

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Bergen Arches: A Castle in the Sky?

As Jersey City writes plans and signs checks to advance the Bergen Arches highway, citizens are raising questions about the project's utility and the site's legal status.

At a recent meeting of Hudson Alliance for Rational Transportation (HART), members listed **inconsistencies in project promoters' plans** and expressed a desire for a more transparent planning process.

A chief concern is **whether the railroads** that own the Bergen Arches right of way **will sell it** to highway authorities. The line's new owners, Norfolk Southern and CSX, have expressed a strong desire to increase Hudson waterfront rail access, and are taking a protective attitude with regard to the Arches. While Jersey City describes the line as "abandoned," it is unclear that the line has undergone formal abandonment via the US Surface Transportation Board.

HART members also note that alternative uses for the corridor are not being seriously studied. A 1991 study by EBASCO makes **no mention of mass transit** through the Arches, and the present HNTB Corp. design study bankrolled by Jersey City explores nothing but a highway. In the early 1990s, NJ Transit suggested that a dedicated, reversible busway be a part of the project.

Regarding public health, Jersey City is a "Severe II" ozone non-attainment area and a carbon monoxide non-attainment area, and is expected to violate the EPA's new standard for airborne particles. HART wants to know how additional waterfront traffic volumes will solve perennial pollution threats.

Historic considerations also appear to have been left out of Arches proponents' publicity materials. The railway cut over which the Arches span closely parallels NJ Rte 139, which NJDOT has proposed for major widening. Even while Jersey City engages a consultant to find funds for Route 139 and the Arches, DOT has been embroiled in a **battle over Route 139's historic impacts**. As of Feb., NJDEP's Office of Program Coordination told NJDOT that its plans threatened "substantial adverse impact" in the Routes 1 & 9/ Pulaski Skyway Historic District. DEP stated that NJDOT plans fell short in showing the level of destruction to the land above the Route 139 project and the number of lanes to be built. Local community groups in the neighboring Heights section of Jersey City have publicly attacked NJDOT for obfuscation on this point, and are concerned that the combined Route 139/Bergen Arches renovations could plow a literal chasm through the middle of the city.

Route 92 Opponents Launch Media Campaign

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign and several NJ environmental groups began broadcasting a **television campaign** against construction of Route 92 this week. The highway project is proposed to connect the New Jersey Turnpike and Route 1 in southern Middlesex County, wrecking wetlands habitat and some of Middlesex County's last remaining open space in the process.

The TV spots focus on the open space impacts of the highway and drive home the point that **the highway will provide no long-term congestion relief**. Instead, the road will serve to generate additional traffic by facilitating real estate development in the area.

The ads urge viewers to **call Gov. Whitman** at 609-292-6000 to request she withdraw support for Rte 92.

Release the Swipe Files

The Straphangers Campaign and NYC Transit Riders Council have written to NYC Transit to urge decisive resolution of problems bus and subway riders are having with fare cards.



The letter said many riders "are having to swipe numerous times to activate turnstiles. Many are also losing fares, getting locked out of the system, or waiting a month or more for refunds on **defective MetroCards**. This leads to great frustration, missed trains and lost time and money."

The letter came on the heels of press reports that fare beating by normally law-abiding citizens is rising. Riders having problems with fully-paid MetroCards are vaulting or slipping past turnstiles in frustration.

MTA officials have sought to **dismiss the card malfunction issue** as non-existent or very small. But so far, the agency **has not released any data on** MetroCard mis-swipes, double deductions and lock-outs.

The groups suggested that Transit give clerks more discretion in granting entry to riders with card problems, reduce "lock-out" periods for unlimited ride passes, change turnstile programming, try different card material, ease refund policies, maintain card readers more often and explore non-swipe "smart" cards.

"Our groups are particularly concerned about **riders losing confidence in MetroCard-based fare discounts**. We're sure you can empathize with their aggravation when — after purchasing unlimited rides for 7 or 30 days or MetroCards with 10% bonuses — a malfunctioning card reader or computer overload locks them out or results in an extra charge," said the letter.

OPTO Incident

A rape on the G subway line in Brooklyn last weekend renewed concerns over NYC Transit's "one person train operation" (OPTO) policy for lower volume lines.

OPTO began on some shuttle lines in 1996, and began on night and weekend G trains in March. The G is the only non-shuttle subway that does not enter Manhattan.

The Straphangers Campaign urged suspension of OPTO, which **removes subway conductors**, after the G train attack. "Conductors on subway cars are an important **deterrent to crime**, both by their physical presence and their quick ability to signal for help," Straphangers' Gene Russianoff told the *NY Times*. Transit has said plans to extend OPTO to other lines like the C and the #6 were on hold until experience with the G is evaluated

Legislators mobilized last year to mandate conductors on trains, but the measure was vetoed by Gov. Pataki.

City Transportation Chief Speaks

New NYC Transportation Commissioner **Wilbur Chapman** introduced himself to the city transportation establishment in a wide ranging speech at a Thursday Dept. of City Planning lunch forum.

Chapman called for an "intelligent, cohesive plan to promote civility" among the city's road users, and **cited Taiwan** as a good example of harmonious interaction between motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists. Chapman, who was formerly third ranking chief in the city police department, questioned whether "it is really important" for people to drive single-occupant cars in NYC and pointed to carpooling as a possible answer to the city's growing congestion problem. He also called on the Transit Authority to further discount transit passes and provide better customer service on subways and buses. Chapman repeatedly emphasized "**human factors**" and **education** in changing road user behavior. He enthused about walking down 7th Ave. after the Disney Parade as it became a temporary pedestrian mall.

When asked about **Prospect Park**, Chapman responded that he favored a 6 month trial closing of the park roadway to motor traffic, but said that with so much vehement feeling on both sides of the issue there was little room to maneuver.

Chapman began his remarks on a discordant and rather bizarre note by comparing Transportation Alternatives to black nationalist and hate monger Khalid Mohammed. Chapman appeared infuriated by criticism in *Transportation Alternatives* magazine over his position on the design of the Manhattan approach to the Brooklyn Bridge. Later, a T.A. representative confronted him over the inappropriateness of his remarks. Hopefully, the Commissioner's incendiary remarks do not reflect on his ability to work with the city's communities and large and vocal pedestrian and bicycling interests.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

Primary Colors

The following are noteworthy comments from candidates in contested downstate NY primary elections on transportation policy questions. The questions were included in a questionnaire issued this summer by the New York League of Conservation Voters (NY LCV). The primaries are Tuesday, Sept. 15. Next month, we will present similar coverage of candidates for the general election. Not all candidates filed responses with LCV, but each candidate listed here is involved in a contested primary race. All candidates listed here are Democrats: the few contested Republican races in the state are either outside the metropolitan region or had no candidates that returned LCV questionnaires.

Questions LCV posed to candidates for Congress were mostly national in nature, and did not specifically refer to transportation. All the candidates responding said they supported implementing and strengthening the Kyoto accord to reduce U.S. emissions that contribute to global warming.

U.S. Senate

Geraldine Ferraro cited her record in Congress fighting for more federal funding for mass transit. As a member of Congress in the 1970s and 80s, Ferraro received high LCV marks for votes in favor of Amtrak and urban transit funding, and for reduction of funds for "high cost" interstate highways like NYC's Westway.

Mark Green wrote that he supports the Regional Plan Association's call for the metropolitan region to invest heavily in new public transit capacity to reduce traffic congestion and pollution. As NYC Consumer Affairs Commissioner, Green convinced a number of city parking garage operators to offer space for bicycle parking.

Charles Schumer cited his work in the U.S. House to pass a stronger Clean Air Act over the opposition of Presidents Reagan and Bush, and said preserving open space would be one of his top environmental priorities. An LCV report notes that Schumer voted against a 1985 amendment in Congress designed to prevent federal funding for Westway.

U.S. House

(9th district, parts of Brooklyn & Queens, seat being vacated by Schumer)

Dan Feldman cited his work in the NY Legislature fighting the Westway highway project and said reducing pollution from cars and trucks was a top priority. He wants to boost rail freight in NYC. Feldman said he is personally committed to implementation of the Committee for Better Transit's "Q-rail" plan, which would restore the LIRR Rockaway Branch and use it for JFK access, instead of the planned Port Authority light rail line above the Van Wyck Expressway.

Melinda Katz said she would back a mix of national regulations and market incentives to reduce air pollution,

including tighter auto fuel efficiency (CAFE) standards.

(10th district, Brooklyn, incumbent: Ed Towns)

Barry Ford Reducing impacts from cars and trucks is a top priority. "I expect to be a very vocal advocate for mass transportation, tougher CAFE standards and development of rail as an alternative to the heavy truck traffic through the city."

LCV asked Democratic candidates for NY State offices several questions related to sustainable transportation policies, including:

- *whether they would support the NYS Transportation Efficiency Act (NYSTEA) introduced in the State Assembly several years ago;*
- *if they would support a 10% upper limit on State DOT highway spending for new road capacity per fiscal year and;*
- *whether they backed a phase out of all MTA diesel buses in favor of cleaner fuels.*

NYSTEA would require the NYS Dept. of Transportation to certify that there are no other policy options available before widening or building highways (the bill passed the Assembly Transportation Committee in 1994 but was never sponsored in the Senate). LCV also provided room for candidates to elaborate on priorities.

Governor

Betsy McCaughey Ross wrote "I believe mass transit will become more vital to New Yorkers' commutes in the coming decades than ever before. Therefore, before future highway expansion is approved, more transit or other alternatives should be considered." Ross said she would "consider" the 10% road capacity limit and said "all alternatives to curtail suburban sprawl, especially in Long Island and Westchester" should be reviewed.

Early in her campaign, Ross backed a pay-as-you-go auto insurance policy that tied premiums directly to driver mileage, a measure supported by transportation reformers because it rewards less frequent car use.

Peter Vallone (currently NYC City Council Speaker) took credit for New York City's progress in recent years converting the NYCDOT franchise bus fleet and other city-owned vehicles to natural gas power, and said he "looked forward to taking on the MTA" regarding the diesel pollution issue.

Regarding the NYSTEA bill, Vallone said "transportation planning that encourages mass transit and intermodal transportation systems is the 'road' to Clean Air Act compliance." Vallone said the 10% new capacity limit "sounds reasonable to me" but said he was not expert enough on the state highway budget to support or oppose it yet. He said he would appoint a DOT commissioner who would bring an "environmental perspective" to the job.

Regarding land use policy, Vallone said he preferred incentives over regulations to direct development into cities and towns and preserve open space, but said it was important that any such policy be effective.

Attorney General

Catherine Abate supports "more bike lanes, bike to work programs and incentives for people to leave their cars home" and further steps to ease transit fares and improve bus and subway service. "Highway funding for projects related to sprawl should be discouraged." She lists fighting air pollution as one of her top priorities. Abate wants to phase out of diesel MTA buses, citing dramatic increases in childhood asthma in NYC.

Evan Davis said he backs a "strong statewide component for land use planning."

Oliver Koppell put fighting air pollution and containing sprawl among his top environmental priorities. He said he would study phasing out MTA diesel buses. He said anti-sprawl measures had merit, but that "local control should not be completely superseded."

Elliot Spitzer said strict land regulation was needed to guarantee the survival of open space, that state expenditures should not encourage sprawl and that the MTA should be held to a "high standard of accountability" regarding diesel particulate pollution.

State Senate

14th dist, part of Queens. Incumbent: George Onorato

George Delis (D) supports NYSTEA but expressed no opinion on a 10% new capacity limit. He supports an MTA diesel bus phase out and said building monorails would be his top capital spending priority.

17th dist, part of Brooklyn. Incumbent: Nellie Santiago

Nellie Santiago (D) backs NYSTEA and the 10% new capacity limit, and says action on a diesel phase out is unnecessary because the MTA has already committed to it. She supports more public transit but believes highway expansion in and near NYC is being driven by increases in truck traffic, which needs to be contained and reduced.

30th district, parts of Bronx and Manhattan. Vacated by Franz Leichter

Jerry Goldfeder (D) backs NYSTEA and the 10% new capacity limit, and wants the MTA to add cars to subway trains and take steps to reduce bus bunching. He supports reduced weekend transit fares, wants federal assistance used to expand transit and bikeways, and says improving transit is one of his top priorities.

Daniel O'Donnell (D) backs NYSTEA and the 10% cap, and says transit in NYC is "woefully inadequate" to meeting the needs of the city. He wants to boost the capital budget to pay for a cross-harbor rail freight tunnel, airport transit links and the 2nd Avenue subway.

Eric Schneiderman (D) was pro bono attorney in the lawsuit by the Straphangers Campaign and NY Urban League against the 1995 MTA bus and subway fare increase. Schneiderman backs NYSTEA and the 10% cap, wants to expand rail freight and revive NYC's port and see increased transit service and the 2nd Avenue

subway built. He backs an MTA diesel phase out but wants to extend to other government vehicles as well.

State Assembly

34th district, part of Queens. Incumbent: Ivan Lafayette

Ivan Lafayette backs NYSTEAs and the 10% new capacity limit.

46th district, part of Brooklyn. Incumbent: Adele Cohen

Adele Cohen says her top priority is to implement a community- and transit-friendly plan for the Gowanus Expressway. She supports Regional Plan Association's efforts in this regard and backs NYSTEAs and an MTA diesel phase out.

Toronto Coroner: Give Bikes Preference

The Regional Coroner of Toronto has recommended changing Canada's Highway Traffic Act to give cyclists precedence over drivers.

In a report reviewing 38 Toronto cycling deaths over an 11-year period, the coroner, Dr. William Lucas, also recommended "side guards" for large trucks and buses to prevent cyclists from being crushed under rear wheels.

"Operators of motor vehicles need to understand the **vulnerability of cyclists** and have respect for them," Lucas said. "It isn't just the cyclists' problem and responsibility. It's a shared responsibility," he said.

Municipal and provincial officials commissioned the report following demands by Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists, a Toronto group formed in 1996 after trucks killed two cyclists and police arrested protesting cyclists.

Noting that current law "does little to clarify how bicycles interact with other vehicles on the road," the Lucas report concluded that "The concept of **motorized vehicles yielding to non-motorized vehicles...** seems to be a common sense rule which should be accepted by all road users. **Entrenching this principle** [would] likely significantly reduce risk of injury and death."

The report offered only limited support for bicycle helmets, noting studies showing limited reduction in deaths or injuries. "Helmets are an asset, not a panacea. The helmet does nothing to prevent a collision," the Lucas report added.

Stronger support was offered for "side guards," which are mandated on large vehicles in several European countries. The devices prevent cyclists from being knocked or pulled under the vehicle's rear wheels.

The Lucas report is Canada's first epidemiological study of cycling casualties. In the U.S., the National Transportation Safety Board and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration have **ignored demands for similar studies**. The report's emphasis on motorist responsibility to reduce danger to bicycle riders is a big departure from the usual cyclist-blaming philosophy.



51st district, part of Brooklyn. Incumbent: Felix Ortiz

Felix Ortiz says air pollution is a top priority, and that he backs an MTA diesel phase out, NYSTEAs and a 10% cap on new highway capacity.

52nd district, Brooklyn. Incumbent: Joan Millman

Ken Baer backs NYSTEAs and a 10% DOT new road capacity cap, and wants the MTA capital budget enlarged. He favors construction of the downtown Brooklyn subway connector to permit subway trains to bypass the Manhattan Bridge, the 2nd Avenue subway and a cross-harbor rail freight tunnel. He says the Gowanus Expressway should be replaced with a highway tunnel and/or light rail line, and that policy regarding diesel pollution should go beyond transit buses to trucks and other private vehicles. He would explore ways to eliminate fares for mass transit over the long run.

Joan Millman says "There is absolutely no coordination of transportation planning in this state and city." She favors eliminating one-way tolls over the Verrazano Bridge, better R-train service and the Gowanus tunnel proposal. She cites her past involvement in the Gowanus issue and says its resolution in a community- and environment-friendly way is a big priority.

Calendar

Sept 12-16 "Rail-volution '98: Building Liveable Communities with Transit" conference, Portland, OR. 800-788-7077 convене@aol.com

Sept 17 12:30pm Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA quarterly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 5th floor board room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087,

Sept 17-18 ITS Connecticut annual meeting. Hastings Conference Center and ConnDOT Training Center, Hartford and Newington. 860-563-3628, nhabesch@tiac.net

Sept 18, Noon NYC Dept. of City Planning meeting on bicycle safety and bicycle parking strategies. 22 Reade St., 2nd floor, Manhattan. 212-442-4711.

Sept 18-19 "Meeting the Urban Health Challenge: A joint Public Health & Urban Planning Conference." Hunter College, 425 E 25th St, 212-481-5172 toutwate@hunter.cuny.edu

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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