

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Pass the Politics

Governor Pataki's proposal for city transit passes this week won high praise from media, straphangers and others. But city leaders Mayor Giuliani and Council Speaker Peter Vallone persisted in calls for a **deeper flat Metrocard fare break** — namely, the 12-for-10 discount that figured heavily in the debate over the Transit Authority budget surplus this fall.

The reputed beneficiary of the continued calls for a flat discount is the **commute-only transit rider**. In 1998, there will be an average of 21 work days per month (not counting holidays), which works out to a \$1.50 per ride wash at the Governor's proposed price of \$63 for a monthly transit pass. Whether the commute-only straphanger is mythical or not is impossible to tell — unfortunately, the Transit Authority seems to have **little information** on its various rider markets, so the debate is largely one of assertion. The Mayor and Speaker so far seem to have missed the strong point the Governor makes that monthly and weekly passes will **induce more transit use** — each additional ride taken with the pass reduces the per trip cost.

But Vallone's offer this week of \$25 million in city funds to partially underwrite a 12-for-10 program could make the argument moot. The MTA should take the city's money, and use it to reduce the price of monthly and weekly passes. A \$57 monthly pass, for instance, works out to 21 \$1.36 rides.

### Mayor to Name New NYC Transport Chief

City Transportation Commissioner **Chris Lynn** reportedly confirmed today at a NYC DOT staff meeting a *NY Post* report that he had been asked by City Hall to take a sub-cabinet job. A successor to run New York City's transportation agency during Mayor Giuliani's second term has not yet been named.

*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

### NJ DOT Releases Capital Plan "Project Pool"

The New Jersey DOT's recently released "project pool", from which the 1999-2003 State Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) will be largely drawn, shows scant evidence of new thinking by the agency. The Tri-State Campaign, along with NJ metropolitan planning organizations, is engaged in discussions with DOT about projects to add or axe from the list, and over what the overall distribution of funds should be. While there are not many surprises in the plan, there are a few clear contenders for kudos and booby prizes:

👍 **Thumbs up** • \$10 million per year in rail freight —

The sale of Conrail will add to the extensive list of opportunities to shift goods to rail with targeted investment in NJ's network. \$15-\$20 million per year may be called for, but \$10 million is a step up from the \$2 million typically allocated to the rail freight program.

• \$1 million per year for bicycle and pedestrian safety projects — a welcome if too small set aside within the local aid fund.

👎 **Thumbs down:** • \$77 million rail park and ride

budget for new parking facilities throughout the NJ Transit system, but especially on the Morris and Essex, Main, Bergen, and Pascack Valley Lines, where Midtown Direct service and the Secaucus Transfer will continue to boost ridership. \$77 million will buy a staggering amount of parking — at least 7,000 spaces — and is nearly three times what is programmed in the current TIP. If NJ Transit put any significant amount of this money into alternatives for getting people to stations, it could significantly reduce local traffic.

• The state with the bicycling governor continues to do poorly by human-powered transportation. The Tri-State Campaign recommended twenty-five new pedestrian and bicycle projects to DOT for this year's capital plan, but the safety fund above is the only bike/pedestrian addition to this year's project pool.

The Campaign's analysis of last year's NJDOT capital plan can be found on our web site, <http://www.tstc.org>. Watch for our analysis of this year's capital plan there and in these pages as it evolves in the next two months.

### Franks Says NJ Congressional Reps Back Endangered Core Access Rail Project

NJ Transit Chairman (and NJDOT Commissioner) John Haley announced Thursday at the NJ Transit board meeting that 1998 will be "The Year of the Raritan

Valley Line.” He said NJ Transit plans to invest in significant **service and access improvements** along the line, including a look at service frequency and improvements to stations. The announcement probably came in anticipation of a meeting convened this morning by U.S. Representative Bob Franks and the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition — an alliance of civic leaders and elected officials — to promote service improvements like a single-seat trip for Raritan Valley riders to Manhattan.

A **resolution drafted by Franks** and adopted this morning by the Coalition backed the “Access to the Region’s Core” (ARC) project. ARC is a planning effort aimed at alleviating the rail capacity problem across the Hudson, and at eventually permitting NJ Transit access

to Grand Central Terminal. Raritan Valley rail advocates understand that capacity constraints in the Northeast Corridor Hudson tunnel and at Penn Station New York will always stand as big obstacles to better, more direct service. Moreover, the ARC project, jointly funded by the Port Authority, NJ Transit and the MTA, **may soon lapse** without vigorous political intervention. At today’s Coalition meeting, the group adopted a resolution, drafted by Franks, that urged: “funding should be made available to (1) continue the present phase of the [ARC] Study and (2) fund [ARC’s] next phase.” Franks said seeing ARC to completion is “most important mission of this coalition,” and said other NJ members of Congress felt strongly about the project.

### Debating Staten Island’s Future

New York State DOT officials and consultants presented a rosy picture of **congestion-free** Staten Island highways and roads to the advisory committee for DOT’s Staten Island Expressway Major Investment Study Wednesday night. The abolition of congestion in 2020 would result from a highway construction scenario that included not only new lanes along the S.I.E., but a Goethals “twin” bridge and a widened West Shore Expressway.

Interestingly, most Staten Islanders present were not buying it. Indeed, when challenged on the assumptions behind their congestion modeling, the DOT spokespersons said that the results might be “a little optimistic.” More importantly, they agreed that additional highway capacity could **induce more motor vehicle trips**, including trips resulting from highway-promoted sprawl development. But they said their traffic estimates could not include these effects. When pressed for a worst-case scenario, project director Peter King first said “doing nothing,” but then conceded that “**eight lanes of stop-and-go traffic is worse** than six lanes of stop-and-go.”

A good deal of ensuing discussion was on the issue of induced traffic and whether public transit could break the cycle of more cars, more roads, more cars. A representative of City Council member John Fusco questioned the worth of any initiative that would not get people out of

cars. He predicted that “a ten-lane SIE would be just as congested” as it is now. Although some attendees represented the position that Staten Islanders were glued to their cars, the general sense of the advisory committee favored a transit solution. Trucks were also a dominant concern. Borough President Molinari’s office asked the DOT to develop study scenarios that include development of a NYC hub port for its **truck traffic forecasts**.

DOT appeared open to suggestions transit, but in the past has interpreted these to mean support for HOV lane construction, which can improve bus movement. Officials said focus groups they convened were more favorable than the advisory committee to highway solutions.

Throughout the evening, DOT representatives were anxious to **avoid discussion of transportation pricing**. DOT materials contain outlines of several pricing schemes, but all of them are tied to new highway lane construction rather than treating incentive pricing as an alternative to pouring more pavement.

#### For the Record

During a discussion on traffic induced by new road capacity at the Wednesday Staten Island Expressway meeting, Port Authority and NY State DOT officials claimed that truck traffic increases at the Tappan Zee Bridge resulting from the completion of the I-287 beltway in 1994 were offset by lower truck volumes at the George Washington Bridge.

However, NYMTC data on annual truck volume trends (NYMTC file: “trends.wk4”) show a **dramatic increase in Tappan Zee Bridge truck volumes** between 1993 and 1995 (from 1.7 million to 2.9 million per year), while George Washington Bridge truck volumes fell by only 170,000 in the same period.

On Wednesday, the Tri-State Campaign, Assembly member Eric Vitaliano, State Senator Vincent Gentile, City Council members John Fusco and Jerome O’Donovan and Staten Island Citizens for Clean Air released a “Statement of Principles for the S.I.E. Major Investment Study.” The statement presented eight points the signatories believe should govern the conduct of the study. Among them:

- A “solution” that promotes an increase in either automobile or truck traffic on the Staten Island Expressway or other S.I. roadways is unacceptable.
- The NY State DOT must fully study all promising strategies for the corridor, regardless of whether a strategy would be implemented in the Expressway right-of-way and whether NYS DOT would be the implementing agency. See the full statement on the Campaign’s web site: <http://www.tstc.org>

#### Westchester HOV is Dead: Long Live HOV?

In recent weeks we’ve written about the NY State DOT’s efforts to plan an HOV lane network on Long Island. An older planning effort we haven’t covered

since April, 1996 (MTR #73) recently recommended further study of a significant number of **HOV lane construction projects in the Hudson Valley**. In August, the Mid-Hudson South Transportation Coordinating Committee finished its report on "Multiple Occupancy Vehicle Emphasis (MOVE)" strategies. The "multiple occupant" tag is used to avoid the folly of labeling 2-occupant cars as "high-occupancy," as is standard today in the highway industry.

The paper, finished prior to Governor Pataki's cancellation of NY State DOT's big project to build a reversible HOV lane on the Cross-Westchester Expressway, looks at a range of transportation strategies worthy of further development. They include incentive tolling, optimizing roadway efficiency by converting general traffic lanes to HOV and bus lanes and development of "queue bypasses" and other means to speed preferred traffic through bottlenecks. NYS DOT should implement tests of some of these inexpensive transportation strategies in the near future.

But the MOVE report also identifies as candidates for further investigation of HOV lane construction the NY State Thruway, I-684, Palisades Parkway, Taconic State Parkway and Route 9. Clearly, the **impetus** to push these projects has been **greatly reduced** by the Cross-Westchester HOV's demise. But the paper says other Mid-Hudson HOV lanes should be considered "even if no MOVE actions are implemented on the NYS Thruway or Cross-Westchester Expressway," and says the projects described have stand-alone benefits.

Highest ranked (in terms of vehicle miles traveled reduction payoff) corridors are I-95, the Thruway south of the Cross-Westchester Expressway and segments of Routes 9A and 100 north of the Bronx. These would be relatively inexpensive because the recommendations are for the poorly named "**take-away lane**" **treatment** – conversion of an existing traffic lane to HOV – possibly combined with incentive pricing, or for peak-period

### Paying for Hudson Valley Transit

When Governor Pataki cancelled the Cross-Westchester Expressway (I-287) HOV lane project, he established a task force to develop other transportation options in the travel corridor. An early job for the task force may be to figure out how to **sustain bus service** recently established in the Hudson Valley. New bus routes underwritten by Westchester, Orange, Dutchess and Rockland Counties have been funded primarily with federal transportation/air quality funds, which can only be used for operating costs for three years. Some routes are also funded from the I-287 construction budget. Capital funding seems plentiful, but state operating dollars are not.

shoulder bus lanes.

More worrisome to many are more costly proposals for HOV lane construction on the Hudson Valley's historic parkways. Environmental and historic preservation advocates are already **fighting the addition of wide shoulder lanes** to the Palisades Parkway. Shoulder design is in discussion now by the Palisades Park Commission and NY DOT. Median or other added HOV lanes would be even more controversial. The MOVE study says less "physically intensive" options for the Parkway would be "take-away" HOV lanes or bus queue bypasses on the shoulders. Another major concern of Hudson Valley transportation reformers is that any widening of I-684 will compete directly with Metro-North's Harlem Valley commuter rail line.

The report's pricing analysis is largely dismissive of economic signals' ability to influence travel behavior. The paper says a \$2.50 additional charge per trip on mid-Hudson highways would yield a 3% reduction in drive-alone traffic, which the report implies is inadequate. It says that because **reducing tolls for multiple occupant cars** is easier politically than imposing additional tolls on solo drivers, the former pricing strategy should be pursued in combination with HOV facility construction.

### Around the Region



Trucks and buses way the weight limit of **Westchester County** bridges are pounding many of them into a fragile state. Many bridges over Metro-North tracks are rated for less than 10 tons, but that doesn't stop 40 ton trucks from using them. In addition, overweight school buses — up to 13 tons — fully loaded, still use many of the bridges despite warnings and rerouting efforts. This year, NYS DOT's annual inspection of the county's 48 bridges revealed only four without violations. Each of the county bridges sustains crossings of an estimated 18,000 overweight vehicles per year. Despite yearly inspections, NYS DOT says it might miss some weaknesses. *Gannett*

Economic growth in downtown **Hartford** has caught city leaders by surprise. Now some expanding companies say a shortage of affordable parking is causing them to consider moving to the suburbs. Authority over parking supply and price in the city is fragmented — 10 big commercial operators enjoy a high degree of autonomy. City government is looking at whether a new Parking Authority could systematize data and its ability to offer parking deals to companies it wants to retain or attract. *Courant*

While E-ZPass is wildly popular at **Port Authority crossings** from NJ to NYC, it will be longer than expected before motorists on **New Jersey highways** will be able to use the electronic tag. Work has not begun on toll booth installation, though a contractor was selected a year ago. Delays are due to a court case brought by a losing bidder and arguments over cost, but EZ-Pass collection should be running in 1999. Meanwhile, the NJ Turnpike Authority, citing a pledge to bond holders, said it won't raise Turnpike tolls until the end of 1999. *Record, Star Ledger*

## Mobilizing the Nation

Word from Washington says the Senate will return to the task of a **multi-year reauthorization** of **ISTEA** during the first week of February. Floor fights are expected over funding levels and amendments that attack environmental protections and funding sources. The House may take ISTEA up in March.

U.S. energy and other corporations framed much of their public campaign against the **global warming** treaty under negotiation this week in Japan in terms of developing countries being let off the hook with later deadlines for capping or reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But some were talking out the other side of their mouths at the same time. The *Wall St. Journal* reported in October that **Exxon** had urged developing countries to reject the global warming treaty to be negotiated in Kyoto next month, because environmental controls would hinder their development. Speaking at the 15<sup>th</sup> World Petroleum Congress in Beijing, Exxon chairman Lee Raymond urged developing countries to **use more, not less fossil fuels**, and said nature was to blame for most global warming. Corporations and environmental groups will now square off over **Senate ratification** of the Kyoto Protocol, which requires the U.S. to reduce greenhouse emissions 7% below 1990 levels early in the next century.

The Federal Highway Administration recently **withdrew its appeal** of a U.S. District Court ruling that the environmental impact statement for a new Illinois toll highway was deficient. Central to the 1996 ruling was the finding that the EIS, in analyzing need for the road and alternatives, should have estimated the **additional population, employment and traffic** that the new tollroad would cause — an important legal precedent concerning induced traffic and sprawl. FHWA, the Illinois DOT and the Illinois Toll Highway Authority had all appealed the decision, but FHWA has, in recent months, signaled to the U.S. Seventh Circuit that it was ambivalent about pursuing its appeal, apparently because it feared the precedential impact of a Seventh Circuit decision affirming the district court ruling. Plaintiffs in the case have filed a motion to dismiss the remaining state agency appeals.

The **Amtrak authorization** passed in November provides \$2.3 billion of much-needed capital support for the national passenger railroad. However, Amtrak had stated early on in its quest for capital funding that it required \$3.75 billion to attain its Congressional mandate of self-sufficiency by 2002. The authorizing legislation itself now poses the question: **“How will Amtrak get the remaining \$1.4 billion?”** As the

railroad seeks answers, look for it to invest where it will get the biggest bang for the buck in its operating budget. That likely means good news for the Boston-New York high speed rail project, which has strong potential to attract new riders.

Meanwhile, Amtrak president Tom Downs quit abruptly last week. The *Washington Post* said Amtrak's board pushed Downs out over the conduct of labor negotiations this fall. The board itself will be dissolved in 1998 because the authorization agreement gives Congress a role in forming a new board. National Assn of Rail Passengers, 202-408-8362.

## CALENDAR

**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.

**DEC 18 NOON** NYC Transit Riders Council meeting, covering the Lenox Ave. subway invert project. At the Graybar Bldg., 420 Lexington Ave., NY, 11 Fl. Conf. Rm. 212-878-7087

**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.

*Mobilizing the Region* is a weekly publication of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, available by fax or electronic mail. The Campaign was formed in 1993 by 14 leading public interest organizations dedicated to restructuring transportation policy, infrastructure and choices to promote environmental health and sustainability, economic efficiency and social equity in the 32-county region in and surrounding NYC, from Trenton to Hartford. We invite organizations that agree with our general orientation to join the Campaign as affiliates.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

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