

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Rail Projects for Bergen County Still in Limbo

Despite a need for restored **passenger rail service** in Bergen and Rockland Counties in NJ, NJ Transit's study of possible alignments has yet to reach a conclusion.

In September, freight railroad CSX, who owns the tracks that NJ Transit intended to run the passenger service on, threw a wrench into the works. CSX stated its desire to have NJ Transit **lay new tracks for any new passenger lines**, instead of sharing tracks with transit trains, an arrangement many had assumed was the future of west shore passenger service. NJ Transit has yet to release conclusions on feasibility and cost of new tracks and sidings.

Of the three lines being studied for passenger service — West Shore, Northern Branch, and Susquehanna — West Shore is predicted to carry the most passengers. While freight traffic on the West Shore is many times greater than on the Northern Branch, making the addition of passenger rail more difficult, the light rail vehicles proposed for the Northern Branch are less compatible with freight rail tracks than are the commuter trains that would be used for West Shore service.

The Transit Committee of Bergen County, in the meantime, is demanding to know why the relatively recently conceived \$600 million Trenton-Camden light rail line is moving full speed ahead while the much older study of Bergen County's rail options has no end in sight, and **funding for the second phase of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line remains uncertain**. Furthermore, the Committee is indignant that the South Jersey line is to be funded with State Transportation Trust Fund dollars, which not only ensures that the project will move more quickly than federally funded projects, but also may mean the postponement of some North Jersey projects. Rumors circulated last week that the elimination of two at-grade crossings of rail lines and roadways in Hudson County, a prerequisite for extending the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line north of Hoboken — and potentially for West Shore Region passenger rail restoration as well — would be delayed from their scheduled completion in 2001 until 2004.

In fact, county representatives throughout northern NJ may be feeling particularly sensitive to new transportation projects in South Jersey since NJ DOT last month presented its plan for "technical revisions" to the current Transportation Improvement Program. The revisions would result in the loss of \$133 million in FY99 transportation funding for the North Jersey region.

Mayor in the Motorman's Seat

— **Governor's Transit Plan Not What it Seemed** — NYC transit riders' hopes for significant increases in bus and subway service and a sensible sales plan for NYC Transit's new one-day unlimited ride pass may hang on whether the Giuliani Administration will press these issues with the MTA in key meetings next week.

The Mayor's representatives to the MTA board forced and won a **surprise vote on the daily pass** issue in a meeting of an MTA board subcommittee this week. The committee meeting ended with approval of a recommendation to the MTA board that the daily pass be sold at all subway station token booths, not just at news-stands as NYC Transit had planned.

Whether that recommendation will stand a full vote in the MTA board Thursday depends in part on how much vigor Mayor Giuliani puts in his board members' stance and how much he carries the issue into the court of public opinion. NYC Transit and MTA officials clearly do not want to sell the daily pass within the transit system (see *MTR* #198).

The larger issue of adequate **levels of subway and bus service** has also become the Mayor's to win or lose. This week, analysis by the Straphangers Campaign and NYC City Council of the transit service plan announced by Governor Pataki revealed that what had been billed as the biggest transit service hike in the city's history in fact provides **very little in addition to modest service increases** proposed by the MTA in September. The Mayor's representatives met with MTA leaders yesterday to review transit finances. City reps reportedly told the MTA that there was room in NYC Transit's budget surplus to do better regarding service additions to alleviate crowding on subways and buses.

The MTA board's finance committee meets next Monday, and the full board convenes on Thursday.

A comparison shows that the MTA 1999 budget released after Governor Pataki's service hike announcement has only **very modest increases over the MTA's "September plan,"** as follows:

- \$6 million more in direct new service (out of a NYC Transit surplus of \$379 million), equaling just 200 more weekday bus trips and 16 more weekend subway trips, for minor 5% and 3% increases over the September plan.
- **A reduction** of weekend bus trips by 830.
- Addition of 180 weekday subway trips — the biggest category of increase — mostly after Sept. 1999.

Citing Service, Assembly Quietly Vetoes MTA Capital Plan Amendment

In a letter sent Thursday to MTA executive director Marc Shaw, Catherine Nolan, the NY State Assembly's representative to the MTA Capital Program Review Board, **vetoed an amendment** the MTA had requested for its capital plan.



The amendment contained items like purchase of new buses, Metro-North Railroad locomotives, and matching money for federal assistance to the Long Island Railroad-Grand Central Terminal connection project.

In the letter, Nolan expresses concerns that the **MTA is not adequately addressing the problem of subway and bus capacity** for booming NYC Transit ridership, and that the MTA has not presented lawmakers with sufficient information about ridership levels, the linkages between capital investment and service levels and MTA priorities for system expansion projects.

The veto will require the MTA to negotiate with the Assembly over the contents of the capital plan amendment and the concerns Nolan has raised. Nolan wrote that a critical factor in the Assembly's attitude toward the next MTA capital plan, which is likely to cover the years 2000-2004, will be "how and whether the plan

makes it possible to offer **more and better levels of service** to the riders."

Of transit system expansion projects, Nolan wrote that while she supports expanded Long Island Railroad service, "access to Lower Manhattan as well as improved service in Queens and Brooklyn should be included in LIRR expansion plans. These expansion projects are especially important as ridership continues to increase beyond expectations on all systems."



More on NJ Transit Bus Fares

Last week, we briefly recounted reports that NJ Transit bus fares were highest in the U.S. Transit planners have pointed out to us that the fares are due to the long trips NJ Transit's suburban riders take to Manhattan and other destinations, while most bus systems in the nation serve short trips within cities. The national study on which the "highest fares" finding was based does not make this important distinction.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

New this week:

- Bronx Council Members call on NYS DOT to study conversion of Sheridan Expressway into park
- Lessons learned from NJ's Route 29 waterfront highway project

NY Senate Transportation Chief Pans Pricing

NY State Senate transportation committee chair Owen Johnson says in an interview published in the current edition of the NY Motorist Association magazine that he is **against congestion pricing at the MTA's bridges and tunnels** and that tolls on New York City's East River bridges will cause worse traffic congestion.

"If the city is to remain viable, it has to have free-flowing traffic between boroughs," said Johnson, of Babylon, Long Island.

Johnson seems ignorant of new **barrier-free toll collection techniques** now in use around the world, including in a number of important North American highway corridors, and which the MTA's EZ-Pass technology is capable of supporting.

East River bridge toll proposals would be dead on arrival if they involved traditional toll plazas on Queens Boulevard or Delancey Street, but non-stop toll technology makes **East River bridge tolls** a traffic management tool waiting to be taken advantage of in NYC.

The MTA, Port Authority and NJ toll road authorities could also do their bridge and tunnel customers a favor by beginning to plan for barrier-free toll collection that would remove or minimize toll plazas as bottlenecks on the regional highway network.

Johnson's remark that drivers already pay for roads (via taxes) and shouldn't be hit up again doesn't really apply to MTA's situation, because the agency already collects tolls from tunnel drivers. But in general, while motorists may have largely paid for the roads, a **congestion premium** is different in principle than a gas tax that underwrites capital construction. It is an attempt to rationally allocate scarce road space. How proceeds from variable-priced tolls are spent would be a matter for debate — the public may prefer that peak-period premiums be offset with off-peak discounts.

Johnson also says in the interview that he backs construction of a New York Harbor rail freight tunnel and raising of bridges along the Hudson Line to facilitate freight train access to NYC and Long Island.



Various forms of barrier-free toll collection are used in:

◆ **San Diego** I-15's FasTrak system reads transponders in cars using special express lanes with overhead antennae.

◆ **Toronto** Overhead gantries at entrances and exits to the 407 Express Toll Route detect how far vehicles have traveled and charge tolls accordingly.

◆ **Colorado** The E-470 around Denver uses a hybrid toll collection approach. Cars can bypass regular toll plazas using two high speed lanes in either direction where overhead readers detect passage of cars with transponders and bill drivers' accounts.

◆ **Melbourne** The CityLink project under development will be one of the world's largest applications of electronic, barrier-free toll collection technology.

City Council Members Want Look at Sheridan Elimination

NYC City Council Members Adolfo Carrion and Lucy Cruz of the Bronx introduced a resolution calling for NYS DOT to study decommissioning the little-used Sheridan Expressway and **replacing it with parkland**. Next year, NYS DOT will begin to develop an environmental impact statement (EIS) for its proposal to rebuild the Bruckner-Sheridan interchange, and the council members want the Sheridan elimination proposal considered among the options. Traffic volumes on the never-finished highway have fallen in recent years.

Although NYSDOT has agreed to produce a Bronx traffic flow model that assumes the **removal of the Sheridan Expressway**, this exercise falls short of making removal of the highway a full-blown alternative in the environmental impact statement. If included as an option in the EIS, the project's costs and benefits can be presented.

The Council resolution states that the high cost of NYS DOT projects related to the Sheridan Expressway, low daily use of the Expressway, and lack of open space in the surrounding neighborhoods are reasons enough to study green alternatives for the space.



A NY State DOT plan to build a **bicycle/pedestrian greenway** between Bronx Park and little-used Starlight Park along the Bronx River dovetails well with the Campaign's call for decommissioning the Bronx' Sheridan Expressway. The proposal is buried in a run-of-the-mill pavement project for the Expressway.

The greenway segment would run from East Tremont Avenue to 172nd Street along the Bronx River, eventually linking up with a greenway running from Westchester through Bronx Park and down the Bronx River to the East River. Overall, the greenway concept would be tremendously enhanced and offer far greater quality of life improvement to the surrounding community by transformation of the Sheridan Expressway right-of-way into parkland. As it is now, the Sheridan walls communities off from the Bronx River waterfront and Starlight Park, and presents a severe constraint on development of worthwhile recreational opportunities in the area.

— Job Announcements —

Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Part-Time (5 hours/day) Office Manager Needed in our NYC office. Responsibilities include: answering phones, monitoring Executive Director's schedule, ordering supplies, monitoring employee health insurance/pension policies. Computer skills a must.

Part-Time (3 hours/day) Bookkeeper

Needed in our NYC office. Responsibilities include: Bookkeeping, audit, bill payment, and payroll.

Mail, fax, or e-mail resumes to:

Tri-State Transportation Campaign, 240 West 35th Street, NYC 10001 fax: 212-268-7333 email: tstc@tstc.org

NYC Truck Study Will Omit Safety, Community Impact

From Bay Ridge to Kingsbridge to Flushing, NYC residents are up in arms over the number of trucks that roll down and idle on residential streets, often in blatant violation of city regulations on size, weight, and route, and sometimes with deadly consequences (*MTR #195*). At a town hall meeting in Dyker Heights last month, the NYC DOT Brooklyn Borough Commissioner promised that an upcoming **study of city truck routes** would address community concerns.

However, in the request for proposals (RFP) for the truck study, released last week, safety didn't make it onto either the list of goals or objectives. The RFP, titled, "Freight Vehicle Operations Needs Assessment and Design Program," says consultants will develop truck routes, signage and regulations for deliveries into industrial parks. It also calls for an education program to teach truck drivers how to **reduce emissions** and operate trucks efficiently.

The RFP lists several constraints that should be evaluated, including width and height of street clearances. However, it does not require the consultants to **look at pedestrian accident data** or other information indicating the impacts of trucks on people and neighborhoods. In fact, the RFP states that in industrial parks like Hunts Point, Sunset Park, and Long Island City, needs of the businesses should be paramount. "Many industrial firms in these areas may be unable to survive unless their status is recognized by clear city regulations whose purpose is to protect them."

Additionally, although the RFP requires the consultants to analyze the extent of non-compliance and enforcement of truck route regulations, it does not require that consultants develop a self-enforcing plan. Even the Police Department admits that there are not enough officers to enforce the present regulations. Community and transportation groups have proposed development of physical infrastructure, such as narrower entrances to streets adjoining formal or de facto truck routes, to **discourage trucks from driving on non-truck routes**.

Bronx Neighborhood Wants NYC DOT's Word on Truck Safety

Community leaders in Hunts Point say NYC DOT's Commissioner for the Bronx, James Kilkenny, has forgotten promises he made following this summer's death of 6-year-old Crystal Vargas under the wheels of a truck (see *MTR #180*).

At an October 21st meeting sponsored by Mothers On the Move, a Hunts Point community group, **Kilkenny promised residents** permanent speed humps and traffic medians by Spring 1999, immediate construction of a median using paint and ballards, and a look into other traffic calming devices from signs to wider corners.

Kilkenny's promises now ring hollow as he claims to have never promised anything by a certain date. He has also refused to meet with Mothers on the Move this

month for the follow-up he also committed to. Hunts Point residents are angry with the commissioner and say they won't accept promises made in private again.

Around the Region



➤ Renovations of the **Spring Valley, NY** train station are expected to begin within two months, thanks to a deal announced Tuesday. The arrangement between the MTA, NYS DOT and Spring Valley, nearly dead as recently as this summer (see MTR #184), means village residents should see \$20 million in improvements to the village in return for the MTA taking ownership of the station and getting more storage space for trains at the Woodbine Yard. Spring Valley serves numerous commuter buses, and is a stop on the **NJ Transit/ Metro-North Pascack Valley** line. Its renovation is being viewed with an eye toward completion of the **Secaucus Transfer** station in NJ, which will make rail commuting to Manhattan from Rockland County much more attractive. *Journal News*

➤ A recent government study concludes that **Amtrak** is on pace toward a \$300 million deficit by 2003, the year in which it must wean itself from **federal subsidies**. The findings may fuel efforts for a wholesale restructuring of Amtrak's operations, but Amtrak supporters say the report does not reflect budget recent reforms put in place to achieve self-sufficiency. The 1997 Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act prohibited Amtrak from receiving federal funds for operating expenses after fiscal year 2002. *Record*

➤ A \$34 million plan to install a high-tech information system on **northern NJ highways** to alert motorists to traffic delays, alternate routes, and other forms of transportation has hit gridlock, a published report said. The "**smart highway**" system, already delayed once after it was promised by 1996, won't be ready until January 2000. The state DOT planned to award a contract in August, but officials threw out the bids when they discovered in specifications that taxpayers could be held liable if the equipment malfunctioned or was damaged during installation. The state plans to award a new contract in December. *Record*

Help make a Difference in NJ

Are you New Jersey citizen who'd like to do more to combat sprawling development, never-ending traffic, and choking air pollution in the Garden State?



If so, then sign up for our new **NJ Transportation Action List**.

Via e-mail, you'll receive issue alerts and releases that can help you make your voice heard on important transportation decisions around the state.

To become part of the action list, send us email at tstc@tstc.org.

Calendar

Dec. 15, 6pm-8pm Auto Free NY Meeting. "Strategies for Reducing Congestion in the NY Metro Region," James Harris, NYMTC director. Transportation Alternatives, 115 W 30th Street, 12th Floor. 212-475-3394.

Dec. 16, 9am-12:30pm NJ State Plan Development Committee. NJ Office of State Planning, Conference Room, 33 West State St, 4th Floor, Trenton.

Dec. 17, Noon-2:00pm NYC Transit Riders Council meeting. The Graybar Building, 420 Lexington Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets, 11th Floor, Conference Room "D". 212-878-7087

April 20, 21, 22 NJ State Transportation Conference "TransAction 1999." Includes expo, reception, workshops. Tropicana Resort & Casino, Atlantic City, NJ. 908-903-1077.



— Job Announcement —
Straphangers Campaign



Lead and Field Organizers for City Subway and Bus Riders

The Straphangers Campaign is looking for a lead and a field organizer to help New Yorkers fight for safe, decent and affordable subway service.

The campaign is a leading voice for New York City's five million daily transit riders. It is a project of the New York Public Interest Research Group, a student-directed organization.

The organizers' activities will include: recruiting and motivating volunteers; handling requests from the riding public; speaking to community groups; and assisting in building coalitions for transit.

NYPIRG is an equal opportunity employer — we are seeking a diverse group of applicants. Salary is commensurate with skills and experience; range is in the mid-30's for the lead organizer and mid-20's for the field organizer. Full health benefits are provided, along with two weeks paid vacation.

Send resume to: Gene Russianoff, 9 Murray St., NY, NY 10007, fax 212-349-1366 or email grussian@nypirg.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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