

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Papers Shun Highway Expansion

Editorials this week in the *Staten Island Advance* and the *Hudson Valley Journal News* argued that adding lanes in congested highway corridors would likely **increase the scale of gridlock**, rather than provide lasting congestion relief.

Responding to a truck crash that turned the Staten Island Expressway into a parking lot for much of Monday, the *Advance* reflected on the Island's limited transportation options and the highway expansion proposals that continue to be floated by the Port Authority and NY State DOT:

If the highway carrying capacity were expanded to allow a trip from the Goethals Bridge to Brooklyn in 10 minutes, many more commuters who now get to work by other means would opt to use that faster, easier route to drive to work, quickly creating the same problem on expanded highways. Then what? Expand the highways more?

Discussing growing support for a new span to replace the creaky Tappan Zee Bridge on Monday, the *Journal News* noted that “[Maureen Morgan of the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County] and other environmentalists and public officials on both sides of the Hudson **don't want two bridges** because that would generate even more traffic. They are probably right.”

### Journal News Backs Variable Tolls

In the same piece, the *Journal News* opined that:

The time has come to seriously consider so-called congestion pricing for passenger cars...People do have a right to move far away from their jobs on the other side of the Hudson River. In doing so, however, they impose a terrible strain on roads and the bridge. To halt that trend, commuters either have to change their hours of travel, car pool, switch to public transportation, pay more in tolls or move closer to work.

The paper was commenting on the Thruway Authority's recently completed study that found that even a **modest differential between peak and off-peak toll rates** at the Tappan Zee Bridge could significantly ease peak hour jams (see last issue).

### Transit Plan Ball in Silver's Court

#### MTA unveils, approves \$17.5B plan in same day

Following the MTA Board's vote to approve its hot-off-the-presses 5-year capital program proposal on Wednesday, debate over the scope and contents of the plan formally entered the political arena. The scope and contents of the transit capital program — especially **how it addresses the Second Avenue Subway** — now rest squarely on the shoulders of NY State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

Silver has repeatedly told reporters he would not approve any capital program that does not establish a plan for and go a long way to paying for a Second Avenue Subway that runs the full length of Manhattan. However, in comments to the *NY Times* on Thursday, Silver appeared to leave open the possibility that he might consider the \$700 million allocated to the Second Avenue project in the MTA's plan as sufficient funding. Critics of the MTA plan contend that funding level will put completion of any Second Avenue project well after the planned Long Island Railroad link to Grand Central Terminal, **adding thousands more riders** to the groaning Lexington Avenue subway.

In comments to the Campaign today, elected proponents of a full-length Second Avenue Subway made it clear they are counting on Silver to deliver.

Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields said she had written to Silver, Governor Pataki and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, urging them “to ensure that...funding of approximately \$2 billion for design and initial construction [of the full-length subway] are included prior to the plan's final approval.”

A spokesperson for Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney said that New York City “elected officials speak with one voice. The MTA 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. stub doesn't fulfill the needs of New Yorkers. The **Capital Program Review Board** (composed of representatives from the State Assembly, State Senate, the Governor's and the Mayor's offices) is the **first line of defense** to insure a full build Second Avenue subway...It will take the leadership of the legislature to insure that MTA does the full build.”

City Councilwoman Kathryn Freed's office insisted that subway construction serve the East Village and Lower East Side, and said it is “up to Silver, Bruno and Pataki to get the [full build] done.”

Governor Pataki is widely believed to have blessed the MTA's proposed plan — he appoints a majority of the MTA Board. Transportation leadership in the State

## Inside

➔ Pataki signs traffic calming speed limit bill

➔ Light at the end of NYC EDC's tunnel study

Senate is heavily concentrated on Long Island. Clearly, the **full-length Second Avenue project s champion is Speaker Silver or no one**. Silver should feel politically comfortable in that role — a very broad coalition of city and suburban business, labor, civic and environmental organizations has backed a plan calling for a \$2 billion investment in the Second Avenue Subway and a construction schedule that brings it and the LIRR-Grand Central connection to completion in tandem.

At Wednesday's hearing, the Straphangers Campaign and NYC elected officials pointed out that the **MTA spending proposal tilts heavily in favor of commuter rail**. Where the capital investment split has stood at 77% for NYC Transit and 23% for Metro-North/LIRR for 20 years, the MTA proposal would shift the percentages to 69%/31% — a \$1.3 billion loss for city transit.



The plan the MTA approved Wednesday contains several significant changes from the draft the agency released to some last week (see *MTR #238*). Most notably, the plan now includes \$645 million for engineering, design and construction of the "off-airport" sections of a rail link to LaGuardia, bringing the system expansion budget in the plan to about \$3 billion. This feature was added after Mayor Giuliani was briefed on the plan. Despite this increase in spending, the MTA did not project its funding gaps to be any larger. The agency may in fact regard the LaGuardia budget as a relatively soft figure, since it has recently returned to the drawing board (see *MTR #237*) and is far from having a plan — let alone beginning construction — for bringing subway or LIRR trains into the airport.

The plan's subway car purchase will **expand the fleet by 203 cars** and facilitate service expansion.

Regarding buses, the 1,056 new buses the plan identifies for purchase are made up of 400 high capacity articulated buses, 356 express buses and 300 clean fuel buses. The bus plan was heavily criticized at Wednesday's hearing by the Natural Resources Defense Council and many elected leaders for its promise to spend **three of every four bus dollars on polluting diesel-powered vehicles**, and for inadequate investment in compressed natural gas (CNG) fueling facilities. The latter problem has created an ongoing "chicken-and-egg" issue regarding deployment of more CNG buses in the city. The MTA plan does not even specify which "clean fuel" the 300 buses will use, though it is likely that they will be the CNG buses slated to operate out of the renovated Manhattanville depot. The MTA plan in fact expands diesel depot capacity. The *S.I. Advance* reported this week that Staten Island Borough President Guy Molinari had worked out a deal for construction of a third S.I. depot, to house the Island's growing express bus fleet. NRDC points out that CNG-powered express buses are available, and CNG articulated buses are under development.

Transit advocates have long worried about NYC Transit's use of articulated buses. While the high-capacity buses can certainly increase the number of

seats and passenger spaces on a route, they can also be used to **reduce service frequency** while maintaining a route's nominal passenger capacity.

Overall, the city transit service increases the MTA plan heralds are in the range of 8-11% from 1996-2004. But weekday subway ridership is up 14% and weekday bus ridership 36% in just the past three years.



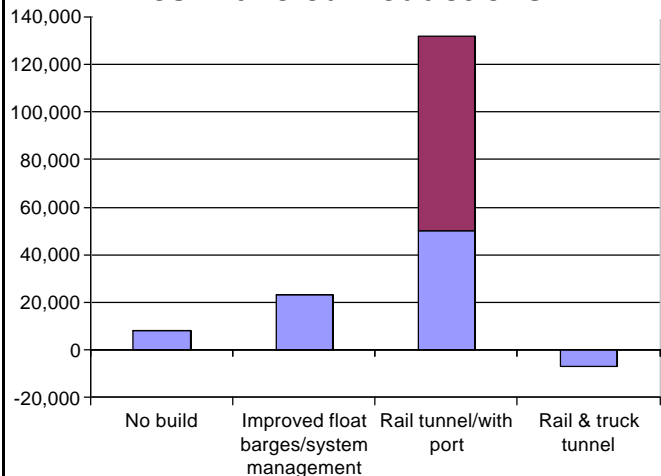
In an interesting role reversal, the *Daily News*, which is known for stridently backing transit riders' interests, has endorsed the MTA's 2nd Ave. "stub-way" plan. On the other hand, the curmudgeonly *New York Post* has begun to repeatedly spotlight the sardine-like conditions on the Lexington Ave. line, and may be on the verge of launching a tabloid campaign in favor of the full-length 2nd Ave. subway.

### Rail Freight: Tunnel at the End of the Study?

The NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) appears likely to finish its major investment study of cross-harbor rail freight improvement options in Spring, 2000. Thereafter, work could begin on environmental review for preferred alternatives.

At this point, it looks as if the latter is likely to consist of a cross-harbor railroad tunnel, probably pre-

### Forecast of Annual Vehicle Miles Traveled Reductions



"No build" reductions are due to increased utilization of existing rail network due to CSX/Norfolk-Southern acquisition of Conrail. Forecasts do not include solid waste transport or assume greater use of rail by present-day rail freight customers.

*NYC Economic Development Corporation*

ceded by increased investment in rail car float barges.

In terms of the project's main goal — to **reduce New York City's dependence on trucks** — the study projects that a rail tunnel will eliminate over twice as many truck-miles per year as improved rail car float operations and measures aimed at managing truck trip demand. The rail tunnel itself will be over twice as effective in reducing truck trips if it is combined with expanded port facilities in Brooklyn. A combined **rail/truck tunnel**, on the other hand, **unsurprisingly reinforces the city's truck dependence**.

An open question for the rail tunnel is whether to connect Brooklyn to the waterfront Greenville Rail Yard in Jersey City, or to the North Shore rail line in Staten Island. The Staten Island alignment would be easier to advance politically, since it would remain

### **Governor Pataki Signs Slow Speed Legislation**

On Wednesday, New York Governor Pataki signed legislation permitting New York City to set local speed limits as low as **15 miles per hour** in conjunction with installation of traffic calming street designs. The legislature approved the measure in August (*MTR #232*). As the Governor's office pointed out, "The new law is intended to permit the development of a more effective range of traffic calming measures premised upon a much lower rate of vehicle speed. The measure is fundamental to improving pedestrian and bicycle safety on city streets by allowing the Dept. of Transportation to design more effective traffic calming devices for less than a 30 mile per hour speed limit." If the city takes advantage of its new authority, the law requires it to submit a report on the lower limits' results to the Governor and legislature in 2002. The slow speed legislation was originally sponsored by Assemblywoman Deborah Glick of Manhattan and State Senator Frank Padavan of Queens.

Still, traffic calming in the city faces continuing challenges. News reports this summer suggested that New York City DOT and community boards were raising the bar for neighborhood proposals for speed hump installation, and key staff have left the city offices responsible for bicycle and pedestrian planning.

On the other hand, **Transportation Alternatives**, which shepherded the bill through legislative minefields in both NYC and Albany, and neighborhood groups that back traffic calming are hopeful the city will use the new law to expand its traffic and pedestrian safety efforts. NYC has **1,000 outstanding requests** for speed humps or other traffic calming devices despite installing more than 300 humps in the last three years.

The legislation may be timely. The *NY Post* reported today that NYC traffic deaths are up 15% for the first 6 months of 1999, after sharp declines in previous years.

Also Wednesday, Governor Pataki extended the authority for NYC's **red light camera demonstration program**, which was to have lapsed in December. The Governor's release noted that "the program has proven to be an effective traffic safety measure that prevents injuries and deaths" (see *MTR #158*). But the program is limited to 30 cameras and will have to be revisited by the legislature again. A better move would be to grant the city unlimited right to use as many cameras as it believes are needed for effective traffic enforcement.

In September, Governor Pataki also signed legislation to **cut MTA transit fares** in half for mentally disabled residents who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (see *MTR #225*) — the legislation was originally introduced by State Senator Padavan.

entirely within New York City. It would also connect to a part of the New Jersey rail network that is less congested than that running into Greenville. However, it would require an active **track connection between Staten Island and New Jersey**, and that has **proven elusive** in recent years because of local concerns in Union County (see *MTR #210*). The existing Arthur Kill rail bridge may also prove a capacity constraint along the two-track system into Brooklyn envisaged in EDC's work. Heavy freight use of the North Shore line could complicate passenger rail operations there as well.

The biggest constraint of all for the tunnel may be finding construction money. While attention is now on the MTA capital budget, a multi-year NY State DOT capital budget will also have to be established in early 2000. The DOT budget generally contains provision for rail freight capital improvements. NYC freight tunnel advocates in the legislature would do well to investigate possible rail tunnel design and engineering needs for inclusion in DOT's pending 5-year plan.



Canadian Pacific (CP) and CSX railroads continue to fight over the terms of CP's access to New York City via the Hudson Line, though the companies have told the Surface Transportation Board that they are seeking a negotiated settlement. CP now says it wants to **serve the Harlem River Yard and the Hunts Point Market directly**, instead of via switching controlled by CSX. Since the STB ruled that CP could serve NYC as part of the breakup of Conrail, CP and CSX have clashed over CP's access to customers between Albany and NYC and over CSX's charges for switching and other services. *Journal of Commerce*



In early September, United Parcel Service **yanked many of its shipments off of the rails** and moved them onto highway-plying trucks. The reason: continued service problems plaguing east coast freight railroad operations following the giant merger of the Conrail system into those of Norfolk-Southern and CSX. The railroads claim that things are improving, and that the frequency of complaints is slowing, but delays and congestion continue to recur. System congestion is worse and train speeds are slower overall for both railroads since the Conrail acquisition. Shippers' concerns are mounting as the peak economic season approaches. *Journal of Commerce*

### **Groups Rebuff Bronx Elevated Road Plan**



This week, the New York State Department of Transportation held its second hearing on a project to **connect the Bronx River Parkway to the Sheridan Expressway** via a new elevated highway ramp. The NYS DOT claims that the ramp will reduce congestion and traffic now caused by a traffic light through which traffic seeking to move from one highway to the other.

Community residents were quick to offer their perspective that the ramp would provide more capacity for cars using the Bronx as a conduit between the northern suburbs and Manhattan. NYS DOT projections showed that the link would see heavy use.

A spokesperson for Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, an organization based in the community that would host the new elevated structure, refuted assertions by the Department that an **overhead viaduct was a better neighbor** than at-grade traffic. Mid-Bronx Desperadoes, a community development group, questioned DOT's level of economic analysis, since the Department was unaware of its plans to build a shopping center two blocks from the Sheridan,

The Bronx Borough President's Office hosted the meeting, but had no comment on the elevated highway structure that would be built within 100 yards of more than 100 apartments.

### **Rockland Seeks Priority for West Shore Rail**

The NY Metropolitan Transportation Council meeting last week featured an unusual event — action whose outcome was not pre-determined. Rockland County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef offered an amendment to the regional plan put together over the past year by NYMTC staff and member agencies. The amendment, which the other NYMTC members accepted, would upgrade the status of the **restoration of passenger rail service on the West Shore Line** from “potential, unfunded” to “funded system expansion” (Campaign's comments on the plan at [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)). NJ Transit is about to start an environmental impact statement for commuter service on the West Shore, the Northern Branch and NY Susquehanna and Western lines.

At the meeting, NYS DOT Commissioner Joseph Boardman announced that Richard Maitino had resigned his position as director of the DOT's New York City division, and that NYMTC staff director James Harris was returning to Albany to a new DOT position.

A report by federal transportation officials on their review of NYMTC's planning procedures was listed on the agenda, but the federal representatives declined to offer substantive comments on the issue.

## **Calendar**

**October 5, 6-8pm** NYMTC public meeting to accept public comments on applications for TEA-21 Transportation Enhancements project funding. 1 World Trade Center, 82e, 212-938-3310.

**Oct. 5, 6:30pm** Metro-North Penn Station Access Study scoping meeting, 121 North Broadway, Tarrytown. 877-667-7366

**October 6-7** Environmental Advocates' annual conference, “Environment '99: Upstate, Downstate.” Lighthouse International Conference Center, 111 E. 59th St, Manhattan. Call 1-800-SAVE-NYS for more info.

**Oct. 7, 6:30pm** Metro-North Penn Station Access Study scoping meeting, 888 Washington Blvd. 2nd Floor, Stamford. 877-667-7366.

**Oct. 7, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum luncheon: “A New Era in Regional Rail Freight Commerce,” W. Robert Bentley, Pres., Cross-Harbor Railroad. \$ 212-435-4086 [pgessner@panynj.gov](mailto:pgessner@panynj.gov)

**October 14, 8am-4:30pm** Association of Bicycle and Pedestrian Professionals training course on changes to AASHTO guide, other regulatory and legal documents. In conjunction w/ “Walk NJ” conference (see below). Bloustein planning school, 33 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick. 609-734-7066. [www.njapa.org](http://www.njapa.org)

**October 15, 8:30am-3:30pm** Rutgers University Transportation Policy Institute, “Walk NJ” pedestrian conference. Learn to design and implement pedestrian-friendly facilities and communities. Bloustein school, 33 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick 732-932-6812 x699.

**Oct. 18, 1pm** NJ Transportation Planning Authority meeting. 1 Newark Cntr, 17th floor. 973-639-8406.

**Oct. 21 5:30pm** Clean Air/Truck Safety Rally, to call for zero tolerance of oversize, overweight trucks and resist NYC's truck-based garbage export strategy. Trees Not Trucks, Transportation Alternatives, Right-of-Way. Corner of Broome and Lafayette Streets, Manhattan. 212-343-2881

**Oct. 26, 6-8pm** MTA/Long Island Railroad East Side Access Project citizens advisory committee. 347 Madison Ave. 5th floor. 718-558-7520.

**Nov. 4, 8pm** Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist (“the urban superhighway should be relegated to the scrap heap of history”) on “Downtowns in America in the 21st Century.” Cooper Union Great Hall, 7 East 7th Street, Manhattan. Info: 212-353-4195.

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