

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 153

December 8, 1997

This edition of *Mobilizing the Region* has been released late due to the Tri-State Transportation Campaign's annual planning meeting, Dec. 4-5. But fortuitously, the postponement provides us with the opportunity to cover today's major transportation reform story.

NEWS

Governor Pataki Institutes Sweeping NYC Discount Fare Program

The Plan

- Unlimited ride monthly pass priced at \$63. At 30 round trips, the fare per ride would be \$1.05.
- A weekly unlimited ride pass for \$17.
- A daily unlimited ride pass for \$4.
- Monthly express bus pass for \$120 (also good for unlimited access to subways and buses).
- Express bus base fare reduction from \$4 to \$3.
- Unspecified service increases.
- Senior citizens who enjoy a 50% discount will continue to do so with the monthly and weekly passes.



Huge Win for Straphangers Campaign

The pending institution of transit fare passes in NYC — an issue barely acknowledged in the public realm before this fall — is a case study in **adept public policy advocacy** by the Straphangers Campaign.

Straphangers' long engagement with the MTA and transit budget issues made the group sensitive, with ridership and the economy growing, to the possibility of a growing TA budget surplus. With the suspicion confirmed, the organization's media expertise enabled it to **break the story** on a *Daily News* front page in October. Thereafter, the issue generated public discussion that public officials could not ignore or, in the case of Council Speaker Peter Vallone, were positively attracted to.

Transit officials' fumbling over the issue became an MTA **public relations debacle**, fueling media interest and editorial demands that the surplus be devoted to better transit surplus and rider incentives.

During the debate, tribute to Straphangers' influence on transit affairs came in the form of mimicry — the *Daily News* launched a fax-the-Governor campaign, while Vallone deployed staff to leaflet subway riders.

Such tactics have served rider interests well. As Straphangers Campaign attorney Gene Russianoff said at the Governor's press conference today, "If we've learned anything in two decades of advocacy, it is that the fate and future of the subways and buses rests in the hands of the people who use them. **Riders deserve the biggest thanks** for winning transit passes."

Ending weeks of advocacy, politicking and speculation about the mounting operating budget surplus at the NYC Transit Authority, New York Governor George Pataki today outlined a comprehensive fare discount plan based on **unlimited-ride monthly, weekly and daily transit passes**. By changing the basis of subway and bus prices, the announcement marks a watershed in NYC transit history and sets the stage for impressive ridership gains.

The Governor's news conference was also striking for its **populist and environmental context**. The Governor's companions at the podium today in his midtown Manhattan office were the Straphangers Campaign's Gene Russianoff, EDF counsel and Tri-State Transportation Campaign chair Jim Tripp and Rich Kassel of NRDC. No MTA officials accompanied the Governor, leading to speculation that the plan is being imposed over some MTA and Transit Authority reluctance.

"We have seen a surge in riders since full implementation of the Metrocard — the changes have worked," Pataki said. He noted that this October had seen the most transit riders since October of 1970, and predicted that his transit pass program would add up to 100 million new rides per year to the transit system. The Governor also noted that his plan would provide a wide array of **choices tailored to different transit use markets** and would "empower the rider to discover that taking transit is better than getting in a car or cab."

"A pass will allow much greater mobility for transit riders and that's great news for our economy. It also means less traffic congestion, a saner city and cleaner air," said Russianoff.

Kassel praised the boldness of the Governor's move. Kassel noted that, together with his **recent cancellation of a major highway expansion project** in Westchester County, Gov. Pataki's fare policy was charting a new, environmentally sensitive transportation strategy. EDF's Tripp said that while world leaders generated hot air at the Kyoto global warming summit, Governor Pataki was taking direct action to reduce car trips and pollution.

Looking Ahead: NYC Transit Renaissance?

Today, Governor Pataki said that sweeping fare policy changes would "prepare the transit system for the 21st Century." Spurred by fare incentives, New Yorkers are coming back to the transit system in droves. It's likely

that, coming on the heels of 15 years of system rebuilding, the institution of transit passes will bury forever the image of a decrepit subway as a symbol of a declining city. What policy challenges will political and transit leaders face in a new era of transit optimism?

Short term

- Keeping confidence in transit high requires strong subway law enforcement. Though still down from the early 1990s, **subway crime** has risen along with ridership this year. Although Mayor Giuliani recently assigned more police officers to the system, the demise of the Transit Police means there no longer is a **career track in subway policing**. NYPD's Transit Division should be restructured to provide opportunities for long-term specialization in subway law enforcement.
- New riders mean new demands for capacity — in the short run, that means added off-peak subway runs and more buses. To minimize bus impacts, the TA should implement and expand the **natural gas bus program** that it's been **stalling on all year**.

Longer term

- More people are riding buses, but in many areas, bus service still operates at a crawl. The TA and NYC DOT must get serious about **bus lanes** and make buses an efficient form of travel. Complement rider incentives by shifting street space from cars to transit.
- Longer-term transit capacity issues include through-put capabilities of existing subways, which are limited by antiquated signals, and the extent of the system (see 2nd Ave Subway piece, next page).
- Large-scale capital investment begs the question of overall transportation priorities. **Funds slated for road expansion** in NYC should be **invested instead** in attractive transit services.
- As toll payment media are integrated around the region, means of paying transit fares should be as well. Beyond that, **intermodal smart cards** could be contemplated. In some European cities, some varieties of annual or monthly car payments incorporate a transit pass, adding incentive to leave the car home. The EZ-Metrocard?

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign presents:

Port Planning in New Jersey: Facing the Next Ten Years

Tuesday, December 16, 1997
8:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

New Jersey Institute of Technology, Newark
\$15 (includes lunch) Call 212-777-8181

NY State DOT Sued Over Gowanus Project

Transportation reformers and West Brooklyn community groups and businesses filed suit last Wednesday against the Federal Highway Administration, the NY State DOT and the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) over the Gowanus Expressway rebuilding project. The NY State DOT's proposed \$1 billion reconstruction of the elevated Brooklyn road is the most expensive highway project in New York State.

DOT officials have claimed for years that the project is an infrastructure replacement project for which in-depth project review is unwarranted. Strong pressure from community groups and elected officials has forced the DOT and FHWA to draft an environmental impact statement for the work. But elected representatives and civic leaders have maintained that the **scale of the proposed investment** and the high impact of the elevated expressway warrants **a more fundamental look** at Brooklyn transportation issues.

Federal transportation law, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act of 1991 (ISTEA), provides for thorough analysis and review of large infrastructure proposals via "major investment studies." But after passage of ISTEA, NYMTC "grandfathered" the Gowanus corridor from major investment study (MIS) scrutiny. This decision seems untenable in light of subsequent DOT and FHWA admission that environmental review of the project is warranted, and gainsays very serious expressions of community concern with the project's short and long-term impacts.

Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden recently called for a **borough-wide MIS** to develop a strategic Brooklyn transportation plan. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit say a major investment study of the Gowanus should set up a wide-ranging collaborative look at transportation options for the borough, including better transit and placing the highway in an underground tunnel.

Plaintiffs are the Boerum Hill Assn, Brooklyn Heights Assn, Care About the Slope, Carrol Gardens Assn, Red Hook Civic Assn, Sunset Park Restoration, United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park, Matthews and Ryan Inc, and Transportation Alternatives.

Clash Over Unwanted Goethals Twin

Port Authority officials have pledged that the Goethals twin — a new I-278 highway bridge between NJ and Staten Island — will not be constructed in the face of community opposition. But the agency continues to press the project in spite of years of consistent opposition to the project in Staten Island and the Elizabeth area. The development of a **final environmental statement** for the project from the draft circulated in 1995 took so long that the Port Authority is **spinning** the EIS' release and the Coast Guard's "approval" (as the federal reviewing agency) **as a new development**. The EIS, they say, has given the project a "shot in the arm."

But instead, the PA's commitment to a project no one

wants makes its planners look like traffic addicts in need of ever more cars and trucks. The Campaign has challenged the PA to examine a combination of alternatives, including increased bus service, bridge approach modifications, and congestion relief pricing to truly relieve congestion at far less cost. The “alternatives” in the EIS were examined singly and rejected.

Port Authority officials were dealt a round of criticism at a hastily-convened NYMTC “public information” forum held in the middle of the work day Dec. 1. At the meeting, Campaign representatives reminded the audience that the PA’s own figures show the **new highway**

capacity will attract more cars and trucks — traffic levels around the bridge would be 32% higher than if the new bridge were not built. They also challenged PA bridges director Ernesto Butcher to explain PA documents that call the Goethals twin a “lynch pin” to plans for a **truck freightway across Staten Island**. Elizabeth’s Reverend Joe Parrish spoke of his city’s air pollution problems and admonished the PA to cancel the project. PA officials declined to respond to claims that the project would increase **asthma-related deaths** in the area near the bridge.

Seeking Second Avenue Subway

NYC Transit Authority President Lawrence Reuter commented at a Nov. 25 forum that momentum needed to build a Second Avenue Subway is forming. Reuter said linking the Long Island Railroad to Grand Central Terminal might be the impetus for Second Avenue construction, and that the subway project could figure in the **MTA’s next capital plan**, which would begin in 2000.

But a senior MTA planner told the Tri-State Campaign that evaluating the 2nd Avenue line’s prospects at this time is akin to “figuring out the meaning of life.”

The Second Avenue subway is the subject of the Transit Authority’s Manhattan East Side Alternatives

(MESA) study. The study proposes two variations of a subway under Second Avenue between 63rd Street and 125 Street, linking to the Broadway 'N' and 'R' tunnel below 63rd Street.

Some speculate that big dollars for the 2nd Ave. project in the next capital plan would take the place occupied in the current capital plan by the costly (\$650 million) **63rd Street/Queens Boulevard subway connection**. The argument is that State Assembly Democrats will press for a Transit Authority capital plan equal in size to that in place now.

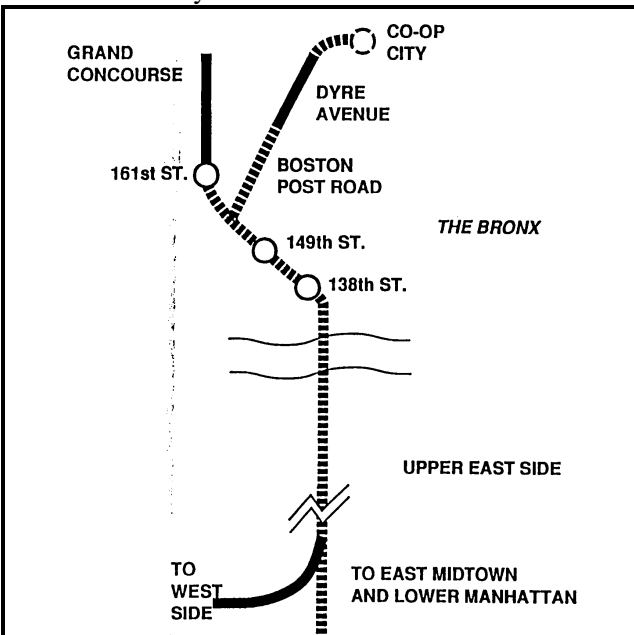
But with the likelihood that the \$2 billion **LIRR-Grand Central connection** will go ahead, fueled in part by significant earmarked funding in ISTE A-2, the \$5 billion Second Ave. Subway stands a strong chance of being **crowded out** of the next MTA capital plan. Indeed, East Side Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney is seeking only \$55 million for environmental and engineering analysis to keep 2nd Avenue Subway work alive during ISTE A-2. A Maloney aide said bigger federal funds would be sought for the job in **ISTEA-3**, but that won’t come before Congress until 2003 or 2004.

Still, demand for the project is growing. At a NYMTC forum in Manhattan last week, a large group spoke out on the “essential” need for better East Side transportation. Nurturing a political outcry similar to the one that drove fare discounts is the way to get the line built, according to City Council member Gifford Miller. Miller says a “general consensus” for the project is forming among Upper East Side elected officials. Hopefully, that coalition will extend to Harlem and the Bronx, where transit service is also needed and powerful Congressional allies reside.

The LIRR-Grand Central project may add thousands of new riders to the Lexington Avenue subway, which will throw fuel on the East Side’s fire. “We need to get the MTA out of big box thinking, where the agency builds one project every ten years,” said Miller.

Light Rail Lobby

Trenton Mayor Douglas Palmer, together with officials of neighboring counties, traveled to Newark in November to urge NJ Transit’s board to approve the Trenton-



Regional Plan Association’s view of Second Ave. Subway extension in the Bronx. The Transit Authority study presently excludes the Bronx.

NJ Planners Illegally Neglect Cycling, Walking

A recent report by the Federal Highway Administration on compliance with ISTE A bicycle and pedestrian planning and promotion mandates notes that the **North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority** is one of only a handful of metropolitan planning organizations nation-wide that has failed to develop a bicycle/pedestrian aspect of its regional long range plan.

Camden light rail line, known as the "Southern New Jersey Light Rail Transit System."

Palmer also said **the line should run to the state house**. Not extending the line into the downtown area will leave out the thousands of workers who travel to Trenton, say officials. NJTransit proposes a bus meet the light rail line and take people downtown, but officials say NJT studies show people won't make the transfer.

Officials also advocated for a stop at Hamilton Ave., near a planned sports complex. Burlington freeholders have passed a resolution supporting that measure.

Officials are pushing for the changes before NJTransit's January deadline for design revisions arrives. Officials hope construction will start in the middle of next year and be done in 2001. *Trenton Times*

Business Help Will Extend Brooklyn Bus Route

A Brooklyn developer with property along the downtown waterfront will improve access to its site by fronting the \$90,000 cost of a **weekday two block extension** of the NYC Transit Authority's B25 bus for a year starting in January. According to the plan, the B25 will make an extra two block run to a stop across from One Main Street, one of the developer's buildings.

Currently, the transit service to Two Trees Management's building is a long two block walk from the current terminal of the B25 at Old Fulton St. under the Manhattan Bridge. A shuttle bus currently carries NYC Human Resources Administration clients and employees only from Downtown Brooklyn to the building.

The B25 operates along Fulton Street from East New York. The bus extension to Main St. will operate weekdays from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The extension is the **first arrangement of its kind for NYC Transit**, though other cities already have similar public/private transit extensions. NYCT will monitor ridership to see if the extension is worth keeping. NYCT hopes to enter into similar ventures with other private partners if the test is successful.

Thanksgiving

At its annual dinner on Nov. 20, the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County honored **Maureen Morgan**, president of the organization from 1994 to 1996 and anchor of the coalition that fought for and won the **cancellation of the HOV widening** of the Cross-Westchester Expressway.

Charles Komanoff, an analyst with the Tri-State Campaign, provided keynote remarks. Also speaking in tribute to Maureen's exemplary work were Assemblywoman Naomi Matusow, County legislator Kay Carsky, Federated Conservationists director Gudrun Lelash and the Campaign's Jon Orcutt.

Also in November, the Westchester County Board of Legislators unanimously adopted a resolution thanking those whose work led to Governor Pataki's cancellation

MTR#153. Contributing: Bill Yates Editors: Jon Orcutt, Alec Merber. Executive Director, Janine Bauer

CALENDAR

DEC 9 12:30PM Brown Bag Luncheon with Martha Morecock, Dir., NY/NJ Model Deployment Initiative for Trans. Management. Spector Hall, 22 Reade St., NYC. 212-442-4724

DEC 9 7PM Manhattan CB7 Transportation Meeting, presentation on IRT 72 St. Station reconstruction plans. At 250 West 87 St., 2 Fl., NYC, 718-694-5135

DEC 12 9:30AM UTRC Visiting Scholars Seminar: "Telecommuting," Pat Mokhtarian, U. Cal. at Davis. At 1 World Trade Ctr., 43rd Fl., 212-650-8050

DEC 12 6PM Planners Network Forum, "What's Progressive About the 3rd Regional Plan," with Robert Yaro, Exec. Dir. RPA., at Puck Building, Lafayette and Houston Sts., Room 423. Refreshments served at 5:30. 718-636-3461

DEC 16 7:30PM Rockland Municipal Planning Fed., Land Use/Arterial Management round table discussion. Town of Haverstraw Town Hall. Call Arlene Miller at 914-638-5474 for info.

FEB 27 9:30AM UTRC Visiting Scholars Seminar: "Highway Capacity Manual in the Year 2000" Roger Roess, PINY. At 1 World Trade Ctr., 43rd Fl., 212-650-8050

Want to Make a Difference?

Regional Plan Association is looking for an individual to help us move our transportation plan forward for the benefit of the New York metro region. Needs to have excellent analytic and communication skills, and be knowledgeable about region.

Call Jeff Zupan at 212 785 8000 ext. 302.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site:

<http://www.tstc.org>

in October of the Cross-Westchester Expressway expansion. The resolution recognized the Hudson Valley Regional Conference, the **Tri-State Transportation Campaign**, the Westchester Transportation Management Organization, the Westchester County Planning Board and Federated Conservationists of Westchester County. The Legislators urged the "**remarkable environmental coalition**" to continue work with Governor Pataki to find transportation solutions for the Cross-Westchester travel corridor.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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