rest of the world. Replacing the bridges would provide jobs for a decade or more.

### Heading down that wrong road again

In the end, tax credits alone cannot kick-start the development of new technologies and tax cuts will not necessarily get the economy flowing again. We've fiddled with this approach for the past eight years and it has only dug the financial hole dramatically deeper. We need to produce value ... we need to build things. Infrastructure projects will do that, and the bigger they are the better.



Staten Island Advance Dr. Jonathan Peters, a finance professor at the College of Staten Island, says the economic recovery effort should focus on creating jobs and building things of lasting value.

In a recent story on the stimulus plan by the Staten Island Advance's Karen O'Shea, Jonathan Peters, associate finance professor at the College of Staten Island, expressed disappointment that more money isn't going to big infrastructure projects. Peters pointed to existing Staten Island Railway stations, most of which were built by the government during the Great Depression, as examples of smart public-works projects during tough economic times. "You created jobs and got something valuable when it was all said and done," he said.

We agree with that view. We cannot expect to succeed by throwing money in the air and hoping some of it lands on good projects. If America is so lacking in a vision for its future, so bereft of ideas and devoid of the imagination and determination and clear thinking it takes to deliberately change the course of our own history, then this costliest economic recovery effort is doomed, and deservedly so.

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