

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### MTA Board Stamps Yes on Historic Fare Deal

Under the 1998 NYC Transit Authority budget approved today by the MTA board, **monthly, weekly and daily fare passes** will be offered to city transit riders in July, 1998. The \$4 express bus fare will fall to \$3 in March.

The introduction of unlimited ride passes marks a watershed in NYC transit history and sets the stage for impressive ridership gains. The policy was hailed at the board meeting by transit advocates.

MTA projections say heavy use of the passes could reduce the average fare to \$1.04.

The Transit Authority budget anticipates further ridership growth. The TA announced Wednesday that it would increase service on 6 subway lines and buy 350 additional buses. 190 of the buses are low-floor buses powered by **compressed natural gas**. They will operate in Brooklyn and Queens.

### NJ Rail Access Ray of Light



The Tri-State Campaign's three years of advocacy for non-auto access to rail stations has borne fruit, in the form of a \$250,000 "**Community Rail Shuttle**

**Challenge Grant**" program announced Monday by New Jersey Transit. The program will make \$50,000 and the lease of a **20-30 passenger minibus vehicle** available for jitney feeder services to train stations in up to five towns along the Morris & Essex Line.

NJ Transit had insisted for years that feeder services were not viable means of reducing station parking demand. But the town of **Maplewood** refused to build a parking deck and introduced a station jitney that proved remarkably popular with commuters. The Campaign and Congressman Bill Pascrell helped Maplewood secure grants to start the service.

While it took an enlightened directive from NJ Transportation Commissioner John Haley to set the expanded jitney program in motion, NJ Transit has now acknowledged the concept's potential and will support towns interested in applying for the funds. The region's other commuter rail agencies would do well to take notice.

Yet the \$250,000 jitney program remains peanuts next to the **\$77 million rail park-and-ride budget** NJ Transit proposes for the next five years (see last week's *MTR*). When the program was announced at a meeting of NJ Transit and the Morris & Essex mayors, the Rutgers Environmental Law Rail

*Continued next page*

### Time for the MTA's Incentive Toll Study

At the MTA Board's monthly meeting yesterday, Chair E. Virgil Conway agreed that the transit umbrella agency, which also controls toll bridges and tunnels within New York City, will undertake an **analysis of toll policies** with a view to creating **economic incentives** to reduce traffic congestion.

Conway's statements came as the MTA Board approved a 1998 budget that included the institution of the package of city transit fare pass proposals proposed last week by Governor Pataki. Mayor Giuliani's appointees to the board, led by John Dyson and NYC Deputy Mayor Rudy Washington, attempted to amend the budget with measures to offer twelve subway or bus rides for the price of ten, and to **cut MTA bridge and tunnel truck tolls by 50%** at night. The latter policy was proposed earlier this week by Mayor Giuliani, who argued the off-peak toll reduction could ease congestion and reduce business costs in the city. News reports on Tuesday said the administration was interested in cutting tolls for trucks initially, and for motorists at some subsequent time. The tenor of early coverage suggested the toll cuts would in some way politically balance the fare incentives the MTA is offering transit riders (*Daily News* Tuesday front page: "Now Cut the Tolls!").

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign responded Tuesday with a statement noting that "Toll policies should not be changed as a near-term **political response** to implementation of **innovative transit fare policies**. Transit and highway transportation are vastly different, and price changes in each sector have very different consequences for the region. On the one hand, measures to boost transit ridership mitigate the environmental and congestion costs of car and truck traffic in the city. But toll reductions for passenger cars will mean **more cars entering New York City**, something the city's environment, streets and neighborhoods do not need or want."

The Campaign presented the statement to the MTA board yesterday. In response, John Dyson said the city was not seeking to reduce tolls for cars.

But the MTA was not ready for the truck measure, either. Conway won a board vote to rule the city's amendments out of order, arguing that they had the potential to unbalance the MTA's budget. He said the 12-for-10 transit fare proposal would be taken up when the MTA had had some experience with the new unlimited ride passes.

Conway's assurance that toll pricing strategies would

also be examined met with heavy skepticism from Rudy Washington, who has been trying to get MTA to analyze the effects of off-peak toll discounts for several years. The MTA in fact **issued a request-for-proposals** about a year ago and solicited bids for a look at congestion pricing (not limited to discounts) at its bridges and tunnels (see *MTR* #106). But the study seemed to have been deep-sixed some time last spring or summer. Yesterday, Washington demanded that the work proceed. One Pataki-appointed MTA board member agreed that “TBTA staff has stonewalled Rudy [Washington]” on the issue. But others said the MTA had sought Port Authority collaboration on the study, but “bad blood” between the PA and City Hall caused the project to be postponed. Dyson said no-one should wait for the Port Authority, and urged the MTA to take the lead.

The argument appears to have won Conway’s commitment to finally moving the pricing study. Like the earlier RFP, the analysis should look at the entire gamut of pricing options, not only off-peak discounts. The *Daily News* wrote yesterday, “The only problem with Giuliani’s version of congestion pricing is that does not **make truckers pay a premium** during rush hour.” Now that it’s installed EZ-Pass at all of its crossings, the MTA owes the region some answers in 1998 about which congestion-busting toll policies will work and which won’t.

Full text of the Campaign’s response to Mayor Giuliani’s toll cut proposal is available on the Campaign’s web site: <http://www.tstc.org>.

**Station Access (continued from page 1)** Clinic called on NJ Transit to dedicate \$20 million over the next five years to non-auto station access. Much of NJT’s park-and-ride money is slated for parking on the Bergen, Main and Pascack Valley lines in anticipation of the Secaucus Transfer. **Towns on these lines dreading more cars and bigger parking lots** brought by surging rail ridership should request a program similar to the Morris & Essex Challenge Grant to start jitney services.

The jitney program on the Morris & Essex Line has the potential to do more than reduce parking demand. Well-designed feeder services to the urban stations could boost ridership by attracting riders who have no other means of access to rail or who are reluctant to leave their cars in urban areas. An increase in ridership could in turn induce NJ Transit to improve rail service to the urban stations, several of which are without adequate Midtown Direct service.

#### **Governor Pataki Does the Right Thing (again)**

The *NY Times* reported today that Gov. Pataki had ordered a 12-month hold on plans to widen **Route 120** in eastern Westchester. Watershed advocates have opposed the highway widening because of construction and traffic impacts on the adjoining Kensico Reservoir. The Tri-State Campaign will use the study period to examine the potential for office **parking cashouts** (see article at right) to relieve traffic congestion on Route 120 without expanding highway capacity.

The Transit Authority’s Manhattan East Side Alternatives (MESA — aka Second Avenue Subway) project has issued a new brochure detailing the bus, subway and light rail options it has produced. Contact 718-694-5164 or [nyctgr@erols.com](mailto:nyctgr@erols.com)

#### **Parking Vouchers Advance as Solo-Drive Antidote in Westchester**

In what may be the start of a breakthrough in reducing single-occupant-vehicle (SOV) commuting in the region, the Town Planning Board of Somers, NY has instructed IBM to consider offering **cash payments to workers who use car-pools, transit** or other non-solo-drive commute options to and from the company’s northern Westchester County office park.

Somers is weighing IBM’s application to **blacktop 10.7 acres** of Croton Watershed land to make 700 parking spaces for 800 new employees at its facility off Route 100, near the Muscoot Reservoir. Last Wednesday the planning board heard Tri-State Campaign economist Charles Komanoff describe the success of **parking voucher programs** at suburban office parks and downtown offices in California, where state law requires some firms to “cash-out” free parking with monetary payments to non-driving employees.

According to a new study by UCLA Prof. Don Shoup, the originator of the cash-out concept, at eight LA-area firms that now pay non-drivers the same or more than the cost of free parking, the average number of cars driven per 100 employees has fallen from 82 to 73, an 11% drop. In a separate study of seven “matched pairs” of firms that differ only in parking subsidies, Shoup found that where parking is free, 72 of 100 employees drive, on average, whereas only 53 per 100 drive where employees pay to park — a difference of 26%.

With 3,500 employees at IBM-Somers, 90% of whom drive, a 20-25% reduction in car use could **obviate the need for all 700** intended new spaces.

The Somers board pounced on Komanoff’s suggestion that IBM could reduce driving by offering subsidies to non-drivers and/or charging for parking. “This is such a good idea — paying employees not to drive — that IBM should examine it right away,” said planning board member Mark Starkman. Other members seconded Starkman. At press time, a source close to IBM **predicted the company would undertake** a study.

Any parking cash-out study should include employee surveys to estimate reductions in solo driving as a function of both price incentives and commuter-assist programs. GIS-based ridesharing linking employees with common zip codes would seem a natural for computer-giant IBM. Another commute option was suggested to the board by Somers resident Lionel Ruberg: shuttle buses that take residents of nearby Heritage Hills to Metro-North morning trains and return empty could ferry arriving IBM employees to work.

The full text of Komanoff’s statement to the Somers planning board can be found at <http://www.tstc.org>

## Despite Double-Dipping, NJ Can't Produce Air Plan

After years of taking credit for a non-existent enhanced inspection and maintenance program to **avoid any serious discussion** of long term measures to **reduce automobile pollution**, New Jersey finally has been threatened with sanctions by the US Environmental Protection Agency for failing to implement the program. Conditions constraining new industry in the state and the loss of federal highway funds will kick in in eighteen and twenty-four months, respectively, from the EPA's Dec. 12 notification letter unless New Jersey can find another way to achieve the hefty reduction in pollutants attributed to the imaginary auto inspection program.

In finding their transportation programs in conformity with Clean Air Act requirements over the past several years, NJDOT and the MPOs have hidden behind patently absurd time lines proffered by the State for the

### City Ready for Rail Tunnel Analysis

The cross-harbor rail freight tunnel, proposed by Mayor Giuliani in his January State of the City address, took a step forward last week when the city Economic Development Corporation (EDC) issued a request for consultants to prepare a \$5 million **freight needs Major Investment Study** (MIS), 80% covered by federal funds. Tunnel construction is projected at \$1 billion.

In an interesting twist, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYC DEP) has expressed interest in piggybacking a water tunnel project onto the rail tube, allowing for some cost sharing — a second tunnel is needed to relieve the one water tunnel supplying Staten Island. The freight tunnel MIS will likely contain a rudimentary assessment of linking the projects.

Two freight tunnel routes will be studied in the MIS, from Brooklyn to Staten Island and to Greenville Rail Yard in Jersey City. Rebuilding the once-extensive "float bridge" — barges carrying rail cars — across the harbor will also be closely examined. The study could take two years to complete.

### A Drop in the Harbor

The New Jersey General Assembly passed a resolution today that calls on Congress to fund improvements to NJ/NY **cross-harbor rail car float** operations. The \$4.75 million proposal for ISTEA air quality funds, submitted by the New York Cross Harbor Railroad, will help cover the company's purchases of new equipment and rehabilitation of float bridges and tracks. Currently almost all freight that moves across the harbor now does so by truck. A significant shift from trucks back to rail will ultimately require a **much larger cross-harbor float investment** — about \$80 million, according to the NYC Economic Development Corporation. Big dollars the Port Authority and the New York State DOT have slated to build a Goethals Bridge "twin" and to widen the Staten Island Expressway to accommodate more trucks should be considered for cross-harbor rail freight investment instead.

implementation of the inspection program. Had they instead raised the alarm on the possibility of a transportation funding cutoff, the impending crisis could perhaps have been averted. Instead, **NJDOT has aggravated the problem** by diverting over 80% of the State's annual \$50 million grant of federal Congestion Management and Air Quality funds, the principal funding pot for innovative transportation programs **in other states**, to the inspection program. While this may seem like a valiant effort to save the program, the fact is that the funds to pay for enhanced inspection and maintenance have **already been collected from motorists** through a \$11.50 surcharge on vehicle registration.

An immediate consequence of the air plan's failure will occur on April 3, 1998, when the State will suffer a "conformity freeze" on its transportation plans. This will presumably prevent the State's MPOs from adopting Transportation Improvement Programs for 1999-2003, a process which typically occurs over the summer. Due to a recent watering down of Clean Air Act regulations (now being challenged in court by the Environmental Defense Fund), the freeze will not bring highway projects to an immediate halt, since projects programmed for the first three years of the current (1998-2002) TIP are allowed to proceed. On the other hand, the freeze may pose a threat NJDOT's habit of reinventing the 5-year plan each year and adding politically-driven capacity expansions at the eleventh hour.

### New Jersey's Views on the Ports

The Campaign organized a port planning conference in Newark this week, focusing on the transportation and infrastructure implications of increasing cargo volumes and tomorrow's larger "megaships." Shippers, port officials, elected representatives, and New Jersey citizens heard from and questioned nine panelists on whether port expansion, and in particular the pursuit of a **"hub port" development**, is in the state's best interest. Throughout the discussion, a crucial theme emerged: **Without a clear planning process**, we risk the diversion of the region's goods to other port facilities, as well as increased reliance on trucks.

Panelists stressed several important points. The first was that any efforts to plan port development need to take into account that our region's **highways are at capacity** and are unable to accommodate further increases in truck traffic. Chris Ward of the Port Authority noted that the projected **doubling of cargo** would dramatically increase trucks on our roadways, and said the port redevelopment plan he is overseeing will place strong emphasis on ensuring efficient "land-side" access to new facilities. The impending Con-



rail merger was mentioned by several panelists as an opportunity to improve port access. Hudson County Executive Robert Janiszewski emphasized the need for a regional approach and cooperation between the two states. Frank McDonough, the state's Director of Maritime Resources, echoed this, calling for a move away from the concept of one "hub port" in one location.

The topic of new port development is a critical one. Our port complex plays an extensive role in the region's economy and is a crucial component of our transportation network, requiring that consensus be reached on how we intend to modernize and expand our port facilities to respond to growing capacity demands. The conference was intended to move us one step closer to reaching that consensus, bring land-side access issues to the forefront of the debate, and help prevent the question of new port development from becoming a stumbling block to cooperation between New York and New Jersey on other important bi-state transportation issues.

**Next Mobilizing the Region  
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#### CALENDAR

**JAN 7 1:15PM** NYMTC discussion on the Conrail Acquisition with Daniel King, Surface Transportation Board. At 1 World Trade Center, #82E., NYC, Reg. by 1/5/98 at 212-938-3300.

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

*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.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

MTR#155. Contributing: C. Komanoff, T. Langer, P. Schultz, B. Yates

#### Safer State

A statement released this week by Governor Pataki said 1996 was the safest year on the road in NY State since World War II. Road-related deaths dropped 4.8% from 1995 to 1996, according to the NY State Dept. of Motor Vehicles. Statewide **pedestrian fatalities dropped even more steeply**, by 7%, to 397. Given NYC's strong pedestrian orientation, one can surmise that city pedestrians fared better last year over 1995, but because the **NYC DOT has not released** its annual traffic fatalities report for either 1995 or 1996, it is impossible to tell for sure. Also, aggressive drunk driving enforcement in NY led to a nearly 20% state-wide drop in drunk driving related deaths from 1995-1996.

Governor Pataki and DMV Commissioner Richard Jackson said the State Police was initiating a road rage patrol of unmarked vans with video equipment to record and crack down on aggressive drivers. Police often have trouble convicting aggressive drivers because of a lack of evidence. The covert video van is designed to address the policing problem. The Governor has also introduced legislation to lower the legal intoxication limit from .1 blood alcohol content to .08.

#### NJ Lawmakers Seek Speedier State

Governor Christine Whitman's long-standing opposition to raising NJ's speed limit is in danger of being outflanked by the legislature. In Trenton this week, both houses approved by strong margins a measure that raises speed limits to 65mph on 809 highway miles. With certain passage of the bill looming, Whitman had said she would accede to a 65mph **trial period**, if accompanied by a program targeting road rage.

The legislature's bill contains neither of these conditions, but it is unclear if Whitman will veto the measure or seek to alter the legislation. The Senate's vote appeared veto-proof, while the Assembly's was one shy of the number needed for an override. An auto insurance industry spokesperson told the *NY Times* a higher speed limit could lead to **higher insurance rates**, adding to the political stakes of the issue. Insurance rates were the most prominent issue in this year's race for Governor. The industry argues that higher speeds generally produce more and more severe crashes, which would appear to give Whitman additional ammunition with which to defend her position. Critics of the 55mph speed limit say that it is ignored by motorists and unenforced by the state police.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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