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Vying for attention

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COMMENT: There's certainly been a lot of chatter around New York about infrastructure and about the local port authority, but most of the press, traditional media and online coverage has not been about maritime things. The biggest headlines have been garnered by plans for a new \$4bn revamp of the 1960s vintage LaGuardia Airport (which, sensibly, would include a ferry link to the business areas of Manhattan), writes Barry Parker.

With high profile rail fails, a new initiative for modernising a 110-year-old railroad tunnel, pegged at over \$25bn, is gathering steam. Meantime, work on a new Tappan Zee Bridge span (20 miles north of downtown, over the Hudson), likely to cost more than \$5bn, continues. As a rail commuter, the \$25bn East Side Access project (for trains from Long Island) is also on my radar. Oh, and did I mention the discussions about fixing the 1950s era Bus Terminal near the Lincoln Tunnel with a price tag of \$11bn?

I could go on, but by now readers are probably asking, 'where's the maritime angle?'. That's exactly the point; I've counted up at least \$70bn of huge people-facing and non-maritime projects already vying (or soon to compete) for scarce capital, both monetary and political.

This one will at least indirectly benefit shipping: looking along the waterfront, a \$1.5bn project to replace the existing Goethals Bridge, around the back of Staten Island near the Howland Hook container terminal, has started. The benefit for shipping is that trucks will no longer have to navigate 1940s style lanes.

In the midst of all this, work on raising the Bayonne Bridge (to 215 feet), with a \$1.3bn price tag, continues. Since 2000, the port has spent just shy of \$3bn on "critical infrastructure assets" benefiting maritime cargo - dredging to 50 feet depth (where the port has contributed \$1.1bn) is mainly completed.

Adding up all these numbers tells me that there's a crying need for some maritime cheerleading, and politicking - at a loud pace. I know the old adage, 'cargo does not vote', but it needs to make some noise if maritime and cargo moving infrastructure can compete with rowdy bus and rail commuters, or motorists traversing the Hudson.

Maritime folks know the positive stories, the billions of dollars of economic benefits that reach far into the hinterland, hundreds of miles beyond the resurgent Red Hook (Brooklyn) or Bayonne (New Jersey side).

Visibility of the waterfront has grown tremendously in recent years with each new real estate development. Soon ferries will be integrated into New York City's mass transit plans. But there's much work - with many more billions of dollars at stake - still to be done. Let's make some noise, the louder, the better.



Commuter centric: ports have to vie with other transport forms for attention. Credit: Wally Gobetz

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