

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Other Airport Access Plan Moves Along

Port Authority planning for ferry service from Manhattan's East Side to LaGuardia Airport has proceeded quietly throughout recent turmoil over the JFK-Jamaica light rail line. Quietly, that is, unless you live along Flushing Bay. Residents there have been planning a waterfront walkway whose view would be obstructed by the new airport ferry terminal. They also say LaGuardia structures in the bay inhibit natural circulation of tidal waters. The PA says it has adjusted plans in response to concerns, but isn't going to drop ferry terminal plans. **The ferry service will cost \$55-60 million** to implement but is only expected to **carry 1,200 people** per day. The PA now says the boat should be running by fall of next year. The PA told *Newsday* that 93% of LaGuardia's 69,000 daily passengers now take cars, cabs and limos to reach the airport. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is considering comments on the project.

Bang for the Buck?

NYC Transit's M60 bus, which runs express over the Triborough Bridge between LaGuardia Airport and bus stops on 125th Street and the Upper West Side (intersecting many Manhattan subway lines), probably costs between \$2.5-\$4 million to run per year in operating costs and capital depreciation.

For the cost of its planned east side airport ferry (\$55-60 million), **the Port Authority could pay airport travelers** to ride NYC Transit to the airport until a LaGuardia-Manhattan rail link is built.

\$60 million would cover the M60's costs for seven years and leave enough to hand out over 5 million \$6 Metrocards to passengers debarking at LaGuardia. If marketed, such a deal would probably win more than 1200 new riders per day, and encourage subsequent transit trips.

More Math

Sources at the MTA say the 11-for-the-price-of-10 NYC Transit Metrocard fare discount slated to begin in January, 1998 will not be a static deal for a single, prescribed number of fares. Rather, **the discount rate will apply to all fare purchases** of \$15 or more. Each fare in such a bulk purchase will cost \$1.36, rather than \$1.50. So, for \$20, you will get 14 rides and Metrocard change (almost 15 rides), where 14 rides with tokens costs \$21 even. The discount favors those more able to buy multiple fares. How about just reducing the fare?

Want Port Study? Take Your Pick

Whether the universe began with a Big Study is still an open question, but it seems any renaissance of the NY/NJ port will require a slew of them. After years of planning vacuum, agencies in the region are finally starting to think about the future of the Port of New York and New Jersey. Now, there's so much thinking that it's difficult to see how the agencies will avoid falling all over each other. New York City EDC and the Port Authority have released **separate requests** for proposals in recent weeks for analysis of opportunities to restore and expand the Port. Both have an eye towards a "hub" port that will **dominate the East Coast shipping market**. Responses to both are due in October.

The PA project will consider development alternatives for Newark/Elizabeth, Bayonne, Staten Island and Brooklyn and will produce a small number of candidate port development alternatives for a Harbor Master Plan. This analysis could be a much-needed complement to the Army Corps of Engineers' "Harbor Navigation Feasibility Study," begun early in the year. **The Corps' study**, designed to develop recommendations for a program of channel deepening in the Harbor, would have been a **futile exercise** had the PA not launched its own effort. The Corps has no authority to determine where port investment should occur. (See "Another Big Study," *MTR* #115).

EDC's request for proposals contains far more detail than the PA's and is broader in scope. Emerging technologies and markets, port facilities' impacts on local communities, and uses of dredged materials, all highlighted by EDC, are missing from the PA document. The EDC project is limited to New York sites, however, so it is unclear whether the two projects will lead to **mutually supportive or conflicting visions** for the Port. Chris Ward of the PA says that its effort is designed to fill in the interstices between the EDC and the Corps studies, creating a unifying whole.

New Jersey, in the meantime, has failed to advance any plans for Port expansion, despite the prevalent view that Port Newark/Elizabeth cannot come close to meeting the demands that new generation of ships and expanding container markets will make. (Some NJ port interests are belatedly showing an interest in Bayonne's soon-to-close naval base, one of New Jersey's premier locations for a deep water port — see *MTR*'s #144 and #145.) New Jersey has thus far declined to press for

significant improvements in cross-Harbor freight movement options, without which stepped-up Port activity will provoke an increase in the already-unsustainable levels of urban truck traffic. While New York's proposal for a Brooklyn-Jersey freight tunnel may warrant some skepticism, it is troubling that **NJ has declined** to support **NY's pitch for expanded car float** operations, for example, in the context of the breakup of Conrail.

Yet if the two states fail to come together on port planning, it is not only New Jersey that will miss the boat. A major Brooklyn port is a non-starter without the help of New Jersey. On the other hand, based on projections of market growth, a **port in Brooklyn could coexist**, not only with a **Port Newark/Elizabeth** operating at or above current levels, but with a **deep water port in Jersey City/Bayonne** as well. In such a scenario, more cargo could dock on the side of the Harbor

for which it is ultimately headed.

Still, if the current discourse over the region's airports is any measure, any bi-state port planning effort will have tough political shoals to navigate. The Tri-State Campaign will spotlight the high and low points of the three studies as they develop.



Containers stacked at Port Newark

MTA Loses Rockaway Revenue

A Sept. 30 MTA board action removed the Cross Bay Bridge toll for Rockaway residents as of January 1, 1998. The bridge, which connects Queens with the Rockaway Peninsula, has long been a point of contention among politicians and residents. The latter said it was the only **"intra-borough" toll** in the city, as if that made it more significant than, say, the Marine Park Bridge toll between the Rockaways and Brooklyn.

Because of MTA bond covenants, **the tolls have not actually been suspended**. Instead, Rockaway drivers will get a special EZ-Pass that deducts the cost of the toll from the MTA's "consolidated service budget." This budget is fueled by the "mortgage recording tax" in the 12 downstate counties, and is used for MTA expenses apart from the budgets of MTA operating agencies such as the Transit Authority or MTA Bridges and Tunnels. These revenues are good for about \$70 million per year. Rockaway drivers without an EZ-Pass will still have to fork up \$1.75 cash.

The MTA's revenue loss will be \$1.5-\$2.5 million per

year, which will be made up via "cheaper paper clips," according to an MTA spokesperson. But the toll elimination sets a **"dangerous precedent"** for bigger tolls that the transit system relies on, according to the Straphangers Campaign's Gene Russianoff. Staten Islanders, for instance, whose political influence is strong with Governor Pataki and Mayor Giuliani, have an insatiable appetite for toll breaks. Toll elimination on bigger bridges would fly in the face of congestion-easing incentive tolling proposals and put a serious dent in transit budgets.

Traffic Zeitgeist: Straight on Red

In perhaps the most pathetic testimony we've seen yet to growing chaos on our streets, a Sept. 23 Hartford *Courant* editorial called on motorists to respect traffic signals and stop at red lights. Productively, the paper called for more widespread use of red light cameras to strengthen enforcement of basic traffic rules.

Pedestrians Need Infrastructure Too

New Jersey Transportation Commissioner John Haley has agreed to allocate \$1 million from New Jersey's transportation local aid funds for towns to install pedestrian safety infrastructure. This is a decent start, but the effectiveness of the money will be put to the real test if it can be translated into a truly safer walking environment.

A Florida newspaper we glanced at recently is instructive in the **real costs of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure**. This year, the city of West Palm Beach, no affluent enclave (pop. 67,600), has slated \$6.5 million for sidewalk work and over \$2 million for traffic calming.

The Tri-State Campaign's *Walking Away* report, released last week (see *MTR* 145, or www.tstc.org), found that of \$60 million in federal safety funds spent in New Jersey since 1992, less than 2% (\$1,102,567) was spent on pedestrian infrastructure. Pedestrians are 22% of traffic fatalities in the state.

Fixing What We've Got

Bronx economic development interests announced this month that they had signed a letter of intent with the MTA for long-term lease of the air rights over the Metro-North Harlem Line tracks between 144th and 149th Streets. The site would feature an ambitious construction project including residential, office and retail space, according to the developers.

But whether the project and any consequent revenue is ever realized, the MTA should identify another priority in the South Bronx — **renovation of Metro-North's Melrose Station**. Presently, whether and how to fix the station is the subject of a \$150,000 study being undertaken by Metro-North at Bronx Borough President Ferrer's request. Renewing the station would dovetail with a community-based development effort planned for a 35-block area nearby, as well as plans for new police academy and court buildings in the area.

Like most of the **regional rail stations** in the Bronx

and Queens, Melrose Station is a **step-child to Metro-North**. Only 11 trains stop there each day, few at normal times for commuting in or out of the city. In the past few years, construction work unrelated to the station has been allowed to obliterate the station's 161st Street entrance and narrow and darken the platform. Community leaders say that as a result, the station is hard to locate and is becoming unknown. Jolanda Garcia of Nos Quedamos/We Stay says it's possible to restore the 161st Street entrances, but adds that a real renewal of the station will have to include more frequent train service and a better environment for pedestrians around the station.

Metro-North's feasibility study is supposed to conclude in May, 1998. A public meeting of the Melrose Station Citizen's Advisory Committee is scheduled for **October 29** at 4PM at the Bronx Borough President's office, 198 E. 161 Street.

NYC Transpo Chief Goes Ballistic – Again

The *NY Times* called last weekend for a "real" mayoral campaign that would, among other things, discuss real transportation problems like traffic congestion, subway crowding, urban highways and truck dependence.

New Yorkers need not look to the City's transportation agency for answers in any of these areas. The mere mention of the **long term structural problems** facing the transportation system in New York apparently sends the NYC DOT's leadership into a tailspin. New Yorkers have cause yet again to wonder what was going on with the DOT and its Commissioner, Christopher Lynn, in the wake of the abrupt departure last week of Ed Seeley, a top department analyst.

As reported in the *New York Times*, **Lynn erupted** over a recent Seeley report confirming the need to expand transit capacity in NYC to handle future job growth. Lynn called the report a "fake" and derided Seeley, a 26-year department veteran and renowned policy analyst, as "essentially a clerk" with a "little hobby" of taking things off people's desks and turning them into reports. Seeley retired the next day.

The episode continues Lynn's pattern of rashness and abuse. At a City Planning brown-bag luncheon last year, Lynn called Carroll Gardens Association president Buddy Scotto "stupid" for asking DOT to evaluate the Gowanus tunnel plan (NY State DOT is now doing the analysis). In 1996, Lynn sacrificed the Queensboro Bridge walking and bike path to Upper East Side residents enraged by the impacts of an **impetuous traffic routing plan** he directed.

Ironically, Seeley's report, "The Transportation Implications of Manhattan's Job Growth Potential," was low-key. Far more provocative was his 1991 study proposing that DOT finance infrastructure maintenance through tolls on the City's East and Harlem River bridges. Seeley's departure leaves NYC DOT even more clueless and adrift in an age of transportation change.

L.I.E. HOV — Usage Hits Ceiling ?

NY State DOT traffic volume statistics for the Long Island Expressway high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes show some growth since the lanes opened in 1994, but the numbers are almost flat over the last year. For instance, vehicle volumes measured by the DOT on the L.I.E. at Route 110 for the months of June and July rose 20% in the morning peak from 1994 to 1997 and 14% in the evening peak over the same period. But vehicles using the lanes grew only half a percentage point in the morning and 1% in the evening from June/July 1996 to June/July of this year.

Evening peak period volumes in the lanes remain significantly higher than morning peak use. For instance, the June/July 1997 average evening volume was 1,019 vehicles, while morning volume was only 834 — 18% higher in the evening. This gap has persisted throughout the life of the lanes. It may suggest that organized commuter carpools are joined in late afternoon by significant numbers of incidental HOV's. As reports indicated in previous years, August evenings continued to be the most popular HOV times in 1996 — families on beach trips or other vacation activities boost volume in the lane.

No Good News from NYC

We wanted to write a good news piece about the new **traffic calming speed humps** popping up in New York City neighborhoods. But the NYC DOT press office couldn't be bothered to speak with us and the program staff is too cowed to talk with us even off the record. So we can't tell you whether the recent spate of hump construction is an election thing, if such installations are becoming routine, or if the DOT leadership even knows it's happening.



Electric Cars Struggle for Niche

NJ Transit has purchased 21 electric cars and is planning to buy 9 more. They will be used in a 3-year test of the "station car" concept — the cars are reserved by "reverse" city-suburb commuters, who drive them from commuter rail stops like Princeton Junction to suburban office park workplaces. This market has been targeted by electric car proponents trying to figure out **uses for the low-range electric vehicles** nearing the market. The Solectrias purchased by NJT can go about 50 miles at 45 mph before needing a lengthy re-charge. Station cars re-charge during the work day. The list of employers participating in the NJ program was unknown as of mid-September. NJT hopes to boost its reverse-commute market with programs like station cars.

A station car test that Metro-North Railroad and the NY Power Authority launched in 1995 is having limited

success. The pilot program, which is to run through next year, was designed to allow carpooling from the North White Plains station to upper Westchester office sites.

But according to the Power Authority's Maura Fitzpatrick, only five of the 12 station car recharging spaces are now in use. The program has attracted some IBM employees — currently, 14 people use IBM's five station cars to carpool between the train station and IBM facilities in Yorktown Heights and Hawthorne. But it has not taken hold at other companies. **Westchester County pulled out** of the program two months ago because its electric car wasn't being used enough.

Fitzpatrick says the biggest challenge has been getting people to carpool, since many workers at IBM have irregular schedules. At least two take a car at any one time for the 35 mile round trip.

IBM installed charging equipment at its own expense at Croton-Harmon station to increase the cars' flexibility. However, the Power Authority has no other plans to spur additional demand or otherwise expand the program.

West Trenton Look Launched

US DOT this week awarded NJTransit a \$496,511 grant to study reviving the West Trenton commuter rail line, which runs 21.6 miles from West Trenton to Bound Brook through Somerset and Mercer Counties. The state will make up the remainder of the money for the \$900,000 study. The line's revival is championed by **Rep. Bob Franks**.

The line closed in 1982 due to lack of ridership. High population growth has taken place in the area since the line closed, putting pressure on area roads such as Route 1. The line's connection with the Raritan Valley line would provide an alternative to the Northeast Corridor.

The line needs approximately **\$16 million worth of repair** to the trackbed, station platforms and parking areas. But stumbling blocks remain. Some transit experts say population density still will not support the line, and that **NJDOT should focus on bigger priorities** like its trans-Hudson capacity problems and the West Shore Line. Moreover, West Trenton tracks are used by Conrail freight trains, and an agreement will need to be struck before passenger trains can roll; the project may also have to compete for funds with the Trenton-Camden light rail line NJDOT is also pursuing.

CALENDAR

OCT 16 NOON Metro-North Commuter Council meeting, at MTA Hq. 347 Madison Ave., NY, 7 Fl. Conf. Rm., 878-7087

OCT 16 1:15PM Metro Planning Forum on Defining the Regional Planning Agenda. At NYMTC, 1 WTC, Rm. 82 East, NY. 212-938-3300

Gore Blows Chance to Limit Wilderness Road Building

An amendment to cut funds for logging road construction in U.S. wilderness areas from the Senate's Interior Appropriations bill was defeated last month when Vice President Al Gore missed a chance to cast a tie-breaker vote. Gore was here in New York City, fundraising. Roads are the heralds of future sprawl into undeveloped areas. Forest Service road construction in wild areas is a huge factor in loss of natural habitat, contributes significantly to erosion and is a heavy-duty taxpayer subsidy to

OCT 17 8:30AM City Club Friday Forums 1997, Breakfast with Joseph Boardman, Commissioner, NY State DOT on future infrastructure needs. At NYNEX (Bell Atlantic) Headquarters, 1095 Ave. of the Americas (at 42 St.) Members, \$12.50, Non-Members, \$15. Info: 212-664-0954, fax: 212-664-0937

OCT 18 7PM Skylands Clean 10th Anniversary Pasta Dinner Celebration. \$17 201-839-8014 for details.

OCT 20 5PM Public Hearing on proposed Metro-North/LIRR fare changes. MTA HQ, 347 Madison Ave., 5th Fl. Bd. Rm., New York, 212-878-7483 to register to speak.

OCT 22 12:30PM RPA Brown-Bag Lunch on the Gowanus Tunnel, 61 Broadway, 11 Fl. 212-785-8000 x309 for reservations.

OCT 22 5:30PM NYC Transit Rider's Council, 1997 Pres. Forum at MTA HQ, 347 Madison Ave., 5th Fl. Bd. Room. 212-878-7087

OCT 22 5:30PM 1997 One City Awards Presentation, at Time-Life Bldg., 1271 6th Ave. (50 St.), NY, 8th Fl. Aud., RSVP by Oct. 10 to Tamyra Gantt, 212-989-0909

OCT 22 NJ Planning Commission monthly meeting. 609-292-7156 to confirm time, place, topics.

OCT 24 9:30AM Visiting Scholars Seminar: "Travel Behavior and Public Policy," Alan Pisarski. At 1 World Trade Ctr., 43rd Fl., 212-650-8050

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

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