

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Connecticut Law: Traffic Reduction Mandate

The Connecticut Legislature has created a legal mandate for the reduction of traffic in the jammed I-95 corridor from Branford to Greenwich. The legislation directs ConnDOT to create an action plan to **reduce vehicle miles of travel (VMT) by five percent from current levels within a period of five years**. The goal and implementation plan will become part of ConnDOT's update of its 1993 Southwest Corridor Transportation Study. The bill had **heavy support** from the southwest Connecticut **business community**, and was signed into law by Governor Rowland.

The traffic relief charge was led by the CT Coastal Corridor Coalition, which earlier this year opposed transit cuts threatened by the proposed CT gas tax cut. The coalition of business, civic and environmental organizations (including CT Fund for the Environment, the Tri-State Campaign, the Business Council of Southwestern Connecticut and the Regional Plan Association) has publicized the link between economic health and the quality of the area's transportation network.

If effectively implemented, the new law could lead to an overall ten percent reduction, given that VMT is slated to grow about 1% per year. To achieve this goal, ConnDOT is to work with stakeholders, including Coalition members, local legislators, regional planning organizations, a ridesharing brokerage, and others. The bill requires that ConnDOT:

- Consider options for financing and maintaining transportation infrastructure and future capital improvements;
- Evaluate and recommend appropriate travel demand management strategies in the southwest corridor;
- Identify intrastate factors that may exacerbate or relieve the corridor's problems.
- Develop a plan to integrate intermodal and interregional opportunities into the corridor.

In considering any options to increase mobility, ConnDOT must consider environmental, safety and fiscal constraints. DOT has already devised an ambitious year-long schedule, with resulting **recommendations to be reported** to the General Assembly no later than **February 1, 1998**. Karyl Lee Hall, staff attorney for the Connecticut Fund for the Environment, said, "We are hopeful that this study will build on the Transportation Control Measure (TCM) evaluations done in 1994 and pricing policies that the Coalition studied this year."

MTA Capital Program Deal Will Restore Cuts in City Transit Service

The 3-year multi-billion dollar MTA capital program agreed to last night by the legislature, the MTA and Gov. Pataki will **restore \$15 million in transit service reductions** imposed over intense transit rider protest in late 1995. The service restorations will be in addition to \$11.1 million in bus service increases the NYC Transit Authority is planning for this fall and other significant increases being made now to accommodate Transit's new free bus-subway transfer policy. A plan to put the \$15 million into more frequent bus and subway service, and possibly into subway car cleaner positions that were eliminated in 1995, will be presented by the MTA by Sept. 30. The restoration, coming on the heels of new fare policies designed to increase transit use, is excellent news for subway and bus riders, the transit system and New York City more generally.

A number of conditions made up the political constellation from which the capital plan agreement emerged.

- The State Assembly, with Member Catherine Nolan as transit point person, refused to blink when the MTA began to rumble to the press that the legislature was jeopardizing the \$1.4 billion **subway car purchase** by withholding agreement on the capital plan. Nolan proposed a separate authorization for the subway car purchase that would de-couple that problem from other capital plan issues.
- The Transit Workers Union Local 100 was single-minded in pursuing the restoration, especially with the Assembly. The Assembly was made to feel that in a year when Albany was not crying fiscal crisis, some give-back to transit was essential.
- Governor Pataki was ready to make a deal because he wanted the MTA to **commit \$35 million to the Penn Station/Farley Post Office** project. This funding was included in the MTA package. The Governor may also have felt additional pressure to deliver for transit after the beating he took in NYC daily newspapers for claiming credit for the onset of free bus-subway transfers.

Transit watchers were hopeful today that the renewed transit service funding could be a harbinger of a greater commitment from the Pataki Administration to the MTA capital program in next year's budget. The capital program approved last night has far less state funding than previous programs, causing concern that the MTA

could be buried in an avalanche of debt early in the next decade. Clean transit advocates were also concerned that language on the MTA natural gas bus program was left out of the capital program agreement, but expressed confidence that earlier agreements with the MTA would lead to increased clean-fuel bus purchases by the agency during the next few years.

City (and State) Fail Rail

We reported several weeks ago (*MTR* #131) that Waste Management Inc. had won the NYC contract to export Bronx garbage, and that the operation was currently truck-borne. **Eighteen-wheelers take the trash** to the south, departing across the George Washington Bridge. A number of parties, including staff from City Hall and the Bronx Borough President's office, took us to task for mentioning the Manhattan Borough President's waste management report in that piece. That paper recommended that waste movement in NYC, including for export, be as water- and rail-based as possible. Our critics said Manhattan's marine transfer stations put it in a better position to carry out such a recommendation, while the Bronx' only (decrepit) marine transfer station is about to be shut down. Any talk of building a new marine transfer site, they said, raises intense opposition.

But this line of thinking only makes sense if one counts out existing and potential Bronx rail freight infrastructure. The Bronx has rail freight facilities that make marine transfer unnecessary. **Bronx trash for export should be loaded directly onto trains**, not added to the daily calamity on NYC and regional highways. But the trash transport issue is another piece of evidence of failed freight planning in New York City

The Waste Management facility from which the Bronx trash is now trucked **abuts the 77-acre Harlem River Rail Yard**. A rail spur runs from the yard into the Waste Management transfer station. "We would take stuff out by rail," according to Will Flower of Waste Management, but the Waste Management spur track was "physically cut" two years ago by the Galesi Group, the yard's leaseholder. Galesi leases space to a competing trash hauler, USA Waste, a possible factor in the blocked access. A spokesperson for NY State DOT, the agency that gave Galesi a 99-year lease on the Harlem River Yard in 1991, says Waste Management has "no legal [claim for] access to the Harlem River yard," though he said the agency "would prefer it if they get access." Even before Waste Management received the trash export contract, it was shipping up to 1,000 tons of recycled waste per day by rail from its South Bronx site. These shipments have now been **diverted to trucks**.

As part of the Galesi Group's leasehold agreement, the company is required to foster development of rail freight activity by keeping 28 of the yard's 77 acres in usable (for rail shipping) condition and allowing access to the yard by outside shippers. The lease is a part of the NY

Some Neighborhoods Beat 3-Fare Zones

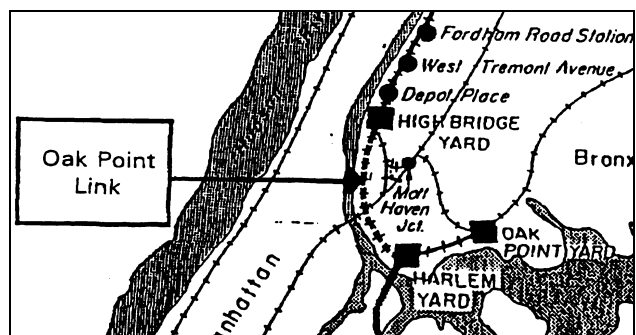
We reported last week that riders who need to take two buses to reach the subway are out of luck, but if you're a Q79 rider from Little Neck or an S60 regular near St. John's in Staten Island, you can get **three trips for one fare**. The *Little Neck Ledger* reports that the Q79 will issue a paper transfer for another bus, which, together with the MetroCard transfer, will get you from the Q79 to anywhere on the subway system for \$1.50. The S60 on Staten Island, which does not connect to rail transit, will also offer the privilege...as long as riders switch within two hours, 18 minutes (see below).

MTA and Transit Authority press offices refused comment on why these two routes and not others have gained the three-for-one bonus. Will there be a Pandora's box of new demands for MetroCard free transfers and other fare discounts if localized good deals become more widely known? But an MTA government relations officer told the Campaign that the Q79 policy was adopted to help **boost ridership on the line**.

The MTA told newspapers this week that the free transfer is actually good for two hours and 18 minutes. The extra time was added for riders who might have long trips prior to changing, like Staten Islanders who take transit to the ferry, then switch to transit in Manhattan.

State DOT's "Full Freight Access Program," whose goal is to reduce shipping costs in New York City and reduce truck dependence. But the Galesi actions have had the **opposite effect**.

In a February report, State Comptroller Carl McCall said NYSDOT had badly "bungled" the Freight Access Program. The lease agreement with Galesi and DOT's oversight of that agreement came in for especially sharp criticism — the report described it as equating a transfer of ownership. On the premise that Galesi has violated the terms of the lease by failing to develop the yard into a working freight facility, and is actively inhibiting movement of trains through the yard, McCall broached the issue of **renegotiating the Harlem River Rail Yard lease**. State DOT officials told McCall they had negotiated the best lease possible. The DOT should hand oversight of rail freight operations off to another agency. And Mayor Giuliani should demand that the Harlem River Rail Yard lease be renegotiated before he signs any more contracts for truck-based garbage export.



Metro North May Bid for Port Jervis Line

Metro North is very interested in purchasing the Port Jervis line. The single track line is used by 1,400 commuters on 16 trains each day. They now **share the track with 10 freight trains**. Metro North contracts with Conrail to use the tracks and with NJ Transit for passenger train operation. Under the proposed CSX/Norfolk Southern division of Conrail, the line will likely be transferred to Norfolk Southern. NS has said that it will work with Metro North to maintain passenger service, but Metro North would like more control. Buying the line would allow Metro North to upgrade it and have more say in operations decisions. How the arrangement might impact freight operations is not known. However, nothing will occur for some time: the Surface Transportation Board has a 350 day approval period for the Conrail deal. *Times Herald Record*

Going North

Reflecting strong suburban job growth, and spurred by fare incentives, the increase in Metro-North Railroad

reverse commuting continues without let-up. Many riders make the run from the Bronx to points north, including Stamford, Rye and White Plains. The railroad loses nothing on the discounts, since the trains must travel north to pick up southbound commuters. The incentives have led to a **14% increase over the past year** in ridership between Fordham and White Plains, according to published reports. Other incentives include an express Grand Central to Rye run specifically for MasterCard employees, and shuttle buses at the White Plains station that take workers to office parks on Westchester Ave.

Commuters now take about 3.1 million rides from Grand Central or the Bronx to the suburbs on Metro North trains.

In other suburb-suburb travel, the Bee-Line Route 77, which plys the Taconic Parkway between White Plains and northern Westchester, recently received a \$100,000 grant from New York State. The money will allow the route, on which ridership is 16,000 and is projected to grow to 22,000, to operate for a second year.

Around the Region



Foot-Friendly Grand Central Pedestrian access to Grand Central Terminal will improve when several new north exits open, shortening some walking trips by as much as 12 minutes. The new passageways, one carved out of an old baggage tunnel, will go as far north as 48th St., with the highest foot traffic expected at a 47 St. and Madison Avenue exit. The new passages are scheduled to open in September 1998. *Reporter Dispatch*

Tappan Zee Bike Trial? The NY Thruway Dept. may close a lane or two on the Tappan Zee bridge one Sunday this fall. The move could be a test for a policy like the summer Sundays traffic closure of the Bronx River Parkway for cyclists and others. Much of the effort to open the bridge to bikes has been that of Paul Feiner, Greenburgh Supervisor and bicycle advocate. *Rockland Journal-News*

Sprawl Denizens Demand Rail Hard-core commuters who make the 3-hour trek to New York by car have formed the Penn-Jersey Rail Coalition to promote revival of the Lackawanna Cutoff, a 26-mile line that runs across New Jersey's Warren and Sussex counties from Port Morris to the Delaware River. The effort to revive the line is being led by the Morris County Transportation Dept., which wants to get the line running by 2003. If the line is re-opened, commuters will be able to travel from Scranton through Lackawanna and Monroe counties in Pennsylvania to Hoboken and the Secaucus Transfer station. Currently, there are no tracks in the right of way – they were torn up in 1978. *Star-Ledger*

A Small Step for Clean Transit At its June Board meeting, NJ Transit awarded a contract for purchase of 50 compressed natural gas cruiser buses to Motor Coach Industries (MCI) of Winnipeg. The \$24.5 million contract includes \$746,000 trade-in credit for 40 old cruiser buses and \$996,650 in spare parts to support the CNG vehicles. The new buses will operate on Route 9 between Ocean County and NYC. In addition, a \$7.3 million contract was awarded for design and construction of a new 7,000 square foot facility adjacent to the Howell Garage in Monmouth County. The first cruiser will be delivered in the summer of 1998. The remaining 49 buses will be delivered through March 1999.

New on the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site:

- **How Does Your Subway Line Rate? A State of the Subways Report from the Straphangers Campaign**

- **Speeder City Transportation Alternatives documents non-existent traffic law enforcement on NYC streets.**

<http://www.tstc.org>

Transportation Connection Missing from NJ Rule Re-write

After two years of deliberation, New Jersey's Land Use, Infrastructure and Environment (LUIE) project — a joint project of the DEP, DOT and Dept. of Community Affairs (DCA) — is finally coming to a close. The project's aim was to **streamline the NJ regulatory process** regarding land use and infrastructure decisions. Its encompassing look at regulations held some promise that the mutual impacts of transportation investments and land use development would be recognized and better integrated than at present.

The LUIE Steering Committee will make final recommendations Weds, July 16 in Princeton, and want public response. Many of the 93 recommendations require changes in the Municipal Land Use Law.

The LUIE report will contain strong recommendations to require various levels of government to **integrate functional plans and capital improvement programs**. County governments would play the primary coordinating role. Unfortunately, there is no descriptive detail on how a "consistency" determination would be made, or who would make it.

Overall, LUIE did not focus on achieving good multi-modal transportation and land planning nearly as much it did on streamlining environmental permit and land use review procedures. In fact, one "good planning" scenario in the LUIE report describes a **new highway construction project winning approval over the objections of the municipality** in which it's to be sited. Aside from the requirement for adoption of "consistent" plans, LUIE offers little with respect to the need to integrate transportation and land use planning in rational ways. With few guiding principles or goals in either area articulated by NJ agencies or regional planning bodies, it is unclear what plans would be consistent with.

LUIE is proposes to introduce "decentralization" of development and environmental permit review authority. This means that counties and municipalities would have authority, if the recommendation are implemented, to grant or deny permits, including freshwater wetlands, highway access and other important permits.

For instance, DOT considers about 700 highway access permits each year, according to a regulatory code under which permit reviewers consider whether a "curb cut" — an entrance onto a highway, usually for a new development — will induce more traffic, unsafe access/egress, etc. Yet driveway access is essential for a development's shoppers, residents or employees to access the site. **Municipalities**, whose governing body may **want tax ratables from new development**, may not be able to fairly decide whether driveway access is suitable. DOT is supposed to have an overview of the corridor, while municipalities need not look beyond their

borders. DOT appears to agree that review authority might be appropriate at the county level for highway access permits, but not at the municipal level. It is unclear what other types of authority DOT or NJ Transit might cede to the decentralization impulse. Could South Brunswick deny a wetlands permit to the Turnpike Authority for construction of Route 92? Could Montclair stop the rail connection? Decentralization without clear transportation policy priorities and a much stronger State Plan framework for land use decision-making could be a recipe for paralysis.

Job Notice

Transportation Alternatives is seeking an organizer and policy advocate to promote community based traffic calming strategies and other improvements to New York City's walking and bicycling environments. Mobilize volunteer advocates and represent T.A.'s positions to public officials, community groups and the media. Strong self-motivation, commitment to the issues and excellent speaking and writing skills required. Salary \$26-\$33k with HMO coverage and 3 weeks vacation. Mail or fax cover letter to Transportation Alternatives, 115 West 30th Street, #1207, NYC 10001 fax 212-629-8334.

CALENDAR

JULY 16 8:30AM The Land Use, Infrastructure and the Environment Project Conference (see article at left). At David Sarnoff Research Center, 201 Washington Rd., Princeton NJ. To register, call 609-292-7156, fax: 609-292-3292 or e-mail: newcomb_c@tre.state.nj.us by July 11.

JULY 17 NOON Metro North Commuter Council Meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 7th Fl. Conference Room. Info: 212-878-7087.

JULY 23 (tentative date) NJ State Planning Commission Revising the NJ State Plan. Call 609-292-7156 to confirm date, place, topics.

SEPT 2-6 1997 National Pedestrian Conference, Washington DC. Register by 8/15 to The Campaign to Make America Walkable, 1506 21 St. NW, Ste. 200, Washington DC 20036 or fax 202-463-6625. Full conference fee: \$350; One Day: \$120. Info: 202-463-6622.

SEPT 4 City Council Task Force on Regional Planning meeting, Gifford Miller, Chair. Call 212-788-6873 for time and place.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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