

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### NJ Approves Variable Turnpike Tolls

On Wednesday, Turnpike Authority commissioners unanimously approved a toll increase that will bring **time-variable toll rates** to New Jersey within the year. Governor Whitman had approved the measure Tuesday.

Tolls are set to increase 20% for cash-paying motorists by January 1, 2001, and vehicles outfitted with E-Z Pass travelling during weekends or peak hours — 7-9 a.m. and 5-7 p.m. — will face an 8% hike. But drivers with E-Z Pass on the Turnpike during weekday off-peak hours will suffer no change, creating an incentive to adopt the electronic fare-collection technology and to **drive at less crowded times**. E-Z Pass is expected to function along the Turnpike's full length on May 22nd.

The Turnpike's program will be the largest value pricing experiment in the country. Carpool-lane buy-in schemes are in place in San Diego, Orange County, CA, and Houston, and trucks pay rush hour premiums on the T-Z Bridge, but none of these apply variable prices to all passenger cars on the road. Other highway authorities are considering pricing policies, but none have yet taken the initiative to move from blue-print to reality.

Transportation watchers expect other regional toll agencies to follow the Turnpike over the next few years.

### Paper Roughs Up S.I. Highway Widening

The *Staten Island Sunday Advance* hit the streets Jan. 16 with the front-page headline: "Xway Study Looks Like a Big Waste." The story detailed complaints by transportation reformers and elected officials that NYS DOT's long-range study of the S.I. Expressway would inevitably recommend **building new highway lanes**, and that NYS DOT is not closely coordinating work with NYC Transit. The piece spotlighted alternative proposals for a **bus-way** for the SIE and Gowanus, which could function as Staten Island's "subway" to Manhattan.

A following *Advance* editorial decried DOT's preference for building a new HOV and truck lane, with a tight argument that new lane capacity would inevitably flood the highway with more traffic that would bottleneck elsewhere on I-278. The piece, entitled "**Planning in Pieces**" asked for a look at I-278 bus-way options, and slammed the Port Authority, the MTA, and NYS DOT for not working together to make this happen.

The paper's position on the SIE dovetails with its October "Traffic Fantasies" editorial, which rejected a Goethals "twin" bridge and said the Port Authority should look to a congestion-relief toll policy.

### Thruway Postpones Action on Tappan Zee II — Agency Appears Unused to Public Scrutiny —

In contrast to reports at the January 11th meeting of the I-287 Task Force, the NY State Thruway Authority's board of commissioners meeting yesterday did not take up the issues of beginning an environmental review for a **Tappan Zee replacement bridge** or of implementing congestion pricing at the Tappan Zee Bridge. The Tappan Zee II plan has been assailed in numerous public meetings and news articles. The commissioners did discuss a **3% toll increase** for all Thruway facilities to help pay for a new agency capital program. That increase, scheduled for June, 2000, could provide the context for the Thruway's introduction of an anti-congestion variable toll schedule at the Tappan Zee.

Nervousness of Thruway staff outside of the meeting implied that the agency half-expected a mob of angry Hudson Valley citizens to descend on the agency. Thruway Authority board meetings seem unused to accommodating public input or presence. Members of the public, including state legislative staff, were not allowed into the meeting room until the commissioners had been in session for 15 minutes. **No public comments** were permitted. At the close of the meeting, the board went into executive session for agenda items that did not appear to have anything to do with contract issues. The Thruway should adopt the MTA's better developed public participation procedures.

### Gilman Says Gov. Pataki "Aware" of Rockland T-Z II Concerns

At a citizens meeting called by Concerned Citizens for Riverfront Development in Nyack on Wednesday evening, a representative for Congressman Ben Gilman said the Congressman and Rockland County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef had recently **met with Governor Pataki** to discuss issues regarding the Thruway Authority's desire to build a new crossing in place of the Tappan Zee Bridge. Gilman's representative reported only that the Governor was aware of concerns about the plan in Rockland County. These include the potential for traffic increases and the fact that the Thruway is rushing to plan a new bridge when mass transit plans for the Rockland-Westchester corridor are sketchy and seem financially fantastical.

Gilman's spokesperson said the Congressman was a strong supporter of reviving passenger service on the West Shore rail line.

At the event, Orangetown supervisor Thom Kleiner urged transportation agencies to exhaust potential traffic demand management and near-term transit options before considering a new river crossing, and many citizens continued to question the **traffic and highway development consequences** of the Thruway's plan.

Still, there was also evidence of some sideways thinking at the meeting. A resolution likely to be introduced in the Rockland County legislature puts strong emphasis on studying construction of a Tappan Zee tunnel, but this doesn't address the big issues of traffic generation or transit feasibility. Likewise, emphasis on the design details of a new bridge blurs focus on the question of whether or not a new bridge is necessary or beneficial.

#### **A Sensible Agenda for Transit and Mobility Planning in Rockland County**

- Implement congestion-relief pricing policies recommended in the Thruway's recent Tappan Zee toll policy study.
- Change the Tappan-Zee reversible lane into a transit-way for buses, vans and carpools.
- Restore West Shore line passenger service, with northern terminus in Haverstraw or West Nyack.
- Develop detailed feasibility and financing plans for Rockland-Westchester transit options before beginning Tappan Zee II environmental studies

#### **Upcoming T-Z II-Related Events**

**Tuesday, March 21, 6 pm** Chamber of Commerce of the Nyacks meeting and panel discussion: "The Tappan Zee Bridge? Nyack Needs to Know." Seaport Center, 21 Burd St. 914-353-2221 coc@spyril.net

**Thursday, March 23** T-Z Bridge Forum sponsored by Assemblymember Gromack. TBA 914-634-9791.

**Friday, March 24** Congressman Gilman's town meeting on transportation issues. With Governor Pataki's Rockland County aide. TBA. 914-343-6666.

#### **Hillary Talks Transit**

At a Monday campaign stop near White Plains, all-but-declared candidate for NY's open U.S. Senate seat Hillary Clinton said the suburbs needed more transit, cited NY's one-third share of the country's transit riders and said that as Senator, she would fight for a **greater share of federal transit funds** for New York. She also discussed uniting downstate's need for transit with upstate's **transit vehicle and equipment manufacturing** industry as a win-win environmental and economic strategy for the state.

One of Clinton's introducers was Marian Rose of the Sierra Club and Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition. **Rose blasted highway expansion strategies** as self-defeating and called on the state administration to abandon the project to widen Route 120 along Westchester's Kensico Reservoir.

#### **Pataki Budget Proposal Hits Smaller Transit**

Governor Pataki's proposed budget for 2000-2001 would give **Westchester's Bee Line** and **Nassau County's L.I. Bus** about \$2 million less in state operating assistance than last year. Long Island Bus is already reeling from steep cuts proposed by Nassau County as a result of the county's fiscal melt-down.

Operators of NY's smaller transit systems say the Governor argues that regular aid has in fact grown, but that, much like the line on NYC Transit funding, a one-shot infusion of funds (included in the Governor's 30-day budget amendments last year) has expired. The bottom line is that the agencies, from Buffalo to Suffolk County (with the exception of Rockland County, which is held harmless), will get less state assistance than they did last year (some agencies say they have yet to see last year's 30-day amendment additional funding as well).

To address the problem of fluctuating state aid, the **NY Public Transit Association**, an Albany-based industry group primarily representing the smaller operators, has developed a proposal for **multi-year state operating assistance**. Transit advocates and interested legislators should obtain a copy of the plan from NYPTA by calling 518-434-9060.

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Proposed state operating cuts from last year (\$ millions)</b>
Rockland	0
Westchester	2.0
Nassau	1.9
Suffolk	0.69
NYC DOT franchise bus and downstate local/private agencies	6.2
Capitol District	0.59
Central NY	0.61
Rochester-Genesee	0.76
Niagara Frontier	1.0
Upstate local	1.0

#### **Trash Trucking, Costs on the Rise**

On Jan. 20, the NYC City Council agreed to increase the city Dept. of Sanitation's budget by \$28 million to cover the cost of **trucking** Manhattan, Staten Island and some Brooklyn **residential waste** out of state. Originally, DOS estimated costs of \$55 per ton, but the actual cost has turned out to be \$62, much more than the \$54 per ton paid to ship Bronx waste by rail.

The higher cost compounds the insult of more trucks. Nearly 40,000 more 18-wheel trucks and 148,000 garbage trucks are crossing the Hudson than two years ago. The 13,000 tons of daily residential garbage could leave the city on 2 trains of 80 rail cars each.

The city is likely to continue its trucking policies for now. On Jan. 19, the DOS began the process of contracting to **truck out Queens waste**. Drafting of the EIS for a long-term waste plan is due to kick off in Feb. Hopefully, DOS will come around to trains and barges as cheaper, more environmentally-friendly options.

**Subway Schmutz III**  
— “G” for Grime —

In its third annual survey of NYC subway cleanliness, the Straphanger’s Campaign reported that an average of two out of every three subway cars still **do not meet NYC Transit’s standard for cleanliness**. However, the report found 5% more clean cars than last year and fewer “heavily dirty” cars, meaning cars with open or scattered food, bad-smelling or dangerous spills, sticky spots or unusable seats. These worst offenders declined from 47% dirty cars to 24%. The findings also showed big reversals in cleanliness from the previous year, with clean lines in decline and formerly dirty lines sparkling (see chart).

The G line was declared the grungiest, with only 9% of all its cars clean. “G riders get the shaft in most categories,” said a long-suffering rider from Greenpoint. “Why should cleaning be any different?” Other low-performers were the 6 and Q lines.

Sixteen surveyors carried out the study over the last six months, visiting 100 cars on each of the city’s 20 major lines.

The Straphangers credited the inch-up in cleanliness to the increase in cleaning workers on the NYC Transit payroll. There are 1,112 car cleaners employed in 1999, roughly 200 more mops moving since last year when the agency **restored money for car cleaners** cut in previous years. Straphangers is calling for NYCT to restore numbers to the 1994 level of 1,234 and to raise their standard from an 80% of cars clean goal to 95%.

NYC Transit responded with their own statistics. Transit’s 1999 survey found that 72% of all its cars were kept clean. Differences in methodology might explain the gulf in findings. Although the same in both rating system and sample size, the Straphangers Campaign surveyed cars during overnight and weekend service, while TA surveyors visited cars only during the week-day. Also, the Straphangers looked at cars while parked at terminals, though not in terminals where cleaners were working.

**Groups: Get NYC Buses Moving**

The Straphangers Campaign, Transportation Alternatives, and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign sent a letter to Mayor Giuliani last week urging him to take strong and immediate action to **speed travel for the city’s 2.5 million bus riders**. New York City holds the dubious record for the **slowest buses** in the U.S. Speedier, more reliable service would encourage more people to get out of their cars and onto public transit, further easing congestion for buses and other vehicles.

The letter asked the Mayor to task city agencies with attaining the following five-year goals: expand the number of **bus-only lanes** in the city, give buses priority at bottlenecked traffic signals, **redesign bus stops** to discourage parking and adequately fund strict enforcement against motorists blocking bus stops and bus lanes.

**Subway Schmutz III**  
**Percentage of Clean Cars by Line\***

	1998 Survey	1999-2000 Survey	significant** improvement?	significant** deterioration?
1-9	23%	45%	✓	
2	32%	33%		
3	13%	26%	✓	
4	33%	33%		
5	38%	22%		✓
6	11%	12%		
7	61%	24%		✓
A	29%	26%		
B	55%	49%		
C	25%	44%	✓	
D	37%	26%		✓
E	1%	35%	✓	
F	14%	30%	✓	
G	9%	9%		
JAZ	19%	27%		
L	9%	21%	✓	
M	5%	71%	✓	
N	36%	51%	✓	
Q	36%	12%		✓
R	53%	35%		✓
System Average	27%	32%	✓	

\*A car was rated “clean” if surveyor found no or light interior dirt.

\*\*Statistical significance at .05 level.

**More Buses? More Bus Parking**

Staten Island constituencies are weighing in on the problem of NYC Transit bus parking. An MTA proposal to acquire an outdoor lot on the Island’s north shore is taking shots from neighbors concerned about more bus traffic, from transit advocates and elected officials who say it’s high time that a **third Staten Island depot** be built and from African-American civic leaders who say the site plan smacks of environmental racism.

Transit needs a place to store 100 new express buses. Advocates like Amalgamated Transit Union Local 726 say the Island needs **even more buses** to boost service from the south shore area, and that a depot is a critical step toward a bigger, better bus operation. Island elected officials say a third depot has been promised for years, but hasn’t materialized. Borough President Guy Molinari said he has a commitment from MTA Chair Virgil Conway to build the depot, but the long history of the issue has other leaders wary. “When the iron and concrete are in the ground, we have a depot,” Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano told the *S.I. Advance*.

## Diversify Station Access Strategies

Data on metropolitan commuter rail station access and rider proximity to stations, together with analyses of station access improvements in other cities, suggests that an increase in **non-auto commuter rail access** mode share on the order of 20% could be achieved in the short term with the right investments and programs.

Getting riders to train stations is a pressing issue. Transit agencies are expanding and improving service, and ridership in many cases is climbing steadily. Rail operators in some cases must **constrain ridership forecasts** on the basis of station parking limitations.

Such limits are sometimes a matter of cost or constraints imposed by the local street system. But more often, they are **imposed politically** by municipal or citizen opposition to large traffic-generating facilities.

Parking construction as a station access strategy has other limits as well. An EPA analysis estimated that typically only one-half of new park-and-ride trips replace drive-alone trips to the final destination — even riders new to the rail station may have formerly taken a bus to the destination. This is especially true of Manhattan-destined travelers, because of high parking, toll and congestion costs.

The two-year-old station jitney service in Maplewood, NJ delivers about 200 riders from two routes to the station each morning — **12% of the town's rail riders**. As one-third of town residents live in areas not yet served, a town-wide system may be able to serve 20% of the station's train riders. An early survey of jitney riders found that 40-45% previously drove to the station, while 35-40% had walked and 10-15% had been dropped off.

A survey in Somerset County, NJ and a modeling study by the Chicago-area RTA indicate that robust investment in sidewalks, traffic calming, bikeways and bicycle parking could push the bike and walk share at stations close to 30% (walking's share in our metro area is about 20%, while cycling's share is negligible).

Costs of station parking vary widely, depending on location and if a structure involved. \$3,000-\$20,000 per space is the basic capital cost range, with annual operating costs at roughly 10% of capital cost. Some operating costs are recovered by parking fees. Experience and estimates place the cost of jitney service from \$500-\$1,300 per year per person. There are ample opportunities to cross-subsidize jitney services with parking fees.

Overall, these facts and findings support the idea that jitney/connecting bus, bicycling and walking have far greater potential to meet station access needs than current investment in these modes reflects.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

<http://www.tstc.org>

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## Calendar

**Feb. 2, 10:30am** Freight Transportation Working Group Meeting, NYMTC offices, 1 World Trade Center, Suite 82 East, RSVP 212-938-3388 by January 31st, ?'s 212-938-3448

**Feb. 3, 11:45am** New York Chapter Transportation Research Forum, James Manzoillo, Regional Planning & Program Manager, Region 11 to speak on "In What Direction Is the New York City Highway System Headed?", Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St. (Rector St.), \$, for reservations 212-435-4086, pguessner@panynj.gov

**Feb. 4, 9am** Central Jersey Transportation Forum meeting. Sarnoff Corporation, 201 Washington Rd., Princeton, NJ 215-238-2872

**Feb. 8, 10am** NY State Legislature joint hearing on transportation elements of Governor Pataki's 2000-2001 executive budget, State Capitol, Albany Hearing Room B, 518-455-3851

**Feb. 8, 6pm** Meeting of the Nassau HUB Citizens Advisory Committee, Hofstra University Club at Hofstra, 516-541-4321

**Feb. 28-29** New York Public Transit Association Winter Conference, Crowne Plaza, Albany, NY, 518-434-9060

**Feb. 16, 7:30 pm** CT Rail Commuter Council Meeting, CDOT Offices, Bridgeport Railroad Station, [www.trainweb.org/ct](http://www.trainweb.org/ct), 1-800-842-8299

**March 4, 7:30-9:30pm** Northern Jersey cyclist public forum to assess bicycling facilities in Passaic County, Mid-County Forum, Town Hall, 475 Valley, Rd, Wayne, NJ, [www.jorba.org](http://www.jorba.org)

**March 9, 7-9 pm** Northern Jersey cyclist public forum to assess bicycling facilities in Passaic County, Upper County Forum, Boro Hall, 60 Margaret King Ave., Ringwood, NJ, [www.jorba.org](http://www.jorba.org)

**March 15, 7-9pm** Northern Jersey cyclist public forum to assess bicycling facilities in Passaic County, Lower County Forum, City Hall, 900 Clifton Ave., Clifton NJ, [www.jorba.org](http://www.jorba.org)

**March 21, 6 pm** Chamber of Commerce of the Nyacks general membership meeting and panel discussion: "The Tappan Zee Bridge? Nyack Needs to Know." Seaport Center, 21 Burd St. 914-353-2221 [coc@spyral.net](mailto:coc@spyral.net)

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