

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Rowland Decongests Connecticut

On Monday, Governor Rowland of Connecticut embraced a **congestion mitigation plan developed by the Coastal Corridor Coalition**, of which the Campaign is a member, over Conn DOT's proposal. The coalition is made up of environmental civic and business groups. The plan will reduce congestion on the major southwest Connecticut roads by 5 percent, thus decreasing travel times and pollution.

The plan calls for: increased telecommuting, promotion of flexible work hours, attracting 1,750 new train riders, increasing carpooling by 2,400 people, increasing van pooling by 200 people, increasing bus use by 500 people, and establishing L.I. Sound Ferry Service to Manhattan and LaGuardia Airport for 250 people daily.

Communities near I-95, Route 1, and the Merritt Parkway will experience a **decrease in air and noise pollution**. People who use highways during non-rush hours will be able to make trips in 1/4 of the time. People who use the various transit will be able to stop spending hours in their cars. Taken together, these provisions will decrease auto use by 5% during rush hours, increasing average vehicle speeds from 25 mph to 40 mph for motorists still using the highway.

Aside from the ferry service, none of the program initiatives are new nor do any require major cost outlays. The Governor's office stated that, "**there is more than enough money in the current DOT budget to pay for and implement each of the programs outlined as part of the overall package.**"

Newspaper and television accounts of the plan failed to grasp the central idea - that increased **road capacity with its high price tag is not a solution to congestion**. Instead, spreading auto traffic over a wider period of time and filling the empty seats on existing trains and buses will achieve the same goal for less money.

"This plan is exciting not only because of the auto reduction provisions but also because, **for the first time, Connecticut coordinated its transportation systems**. It mandates a major shift for the Dept. of Transportation which will now have to promote efficient use of existing systems rather than building new roads," said Katy Lee of CT Fund for the Environment.

"**The final judgement, of course will be in the implementation of the project,**" said a spokesperson from SACIA. A nagging question is how fast the new space on I-95 will fill up with cars and trucks directed from other routes.

### LIE Widening Advances

New York State DOT released the detailed plans for the Long Island Expressway and Cross Island Parkway Interchange upgrade to City DOT this week. Although technically a separate project from the LIE widening for HOV lanes, the **Cross Island Interchange must be modified before the new LIE lanes could be built**. The release of the plans shows that DOT is continuing its expansion of the LIE despite unified community opposition.

Under state highway law, the **Mayor can cancel certain highway projects** once such detailed plans are submitted. Canceling the interchange upgrade would doom the entire Queens LIE project.

State DOT did not give the plans to State Senator Padavan, Assembly Member Weprin, Council Member Leffler, Community Board 11 or any of the local civic groups which have opposed the LIE widening, several of whom expressed their outrage on being informed by City DOT officials that the plans existed since Weprin had not been given a copy by State DOT.

The State asked the City to make written comments by early April. However, some **City sources said that written comments would not suffice and that they will request a public meeting.**

### Assembly Budget High but Vague

On March 18, the Assembly announced its budget proposal. The **Assembly's budget allocated \$103.3 million more to the MTA than the Governor's budget**. Of this, \$83.3 million was set aside for service restorations.

Although the Assembly budget's size is good news, it lacks specific targets. Straphangers Campaign urged the Ways and Means Committee members to use the money for bus and subway restorations including:

- Guaranteeing that riders will **wait of no more than six minutes during rush hour for subways**.
- **Restoring bus service be restored to 1986 levels** including 78,000 weekly bus trips.
- Making MTA adhere to its **guarantee that all riders will get a seat during off-peak hours**.

Further, the budget should include language from Assembly bill 2317-A, which would require **detailed monthly reporting of service levels for each subway line** so that MTA can be held accountable.

The Senate will release a detailed budget next week.

### More Traffic a Good Thing for the PA?

Traffic at the Port Authority's bridge and tunnel crossings climbed 4 percent last year, bumping up toll revenue to \$515 million and helping the agency post a record \$161 million in net income. PA officials touted the earnings results and pledged to keep tolls at current levels. Tolls made up almost 2/3 of the PA's total revenue last year.

Higher traffic volume will mean longer waits on toll lines, however, even with the implementation of E-ZPass. As the economy recovers, traffic is expected to continue to increase unless alternative strategies are pursued. By keeping tolls stable rather than implementing congestion relief pricing at its crossings, the PA is increasing its revenue while doing nothing to solve traffic jams. Its major non-transit building project would attract even more traffic to the region. The Goethals twin, still on hold, would increase the number of vehicles using the crossing by 30%, according to the project's environmental impact statement.

The PA earnings results expose an inherent conflict over how the bi-state agency views increasing traffic at its crossings. Inducing more cars to come into NYC boosts the PA's bottom line but adds to gridlock. Tolls could be used as both a revenue generator and a means of managing the region's chronic traffic congestion. Implementing congestion relief pricing on its crossings would bring down traffic volumes while keeping revenue steady or even increasing it. The extra money could be used for other purposes, such as keeping PATH fares stable. PA Executive Director Robert Boyle confirmed that a PATH fare hike is to be studied in the coming year. The PATH system, despite ridership increases, ran a deficit of \$169 million in 1997. But it is used by many riders who also pay a fare on NJ Transit or NYC subways. Congestion relief pricing would be easy to implement, given the growing acceptance of E-ZPass. Past studies on congestion relief pricing, however, continue to gather dust. No apparent progress is being made between the PA and the MTA on reviving a dormant Request For Proposal to study pricing initiatives.

### Sidewalk Standards Upheld

The New Jersey Appeals Court upheld a **statewide regulation that mandates that sidewalks be provided in new residential developments** if within a half mile radius from school bus routes, train stations, and activity centers. The Tri-State Transportation Campaign and NJPIRG Citizen Lobby fought for these sidewalk connectivity standards (see MTR 40) when the state Department of Community Affairs' technical board adopted the regulations. The advocates then convinced DCA Commissioner Harriet Derman to go further and require that the standards be extended to rural areas and within 2 miles of schools.

Tri-State cited an FHWA report that showed that the presence of **sidewalks significantly increased**

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### More Riders Not Enough Service

New York City's subways and buses carried 12 million more people this January than last January reported the New York Times. Most of the new trips took place on weekends when bus use increased by 30% and subway use by 9%. The jump in ridership is attributed to the 10% discount offered to riders who buy \$15 or more plus the lure of free transfers for MetroCard users.

In order to cope with the increase, NYCT promised to add buses on 46 routes. Yet, according to a report released by the Straphangers Campaign in January 1998, 155 routes were cut or eliminated between 1986 and 1997. In total, 23% of all bus service was eliminated over the past decade. Thus, despite the promised service increase, most riders can expect long waits and crowded service.

In related news, NYPD reported that the number of most serious crimes decreased in January and February as compared to the same period in 1997. Combined with the increase in ridership, the drop in crimes means that the rate of crime per passenger served decreased sharply.

### News Flash - Cars Speed

On March 18, 1998 the Daily News proved what everyone in New York City already knew - most drivers speed. The news zapped 350 cars and found that "84% exceeded the speed limit." Cars on residential streets reached speeds of 62 mph.

Not only do most drivers speed but most do so without penalty. Despite much rhetoric from Mayor Giuliani, including his announcement in 1995 of "Police Strategy No. 8: Reclaiming The Roads of New York" which details the creation of an 1,100-officer Traffic Control Division responsible for enforcing traffic laws and directing traffic (see MTR 56), the laws have not been enforced. In 1996, police gave only 89,097 speeding summonses. Far less than the number of drivers who broke the law according to the News's research.



The widespread disregard for the law, found by the News, demonstrates that posting speed limits will do little to deter the crime. Streets with well posted speed limits and those without speed limit signs had just as many speeders. Speed limits, must therefore, be self enforcing.

As reported in MTR's # 149 and 158 and advocated by many groups including the Neighborhood Streets Network and Transportation Alternatives, several techniques including retiming traffic signals, creating mini-traffic circles, installing speed humps and bumps, and placing neckdowns at street entrances would be more effective than relying of police enforcement.

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**pedestrian safety.** The standards were challenged by the League of Municipalities and some towns, including car-dependent Plainsboro, as a usurpation of municipal zoning authority. However, the Appellate Division found the FHWA report's safety standards to supercede the municipal zoning authority. The court found that DCA Commissioner Harriet Derman correctly adopted the FHWA approach.

### Judge Reserves Decision on Rt. 29

Federal judge Mary Cooper reserved decision on a request by Trenton citizens, Tri-State, and major environmental groups in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, to enjoin NJDOT's construction of the last section of Rt. 29 in Trenton. The link would **destroy the last remaining section of Trenton's waterfront** not already obscured by highway, preventing anglers, beachgoers and pedestrians from accessing the water.

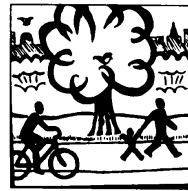
Although a judge's reactions during oral arguments are not an accurate prediction of a ruling, the judge, in this case, was very tough on DOT and FHWA. Their attorneys had to justify why the agencies **refused to perform a congestion management study, major investment study or a supplemental environmental impact statements** on the project, when the preferred alternative selected in the final EIS was different than the one proposed for the original link.

The original link was approved by FHWA in 1980, but was successfully put off by the City of Trenton until late 1996. In between 1980 and 1996, ISTEA changed the way state DOTs must look at highway projects that increase single occupant vehicle travel as Rt 29 would. Tri-State argued that Rt. 29 was covered by ISTEA since it was not approved until 1997. The agencies responded that the project is "grandfathered," despite federal regulations that fix 1992 as the trigger for ISTEA-mandated studies.

Specific complaints focused on the significant **pedestrian safety impacts** expected when the highway is built between a low-income south Trenton neighborhood and a baseball stadium that attracts 450,000 people each year. Large numbers of residents walk from their homes to the stadium. DOT claimed that either the problem was not significant enough to warrant additional study or that it had been remedied by the creation of a pedestrian refuge island between the north and southbound lanes of the highway.

DOT showed how **out-of-touch it is with the affected community** when its attorney ridiculed the idea that anyone would want to swim in the Delaware River at Trenton. Yet, the Delaware at Trenton and north has been promoted as a wild and scenic river in Congress because of its unspoiled beauty. Further, most citizens swimming and fishing there are people of color who cannot afford to drive to the beach an hour away, or access inland country club pools.

## Around the Region



➤ **Bronx** Borough President Fernando Ferrer called two weeks ago for a major overhaul of the Grand Concourse, which runs from the South Bronx to Mosholu Parkway near Van Cortland Park. He allocated \$500,000 to get the job underway. The rehab would add attractive pedestrian space and reduce the highway-like feel that past work has given the boulevard. NYC DOT has in fact been working on designs for the neighborhood-friendly rehab for several years.

➤ **Passaic County** Freeholders pledged last week to explore broad-based approaches to traffic problems. Over the past few years, County planners had sought to double traffic capacity on County Route 511 (Ringwood Avenue) north of I-287 in Wanaque. The project was opposed by Wanaque residents and environmentalists who feared the road would spur development in the NJ Highlands. The State DEP rejected the project's EIS last year. Significant change occurred on the Freeholder board in November.

➤ Newcourt Credit Group Inc. is paying to install E-ZPass on 400 miles on the **New Jersey** Turnpike, the Garden State Parkway and the Atlantic City Expressway. In lieu of payment, the group will collect all of the fines that toll violators pay. If after the 10 year life of the investment plan, users of New Jersey highways are more honest than expected, New Jersey taxpayers will have to repay the cost of installation to the creditors. The Courier-News has called for a more realistic plan.

➤ On March 9, the PA's Deputy Project Manager, Paul Bakus supported the linkage of the **JFK Airport light rail** system to the defunct Rockaway Branch of Long Island Rail Road. The present designs call for the light rail to pass directly over the LIRR cut, making the connection seemingly simple. However, since no rail line now operates on those tracks and none is scheduled to operate in the near future, Bakus's statement lacks relevance.

➤ A new ferry service from Manhattan to the **Mets' Shea Stadium** in Queens received the Mayor's blessing this week. Scheduled to start March 31, NY Waterway's "Mets Express" will carry baseball fans from South Street Seaport to the World's Fair Marina in Flushing Meadows Park, a five minute walk from Shea Stadium. Several Queens groups, however, have objected to the service, citing concerns about the Flushing Bay ecosystem and the use of parkland for a commercial enterprise.



**FHWA's attorney similarly shocked citizens in attendance by continually deferring to (indeed applauding) NJDOT's judgments,** terming FHWA's role that of a "venture capitalist" for capital construction, rather than a regulatory agency. A decision in the case against the controversial highway expansion is expected soon.

## Depot for Sale

The MTA is moving to speed up closure of a South Bronx bus depot in order to make the property available to The New York Post, which wants the land for construction of a new color printing plant. The Walnut Depot, which handles 220 buses, was originally to have closed in two years, upon the completion of a new depot elsewhere in the Bronx. Plans to close the depot ahead of schedule are the result of an effort to keep the newspaper's 500 printing jobs in the city. The land will be sold to the State and leased to the Galesi Group, the leaseholder of the Harlem River Rail Yard. The property will be developed and rented to the The Post, which likes the location due to its proximity to area highways.

Critics have questioned the wisdom of closing a depot at a time when ridership has been climbing. The South Bronx has already suffered a 24% cut in overall bus service in the last decade. While the MTA plans to purchase hundreds of new buses to match ridership increases expected in July, when monthly transit passes debut, area depots will be at capacity. Two hundred of the 220 buses to be transferred from Walnut will be moved to depots in northern Manhattan. This places buses further from their routes, which transit workers fear will increase waiting times for Bronx bus riders, tempting them to use shuttle vans. Harlem environmental advocates have objected to the inevitable increase in air pollution that will come with 200 displaced buses making their home in the neighborhood.

The full MTA board is expected to vote on the depot closure next week. An analysis on potential service implications, both immediate and in July, and a study of the local impact of truck traffic generated by the printing plant seem warranted.

## — Job Announcement — Tri-State Transportation Campaign Communications coordinator

The Campaign needs an energetic staff member who is committed to public policy advocacy, likes to write and is computer- and internet-literate.

Send resume and writing sample to:

Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
281 Park Ave. South, NYC 10010  
fax: 212-777-8157 e-mail [tstc@tstc.org](mailto:tstc@tstc.org)

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site  
<http://www.tstc.org>

## — Job Announcement — Tri-State Transportation Campaign Long Island coordinator

The Campaign needs an energetic staff member who is committed to public policy advocacy and grassroots organizing, communicates well verbally and in writing and is familiar with Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

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## CALENDAR

**MARCH 23 10am** NYC City Council transportation committee hearing: Pataki Road Rage legislation and cab driver road test. City Hall, Manhattan.

**MARCH 23 10am** NJTPA Meeting: TIP amendments including Rte. 1 congestion mgt. strategies. NJTPA, 1 Newark Ctr., Newark 973-639-8400.

**MARCH 24 6-8pm** Auto-Free NY: "Strategies for Allocating Bus and Subway Service in NYC" John Tucker III, V.P. Operations Planning, NYC Transit. 115 W. 30th St. #1207, Manhattan 212-475-3394.

**MARCH 24-25 9am-5:30pm** Port Authority Environmental Expo (alt-fuel vehicles, etc.) 1 World Trade Center mezzanine, 212-435-expo.

**MARCH 25 6-8pm** Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council Meeting: Transportation plan update. Dutchess Cty. Office Building, 22 Market St., Poughkeepsie 914-486-3600.

**MARCH 25 6-8pm** American Planning Association: NYMTC's importance to regional transportation planning. James Harris, NYMTC. Hunter College, West Bldg., Rm 217W 68th St. & Lexington Ave. Manhattan 718-204-1451.

**March 26 9:30am** MTA Board Meeting. Vote on Walnut Bus Depot closure. MTA HQ, 347 Madison Ave. 5th Fl. 212-878-7000

**MARCH 30 1pm** NJTPA Board Meeting: DOT TIP amendments vote prior to conformity freeze. NJTPA, 1 Newark Ctr., Newark 973-639-8400.

**MARCH 31 5-7pm** "Revitalizing the Port of NY" NYC Bar Assn. 42 West 44th St., Manhattan 212-382-6600.

**APRIL 2 12-2pm** TRF Luncheon: "Short Line Realities." Roy Blanchard, VP, Morristown & Erie Railway. Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St., Manhattan 212-435-4086.

MTR#166. Contributing: Gene Russianoff, Lisa Schreiber, Bill Yates Editor: Jon Orcutt Executive Director, Janine Bauer

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