

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 182

July 27, 1998

## NEWS

### Lawmakers Lash L.I.E. Carpool Lanes

Perhaps spurred by the anti-HOV lane revolt in New Jersey, two **Nassau County legislators questioned the benefits of HOV lanes** at a press conference Tuesday. Steve Levy and Lisanne Altmann called on the NY State DOT to investigate the merits of carpool lanes versus opening the existing Long Island Expressway HOV lane to all traffic, or even adding a fifth lane to the L.I.E.

The elected officials challenged DOT to try a real-world, several month experiment of **opening the L.I.E. carpool lane to general traffic**.

NYS DOT, which plans to extend the L.I.E. carpool lane by widening the expressway between Jericho and Queens, dismissed the legislators' request.

Echoing statements from New Jersey, Levy and Altmann criticized under-use of the L.I.E. HOV lanes.

### Route 29 Polarizes Trenton Area

Pennsylvania officials and towns added to the growing opposition to construction of Route 29 along the Delaware River in Trenton.

The Morrisville, PA borough council condemned the project in a resolution adopted Monday, citing the additional **traffic and river impacts** the project will create and stating that the project "is contrary to almost every goal" of the Lower Delaware River Management Plan.

Meanwhile, the **Trenton City Council** has requested a fact-finding meeting about the project with NJDOT.

Opposition to the waterfront highway began to mount when NJ's Tidelands Resource Council rejected a permit for the project to fill part of the Delaware in May. NJDOT and the Council are attempting to organize a re-hearing, but the legality of a second hearing for the same proposal that was rejected earlier is dubious.

### Lines Being Drawn Over NJ Gas Tax

NJ **grassroots anti-tax activists** have already begun distributing bumper stickers around the state, and charge that the Whitman Administration has sold out its pledges of fiscal conservatism. Business and labor groups, on the other hand, are launching a media campaign underscoring the need for infrastructure investment. The NJ Legislature will likely vote next week on whether to put the tax hike on November's ballot. The Tri-State Campaign would back the hike if the Governor would agree to **appropriate controls on how the revenue would be used**, but the administration refuses to consider the idea. The Campaign fears NJDOT's sprawl-causing road construction activities will accelerate once the tax hike expands the agency's budget.

### Transit Surplus '98

MTA and NYC Transit Authority officials reported yesterday that the agencies would likely end 1998 with sizeable budget surpluses. Strong economic conditions have pushed **tax revenues dedicated to the MTA** above projections. **Robust rider revenues** have also exceeded expectations.

MTA finance chief Gary Caplan told an MTA Finance Committee meeting yesterday that the agency faced a transit "windfall" that could yield a surplus of \$100 million by year's end. The announcement marked a big difference from the agency's behavior last year, when it **tried to deny** through most of the fall that **any budget surplus** existed. The MTA ended 1997 with a surplus over \$180 million. That surplus led Governor Pataki to heed calls for monthly and weekly transit passes – the MTA began offering the passes this month.

Transit officials cautioned that the estimates are preliminary, only covering the year's first five months. But transit observers **think the surplus will continue to grow** during the year. For one thing, transit officials have underestimated ridership increases stemming from fare incentives and good economic times, and they have overestimated losses from the incentive packages.

The Straphangers Campaign has pushed NYC Transit to provide more service to ease current crowding and to accommodate the expected increase in transit use the monthly and weekly passes will bring after the summer. Transit service increases announced last week amounted to a .5% increase for buses and a less than .2% increase for subways.

But an MTA spokesperson told reporters that **Governor Pataki** had directed the MTA to **"return any surpluses to the customers"** and that investment in more service was a likely use for extra revenue.

While the MTA has large capital investment needs as well, surplus fare revenues, at the very least, should be invested in service. Last year, the fare surplus was about \$73 million, and through this May, the fare surplus was over \$20 million. Investments in more frequent service could ensure continued strong ridership and help ensure the overall health of the system.

### Regional Fare Card Talks Underway

Officials from the MTA, the Port Authority and NJ Transit told reporters this week that discussions had begun toward regional adoption of the MTA's Metro-Card fare collection system. Port Authority officials said it was possible that **PATH train turnstiles** could

be outfitted to read **MetroCards** as well as the PATH fare card in use now. NJ Transit officials were less specific. NJ Transit train stations are not part of a closed system (tickets are collected on the trains rather than at stations) where a swipe card would be used. Nonetheless, there are a variety of transit-boosting options NJ Transit could use. One is to offer a **combined monthly commuter train/Metrocard pass**, at discounted prices,

#### **Service and Ridership on NYC Transit** (data as of July, 1998)

There were 509,000 more daily subway and bus riders on an average weekday in May 1998 than in May 1997 — an overall 9.8% increase in ridership.

##### Buses

\* Of the 509,000 added daily riders in the last year, 306,000 are on the buses — a 22.2% increase in ridership.

\* Weekday bus service increases (planned for this September) add a total of only 298 daily scheduled trips — a .5% increase in service (298 added trips out of a base of 43,000 daily bus trips).

\* Bus ridership is up 39% since 1996 (with 1.22 million bus riders on an average weekday in May 1996 compared to 1.69 million in May, 1998).

\* There has been only a 6% increase in scheduled service between 1996 and the middle of 1998: A total of 2,598 daily scheduled bus trips have been added out of a base of 43,000 daily scheduled trips, according to NYC Transit records.

##### Subways

\* Of the 509,000 added daily riders in the last year, 203,000 are on the subways — a 5.3% increase in ridership.

\* Weekday subway service increases (planned for September) add only 10 daily trips on three lines — for less than a .2% increase in service (10 added trips out of 6,300 daily trips).

\* Subway ridership is up 14% since 1996 (with 3.53 million subway riders on an average weekday in May, 1996 compared to 4.03 million in May, 1998).

\* There was only a 2% increase in service between 1996 and 1997, with vehicle revenue miles increasing from 299.3 million in 1996 to 304.1 million in 1997, according to the MTA's 1999-2003 Strategic Business Plan.

**Straphangers Campaign**



**Don't Stand for It!**

as do Metro-North and Long Island Railroads. **NJ Transit buses** could also be outfitted with MetroCard readers, and reportedly, the new Secaucus Transfer station will be turnstile-controlled.

The MetroCard is the most likely regional fare system because it is already in place, in use by the largest part of the region's transit network.

Transit advocates hailed the talk of an integrated fare system as good news, but hoped the discussions would turn to **implementation plans** before long. Highway toll agencies in NYC, upstate NY and at Hudson River crossings have already integrated EZ-Pass toll collection systems, and NJ's toll agencies will join them within a few years.

But officials at all of the agencies were guarded about the time-frame for a regional fare card. "This is a long way from something that would be instituted next week," an MTA spokesperson told the *Star-Ledger* on Thursday. An NJ Transit spokesperson told the Campaign that a seamless transit network was part of **Governor Whitman's strategic transportation vision**. When asked whether serious movement on the matter would take place in the next three years, before Governor Whitman is scheduled to leave office, the official declined to be specific.

Interagency fare collection would require a data-sharing system to track revenue and ridership, because a rider could pay for a fare card at a Transit Authority station but use it on PATH trips. The Port Authority, the MTA and the NY State Thruway Authority transfer large quantities of data on EZ-Pass transactions between themselves each day, because motorists who have opened an account with one agency often incur toll charges with the others. Transit advocates argue that the rail and bus network should be as integrated as the region's highway system.

#### **Expressway to Future Gridlock**

The "Bergen Arches" proposal to **add six lanes** to the east-west **Jersey City** roadway feeding the Holland Tunnel continues to draw attention. Jersey City Mayor Bret Schundler touted the project as "an expressway to New Jersey's future" in the *Star Ledger* this week, while DOT Commissioner John Haley stumped for the NJ gas tax hike, cautioning that "only with the renewal of the Transportation Trust Fund could we even consider new projects like this one." The \$100 million dollar highway, along with a \$200 million extension to a new Turnpike exit proposed in the Meadowlands, is a prime example of why the Tri-State Campaign fears a 4-cent gas tax hike and giving NJ DOT carte blanche to spend it.

Jersey City activists wary of thousands of additional

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cars cramming onto Hudson waterfront streets where the new Hudson-Bergen light rail line was supposed to promise traffic relief called a preliminary meeting to determine what alternative uses should be considered for the 2½-mile Bergen Arches rail bed. Jersey City officials had no answers on this or other related issues at a special City Council meeting this week.

In fact, it's not clear that proponents of the new highway have done their homework on the Bergen Arches. The property is **owned by Conrail**. Rail freight volumes in northern NJ are expected to rise substantially after Conrail is acquired by Norfolk Southern and CSX later this year, and increased port activity anticipated shortly in Jersey City and Bayonne will call for more capacity and routes for rail traffic moving north and west out of the peninsula. An active freight rail line already runs under Arches, and the tunnel housing it may be able to accommodate additional trackage. But when questioned this week about the proposal to convert the rail bed to a highway, a **Norfolk Southern** official replied: "We want to **keep our options open**."

Should the railroads decide to sell the property, NJ Transit would have "the right of first refusal" to acquire it. Since other passenger rail lines run parallel to this line, NJ Transit might well decline. But as the New Jersey Association of Rail Passengers points out, overcrowding and operational difficulties on existing rail lines could make the line extremely valuable.

### LIRR Rapped Over Repairs

A public outcry erupted over Long Island Railroad service last week, after irate riders tipped the *NY Post* to declining conditions and performance on the country's busiest commuter railroad. **More train cars than usual** have been **removed from service** for maintenance following breakdowns, causing worse than usual crowding, and the official on-time performance measure for June fell to 87.5%. Riders were especially incensed at a high failure rate of air conditioning.

The LIRR Commuter Council and others, including Senator D'Amato, quickly took LIRR's management to task for poor performance and inadequate maintenance.

Some labor sources said the situation was an unsurprising manifestation of **long-deferred maintenance** on the railroad's aging fleet. They also said recent service increases without addition of new rolling stock had stressed the old equipment more. An LIRR spokesperson told the *Post* that maintenance operations had been running only part-time prior to the summer.

Delivery of many **new train cars and locomotives** is in the LIRR's near future, but observers worry the railroad is positioning itself for more postponed maintenance. LIRR's most modern maintenance facility, the Hillside shop, does not have strong enough floors for diesel locomotives. LIRR will thus have to build a **new facility** to maintain its new equipment, which includes bi-mode diesel/electric engines. But, with some of the new rolling stock set to start its shake-out period with the railroad, work on the new maintenance center, an addition to the Richmond Hill shop, has yet to begin.

## Around the Region

☛ The **Franklin Avenue Shuttle** subway line in **Brooklyn** is scheduled to close tonight at midnight for an 18-month, \$74 million rehabilitation. Free buses will run the route in lieu of the subway trains. Renovation of the shuttle was won by Brooklyn elected officials, the communities near the line and transit activists after the MTA tried to remove the line from its capital program in late 1994. Despite its advanced state of decay, 10,000 riders per day have used the shuttle in recent years.

☛ Metro-North Railroad has sought to boost its **Rockland County** ridership by marketing a "Guaranteed Ride Home" program that provides two free taxi trips, up to 30 miles, from the railroad's Tarrytown Station. Commuters with Pascack Valley Line passes or Metro-North/Tappan Zee Express "unitickets" can get "Guaranteed Ride Home" vouchers at Grand Central Terminal.

☛ Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields has asked NYC Police Commissioner Howard Safir to step up enforcement of bus lanes in NYC. She suggested that the NYPD's use of traffic agents riding on **Lexington Avenue** buses (who would debark and ticket bus lane blockers), be expanded to other **Manhattan bus routes**. Increasing bus ridership, wrote the Borough President, makes "the timeliness of service and ability for buses to get to bus stops all the more important."

### Highways into Parks

If it were dug up and converted to parkland, as has been proposed by groups in the Bronx (see *MTR* 177) **the little-used Sheridan Expressway** would stand in good company alongside other urban highways — actual or planned — that are now promenades or linear parks.

- In 1974, Harbor Drive along the Willamette River in Portland Oregon was torn up and the 37 acre Tom McCall Waterfront Park, which includes basketball courts, hiking and bicycling trails, a dock, fountain, art and rest rooms was developed.

- In San Francisco, the 1989 earthquake dislodged part of the Embarcadero Freeway, shutting it down. Instead of fixing the elevated road, the city decided to reclaim its waterfront by clearing the highway and building a premier promenade with pedestrian accommodations, art installations, and a bike path.

- Community opposition in the 1960's and 1970's led to cancellation of plans for a major Boston highway



*The Sheridan on a recent weekday*

southwest of downtown. Today, the Southwest Corridor Park features a rail right-of-way for a subway line commuter rail and Amtrak, but no highway. Instead a bicycle/pedestrian path, community gardens, an extension of a community college and housing for the elderly have been developed in the corridor.

### Big Ships, Deep Water

The Regina Maersk, a cargo vessel that requires 50 foot channels when loaded to its 6,000-container capacity, visited New York Harbor Wednesday to illustrate the need for port facilities able to handle new monster ships. World-class container carriers Maersk and Sea-Land have publicly **threatened to leave the Port of NY/NJ** unless channels deep enough for its biggest ships are provided. The Port Authority, which plans to dredge channels leading to Ports Newark and Elizabeth down to 45 feet over the next five years, has responded with a preliminary proposal to **develop a new terminal** for the carriers at Port Elizabeth, which will presumably involve **blasting bedrock** out of the bottom of the Arthur Kill to attain the necessary 50 foot depth.

Deep-water port development around NY Harbor could reduce some long-range truck trips to and from NYC, especially if the alternative is **loss of maritime freight market share** by the Port of NY/NJ. But for this effect to be realized, new port areas will need efficient rail links and support by sufficient intermodal yard capacity. In addition, truck impacts from port development must be made clear to relevant stakeholders, and extensive mitigation measures devised.

Press coverage of the Regina Maersk's visit presented **more dredging or blasting** of the channels to Newark and Elizabeth **as the only option**. These accounts, and a statement released by Governor Whitman's office, neglected to mention that naturally deep water sites already exist in the harbor, in particular the underused **Brooklyn** waterfront and the soon-to-be closed Military Ocean Terminal at **Bayonne** (MOTBY), that are **under consideration** by New York City and the Port Authority for port development. Also not described were the immense fiscal and environmental costs and strong likely opposition that further blasting would create. The visit of the Regina Maersk will hopefully convince port experts at the agencies to take full advantage of current deep water locations.

## TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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

#### Transportation reform advocate, NJ

The Campaign needs an energetic staff member to advance economic incentives for reduced car and truck use and congestion in New Jersey. Candidate should be committed to public policy advocacy, communicate well verbally and in writing and be familiar with New Jersey.

Send resume and writing sample to:

Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
240 West 35th St, NYC 10010  
fax: 212-268-7333 e-mail [tstc@tstc.org](mailto:tstc@tstc.org)

#### Help for Melrose Station ?

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has scheduled a review of its study of Metro-North's **Melrose Station** in the South Bronx. The study will look at **service and infrastructure improvements** needed to make the ill-designed, decrepit station into a worthwhile transit facility capable of serving its host community's needs.

The meeting will be held at Morrisania Air Rights Houses' community center just north of the station's western entrance, 3131 Park Avenue at **5:30 PM Tuesday, August 4th** and begin with a site visit to Melrose station.

### Calendar

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

**July 28 6:30 pm** CT Dept. of Environmental Protection hearing for CT DOT widening of Route 66 in Middlefield. Middlefield Community Center. Citizens for a Sensible 66, 860-346-5321.

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

**July 30 7:00am, 4:00pm** Public open house, MTA Lower Manhattan Access Alternatives, Flatbush Ave. Terminal (cnr Atlantic), Brooklyn. 212-799-4500.

**July 30 12:30pm** "Getting Around Columbus Circle" NYC Dept. of City Planning brown bag lunch. 22 Reade St., Manhattan 212-442-4630.

**Aug 5 8:00am** MTA Lower Manhattan Access Alternatives public advisory committee meeting. U.S. Customs House, 1 Bowling Green, Manhattan. 212-799-4500.

**Aug 25 6pm** Auto-Free NY walking tour: "NJ Waterfront Trolley." Meet Exchange Place PATH station entrance, Jersey City. 212-475-3394

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