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Don't Mess With My Commute

By [Mitchell L. Moss](#) 1/15 11:39am



Heavy traffic exits the George Washington Bridge onto the Henry Hudson Parkway as morning commuters drive into Manhattan. (Photo by STAN HONDA/AFP/Getty Images)

For most Americans, there is nothing worse than disrupting their commute to work or delaying their child's bus trip to school.

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has a long record of disdain for the commuters in the northern part of the Garden State. Mr. Christie's base of support lies in southern and central New Jersey, not in the largely Democratic northern cities and suburbs that depend on tunnels and bridges that connect New Jersey to New York.

In fact, one of Christie's first gubernatorial decisions was to kill a massive, federally funded project to build a new rail tunnel from New Jersey to Manhattan—a project that would have

brought relief to the overcrowding at Penn Station and provided a long overdue alternative to the aging rail tunnels under the Hudson River.

There are growing economic ties between New York and New Jersey. New York City increasingly depends on workers from New Jersey and Pennsylvania; in fact, Long Island and Westchester suburbs are diminishing sources of Manhattan's work force. At the same time, financial firms based in Manhattan have built vital back offices and data centers in the Garden State, where office space is much cheaper than prime New York real estate.

The George Washington Bridge is the busiest motor vehicle bridge in the world. It connects all of New England and New York City with the rest of the nation. More than 100 million vehicles cross the bridge each year, far more than the 38 million that cross the Golden Gate Bridge annually.

New Jersey's governor is uniquely powerful. Until 2009, there was only one statewide elected official in New Jersey: the governor (and the addition of a lieutenant governor isn't much of a check on the governor's power, since they run as a ticket). Furthermore, the governor appoints the state's attorney general and the rest of the cabinet, as well as superior court judges and prosecutors for each of the state's 21 counties. So all public authority flows to and from the governor, and Mr. Christie has demonstrated that he thrives on the use and abuse of that power. But only in New Jersey would political revenge consist of causing traffic jams in the jurisdictions led by political opponents. If it were not for the *Bergen Record* and its brilliant editor, Martin Gottlieb, we might not know the full scope of Governor Christie's capacity for the vehicular equivalent of guerrilla warfare.

It is essential to recognize that New Jersey, like almost all of America with the notable exception of New York City, lives and dies on its highways. For decades, New Jersey Congressman James Howard was chairman of the House Public Works and Transportation Committee and delivered billions of highway dollars to the Garden State. Newark Liberty International Airport has more than 20 lanes of high-speed arterials that flow into the airport, while J.F.K. International Airport, with millions more travelers, depends on the outmoded Van Wyck Expressway and Belt Parkway.

New Jersey governors have a habit of getting in trouble when they are in motion. Former Governor Jim McGreevey was forced to have the State Democratic Party repay the government when he used the state helicopter for political purposes. And former Governor Jon Corzine was seriously injured when he was travelling 91 miles per hour, 26 miles above the speed limit, while being driven to a meeting with Don Imus and the Rutgers women's basketball team. More recently, Mr. Christie himself was criticized for taking a state helicopter to attend his son's baseball games. Voters get stuck in New Jersey traffic jams; governors do not.

Few people realize that New Jersey is a state without a center of gravity; it has no major city.

New Jersey is the home of professional football teams that prefer to have New York, not New Jersey, on their team nomenclature. In a few weeks, the Super Bowl will be played in the New

Jersey Meadowlands, yet almost all of the pregame parties and festivities will occur in New York City venues, not in the roadside restaurants of the Garden State.

New Jersey has a schizophrenic economic and political culture. The northern part is home to global firms such as Prudential, BMW, Samsung and ADP, while much of the southern part of the state lies below the Mason-Dixon line, where it produces some of the world's tastiest tomatoes and blueberries.

Governor Christie's policies, and those of his staff, are a striking contrast to those of his neighboring governor, Andrew Cuomo, who is building a new Tappan Zee Bridge to span the Hudson and investing in modern commuter rail facilities, while New Jersey blocks bridge traffic and lengthens commuting time.

Americans spend almost an hour per day in their cars, and many people have intense personal relationships with their automobiles. Advances in electric vehicles will soon make driving pollution free and relieve us of our dependence on foreign gas. Governor Christie may not realize it, but a Republican president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, launched the interstate highway system. The road to the White House is never free of potholes, but it certainly is foolish to create one of your own.

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