

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Government by Tabloid

With remarkable speed, New Jersey politicians are buckling under the pressure of the *Star Ledger's* front page "Lanes of Pain" campaign to **decommission the carpool lanes on I-287 and I-80**. No intelligent transportation policy debate is taking place regarding the future of the lanes — it's just fast, cheap politics.

The *Ledger* reports today that Senator Frank Lautenberg has inserted language into the federal transportation appropriation bill that would permit NJ to **abandon the I-287 HOV lane** without an act of Congress (the HOV lane received Congressionally earmarked federal funding). State officials would likely still have to win FHWA approval to ditch the lane without repaying federal funds. NJ officials have cited the repayment as their greatest hurdle in getting rid of the HOV lanes.

NJDOT is now talking the anti-HOV talk, as opposed to just weeks ago when the agency's leaders insisted the HOV lanes needed a few more years to prove themselves. NJ Transportation Commissioner Haley bemoaned the fact that Lautenberg's language did not cover the I-80 HOV lanes. "The minute we could give [the feds] some data on the lanes being ineffective, I'm sure **we would [decommission them],**" a Whitman Administration spokesperson told the *Ledger*.

Congressman Bob Franks and Senator Robert Torricelli have also jumped on the bandwagon, saying they are pleased with Lautenberg's move.

Part of the Tri-State Campaign's consistent opposition to HOV lane construction in our region is that, once built, the lanes are **easy targets** for campaigns like the *Ledger's*. Once opened up, the lanes are just more traffic- and sprawl-inducing highway capacity.

Whitman, *Ledger*, NJDOT Have No Plan

Perhaps the NJ Association of Rail Passengers, writing in *Commuter News*, said it best:

"Notably lacking in the *Star-Ledger's* 'let's ditch HOV lanes' campaign is the simple question: What happens when the **liberated HOV lanes are as equally congested** [as regular traffic lanes] ?

"NJ-ARP, like the *Star Ledger*, is critical of HOV lanes; for our part, it's because HOV has been sold as mass transit, when in fact it's a round-about way to **expand highway capacity** —

and feed more sprawl...

"...Road warriors may succeed in liberating HOV lanes from government restriction; we hope they enjoy their victory as they stew in the same traffic jam five miles down the road."

NJ Gas Tax: NJDOT Prepares Pro-Sprawl Spending Plan

The Whitman Administration has rejected the concept of including program and spending prescriptions in its reauthorization of New Jersey's Transportation Trust fund (which Governor Whitman says requires an increase in the state gas tax). The Tri-State Transportation Campaign says such controls are necessary to stop NJDOT from continuing to **reflexively construct highway capacity** in both urban and rural parts of the state.

But interestingly, the NJ Dept. of Transportation has **already developed a spending plan** for future Trust Fund resources. It promises to continue to promote, and possibly accelerate, sprawl development.

A "NJ First" spending chart distributed by NJDOT shows that transit's share does grow, to just over a

CURRENT SPENDING ALLOCATION

	Mill \$	%
TRANSIT	200	29%
HIGHWAY	500	71%
	Mill \$	% of hwy
highway expansion	190	38%
highway preservation and management	120	24%
local aid for counties and municipalities	130	26%
rail freight	2	0%
ped/bike	16	3%
other	42	8%
TOTAL	700	

4-CENT GAS TAX INCREASE - NJ DOT CHART

	Mill \$	%
TRANSIT	313	35%
HIGHWAY	587	65%
	Mill \$	% of hwy
highway expansion	228	39%
highway preservation and management	124	21%
local aid for counties and municipalities	189	32%
rail freight	(in "other")	
ped/bike		
other	46	8%
TOTAL	900	



4-CENT GAS TAX INCREASE - TSTC/FIX IT FIRST

	Mill \$	%
TRANSIT	313	35%
HIGHWAY	587	65%
	Mill \$	% of hwy
highway expansion	59	10%
highway preservation and management	188	32%
local aid for counties and municipalities	260	44%
rail freight	20	3%
ped/bike	30	5%
other	30	5%
TOTAL	900	

one-third share. Absolute highway spending and spending on highway expansion projects both climb as well.

If the Tri-State Transportation Campaign's program proposals were adopted, NJ's transportation spending would look like the table directly above. Transit would enjoy the same increase, but the critical area of state highway spending would be oriented far more toward **roadway maintenance**, local aid and pedestrian, bicycle and rail freight projects.

Legislators, local elected officials and community leaders should decide which vision best promises better communities, open space and a way out of gridlock.

Trucks and the Bronx' Highway to Nowhere

The Tri-State Campaign and Bronx groups recently proposed that NY dig up the **Sheridan Expressway** and make it into a park rather than spend \$245 million to fix its interchange with the Bruckner Expressway.

In an *El Diario-La Prensa* story last week, the NY State DOT's project manager justified upgrading the interchange, saying that the present highway configuration made it difficult for highway **truck traffic** to access the **Hunts Point Market**.

Advocates of eliminating the Sheridan agree that truck traffic in the residential neighborhoods of Hunts Point is a major problem. The Campaign's "Redundant Roadway" paper points out that getting rid of the Sheridan can make it easier to route trucks directly to the market, away from schools and people.

By eliminating the Sheridan Expressway, the State DOT can eliminate numerous elevated highway ramps and four sets of traffic movements at the interchange — two between the Sheridan and the Bruckner and two between the Sheridan and Edgewater Road. By simplifying the system, highway engineers can concentrate on improving truck movements **from the Bruckner Expressway** (where most of the trucks destined for the market originate) **onto Edgewater Road**, the best Hunts Point Market truck route.

"Redundant Roadway: Deconstructing the Bronx' Sheridan Expressway" is available at the Campaign's web site <http://www.tstc.org/reports/redroad.html>

Passing into History

Though likely to revolutionize the way New Yorkers use and regard public transit, NYC Transit's **new monthly and weekly MetroCard unlimited ride transit passes** got off to a relatively uneventful start this week. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while many are buying the passes, some regular transit riders are waiting until the value of their regular MetroCard runs out, vacations have been taken or the new system has had some time to prove itself. Riders' biggest gripe so far is a **computer problem** that completely **neutralizes the pass for 18 minutes** after it is swiped. The system is supposed to do this only for the subway station it is swiped in, not for the entire system — this is supposed to be fixed in the fall.

Perhaps most noteworthy was the amount of **media attention** NYC City Council Speaker and NY gubernatorial candidate **Peter Vallone** garnered with a report on the chronic problem of MetroCard **double-swiping**. The City Council report said that some straphangers who switch subway turnstiles after receiving an error message have had fares erroneously deducted from cards. The MTA attacked the report as political, but paper Transit Authority signs have gone up in some subway stations that instruct riders to stay with the same turnstile after receiving a "swipe again at this turnstile" message.

LIRR's Subway Riders

While much attention has focused on the booming ridership, new unlimited ride passes and service problems of NYC Transit, the MTA also reports increased commuter rail ridership and **strong use of fare discounts on the Long Island Railroad**. In January, Metro-North and Long Island Railroads began offering a 9% discount on monthly passes purchased along with a \$60 NYC Transit Metrocard.

The Long Island Railroad sales department reported it is now selling about 40,000 of the combined passes per month, a number equivalent to **about 30% of LIRR's daily riders**. LIRR ridership was up about 1.6% in the first quarter of 1998, compared to the same period last year. Non-commute trips made up the bulk of the increase, so LIRR revenue has increased more quickly than expected in the face of high participation in the discount program.

Metro-North ridership is up about 3% for the first quarter, although **only about 5% of its riders** use the discount package. MTA officials say LIRR riders use NYC Transit subways and buses far more than Metro-North riders. The LIRR fare structure in fact leads many train riders to switch to subways at stations in Queens.

This week, the commuter rail package deal shifted slightly — the \$60 MetroCard has now been replaced by a **\$63 unlimited ride bus and subway pass** (which is set to a calendar month, rather than 30-day schedule, unlike the passes sold in the city).

No Need for Jams During Goethals Rehab

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign recently sent the Port Authority a set of proposals for easing traffic at the Goethals Bridge during an upcoming deck rehabilitation. In an attempt to bolster its unpopular plan to twin the bridge — and thereby increase traffic — over the Arthur Kill, the agency has said the impending maintenance work could **shut down half the lanes** on the bridge and lead to traffic chaos without a second span to take up the slack. However, PA staff remain tight-lipped when pressed for details on the deck, indicating that lane closure talk may be mostly scare tactics.

But should the deck repair work require any lane closures, the rehabilitation presents an **opportunity** to implement a number of **demand management and safety initiatives** that the Tri-State Campaign and affected community groups have advocated as alternatives to building a second highway span.

Specifically, the Campaign has recommended that the PA offer other options to motorists by funding local bus and van service between Staten Island and New Jersey. Implementing a new toll schedule that charges more in

SIE Study Group Looks at Transit and Pricing

Citizens attending a **Staten Island Expressway** study advisory committee meeting this week were presented with several **transit proposals** and an introduction to **congestion relief pricing**. Prominent among the transit concepts proposed by the NY State DOT was a transfer center for buses and rail located adjacent to the **Grasmere** neighborhood, where the Staten Island Railway crosses under the expressway. Residents turned out largely to protest the proposal, citing concerns that a transit center would exacerbate local traffic problems. Concept drawings were also presented for light rail lines down the center of the expressway median and along the island's north shore, prompting one citizen to remind the audience that NJ is well ahead of Staten Island in developing light rail, and therefore stands to reap the economic and mobility benefits far sooner.

The group also watched "Buying Time," an introductory video on congestion relief pricing produced by the Minnesota DOT (see review, *MTR* #171). **Higher tolls during peak periods** could significantly reduce the congestion that plagues the corridor, just as lower fares on Staten Island express buses have boosted ridership. Comments from the audience were generally favorable, in particular when it came to applying pricing to trucks. The only individual to speak out against the concept was a **AAA spokesman**, who had not previously attended any of the SIE meetings.

Plans to **add both a bus lane and a truck climbing lane** on portions of the SIE were announced as "**early action**" projects at the end of the meeting. A Tri-State Campaign representative questioned the bus lane, which the DOT is reportedly **engineering to passenger car specifications** (see last issue), and the group was assured that more details would be provided before the projects were advanced further.

the peak period will lessen the number of cars trying to cross when traffic is heaviest. Expansion of goods movement options also figures prominently among the proposals. By expediting ongoing rail freight projects such as the North Shore Railroad rehabilitation and the City of New York's cross-harbor car float investments—and enhancing these services through temporary subsidies—the PA could substantially lessen truck traffic at the crossing during the deck rehabilitation. The Tri-State Campaign looks forward to the PA's response.



NYC's Truck Rules: Unenforced

Last week, we noted that communities from Trenton to the Triborough Bridge are fed up and **want relief from truck traffic**. The current *Transportation Alternatives* magazine tells the story of another such neighborhood.

NYC DOT has apparently designated Linden Boulevard, a primarily residential street in the Brooklyn sections of East Flatbush and Brownsville, as a truck route to JFK airport.

But according to NYC's traffic rules and truck route plan, Linden Boulevard is to be used by truck bound only for destinations within Brooklyn.

"Now we have **18 wheelers plowing down our street**. Children can't even cross the street without fear of being crushed," Marcella Williams of the Linden Boulevard Neighborhood Improvement Association told T.A. The group has vowed to rid the neighborhood of monster trucks.

- Copies of the **NYC Truck Route Network** may be obtained by writing:

NYC Dept. of Transportation, Office of Transportation Modeling, 40 Worth Street, NYC 10013

- The **Neighborhood Streets Network** is a coalition of 50 block associations, neighborhood groups and PTAs working to make NYC streets quieter, safer and friendlier. Call Elizabeth Ernish at Transportation Alternatives, 212-629-8080 to join or for info.

Traffic Solution: Community Organizing

Transportation Alternatives also tells the story of a Bronx community that has **tamed traffic** with new pedestrian safety installations on some of its streets.

The University West Burnside Neighborhood Association, with Transportation Alternatives and a handful of churches, elected officials from the neighborhood and local business groups, successfully persuaded the NYC DOT to develop a traffic calming plan around **new speed humps and mid-block crosswalks**. The plan was developed by NYC DOT's Traffic Calming Office,

though DOT's Bronx Borough Commissioner, James Kilkenny, **had to be pressured** into paying attention to community complaints about speeding and traffic noise.

T.A. writes: "The role of the NYC DOT Traffic Calming Office in achieving consensus between the community and DOT is noteworthy. In case after case, the Traffic Calming group has worked to gain a real understanding of neighborhoods' traffic problems, and then proposed solutions. Unfortunately, with a **staff of only four** and a **backlog of 1200 community requests** for help, the group is overwhelmed. The DOT needs to quadruple the office's staff and emulate its consensus-based approach throughout the agency."

Jitneys Set NJ Trend

At a Tri-State Campaign press conference July 2nd, Congressman Donald Payne announced \$2.5 million for **jitney-rail feeder programs** and bike and pedestrian access improvements to rail stations in urban municipalities like **Newark and East Orange** along NJ Transit's Morris & Essex lines. The money was secured through the recent federal TEA-21 authorization.

Affirming longstanding Campaign contentions, Congressman Payne said, "Better access to our region's rail stations will undoubtedly result in an **increase in the demand for rail...** An integrated system of jitney-to-rail services throughout the Oranges and Newark will provide significant benefits to residents and businesses in these municipalities."

East Orange Mayor Robert Bowser stated that expanded jitney services will serve as a catalyst "in the rebirth of this city."

However, most urban rail stations along the Morris & Essex line do not yet receive full Midtown Direct service, and for urban revitalization efforts to succeed, equal access for New Jersey's urban residents to NYC and suburban job markets must be also achieved.

In March, Congressman Payne's office reached out to the Campaign to help define how the TEA-21 earmark should be spent. Innovative rail feeder programs, like those funded by NJ Transit's "Community Rail Shuttle Challenge Grant" (MTR #155), are being demanded by cities and towns throughout the region because they provide an affordable and environmentally sound solution to air pollution, pedestrian safety and traffic and parking problems.

What's new at the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site:

Alternatives to Destroying Trenton's Waterfront

Policy paper from the Tri-State Campaign and others to the Mayor and City Council of Trenton

<http://www.tstc.org>

Mobilizing the Nation

☞ Lancaster, California, north of Los Angeles, has developed a **market-based alternative to growth boundaries**. The city charges for the expense of providing services to far-flung sites – levies for police, fire and other services are based on sites' distance from already developed areas. Once the system was developed, in 1992, residential development pressure eased considerably, so it has not yet been put to a real test. *Neighborhood Works*

☞ The *Wall Street Journal* reported this week that **highway contractors are staffing up** in anticipation of more work following Congress' and President Clinton's authorization of **record road spending** in May's 6-year Transportation Equity Act. The companies anticipate a quick pick up in contracts as the federal dollars flow through state transportation departments.

The program is so big some economists think it could exacerbate existing construction industry labor shortages and further drive up wages. "You'd rather do this during a recession," one economist told the *Journal*.

Congressional fact-finding forum

HOV LANES IN NEW JERSEY

Reps. Bob Franks, Rodney Frelinghuysen

Monday, July 13 10:00am

Somerset County Vocational & Technical School
North Bridge St. and Vogt Drive, Bridgewater

Call 908-686-5576

Calendar

July 16 Noon Metro-North RR Commuter Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 10th floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

July 17 1pm NYMTC bicycle/pedestrian working group, 1 World Trade Center 82e 212-938-3300.

July 28 6pm Auto-Free NY walking tour: Brooklyn Historic Trolley Museum. Meet at B61 bus stop, Jay & Willoughby Sts. 212-475-3394.

July 29 9:30am MTA Board meeting, 347 Madison, 5th floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7000.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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