

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### No Parity in NY Senate Hway Bond

In the midst of the on-going debate in Albany over transit and highway capital programs, the NY Senate and Assembly majorities **announced and then passed 2000-2001 state budget proposals** this week. Legislative watchers had suggested the two houses might put aside barbed five-year transportation funding issues in the name of timely budget resolution (MTR #260). Instead, both proposals contain enough long-term provisions to ensure a protracted conference committee period.

The Senate's \$77 billion dollar budget makes good on earlier talk of a \$2.5 billion bond issue proposal to support future highway and bridge construction and maintenance. Championed by Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and Republican members of the Senate Transportation Committee, the bond issue is explicitly intended to boost the Governor's proposed \$14.3 billion allotment for NY DOT's **five-year capital budget up to a level of "parity"** with the \$16.5 billion set aside for the MTA.

NYS DOT	14.3
NYS Thruway	1.0
MTA Bridges and Tunnels	1.0
Hway Bond Issue	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.7</b>

A more precise accounting shows that a highway dedicated bond issue would itself skew the Albany tradition of equivalence. To promote parity, the Senate leadership

should also support the Empire State Transportation Alliance MTA capital program proposal which sets forth an \$18.5 billion transit budget (MTR # 236).

Senator Bruno told the AP that a full list of projects would be available before the vote in November. Environmentalists and transportation reformers would scrutinize this list and **advocate that the money be used for maintenance, rather than highway expansion.** DOT's annual budget over the last six years was 75% less than what the Senate now proposes. Maintenance projects were still overlooked in favor of planning unpopular road widenings such as Rt. 347, 25, and 112 in Brookhaven.

### - Silver's 2nd Ave. Line in the Sand-

In his presentation of the Assembly's \$78.2 billion budget proposal, Speaker Sheldon Silver assured reporters and Lower-East Side constituents no state budget would be approved that did not **include a commitment by the Governor and the MTA to a full-length 2nd Ave. Subway.** But whether that commitment must be monetary is less clear.

The Assembly proposal reportedly includes \$300 million more than the Governor's for the MTA five-year budget plus \$10 million over the 2000-2001 fiscal year earmarked for an environmental impact analysis for a 2nd Ave. full-build. But this amount **falls short of the \$2 billion thought necessary** by RPA for work over the next five years on a full-length line.

The Speaker has also asked that the final budget provide for an accelerated 2nd Ave. project so that some portion of is completed by the projected 2007 opening of the LIRR East Side Access tunnel. As it stands, the vast majority of investment in the 72nd-125th St. 2nd Ave. "stubway" proposal is scheduled for the final year of the capital program (see page 2).

### Knife Held over NY Gas Tax

This week the NY State Assembly and Senate passed versions of their 2000-2001 budget containing respective provisions **to suspend or to eliminate the 4% state sales tax on gasoline.** The Assembly bill championed by Speaker Sheldon Silver would drop the tax for the two summer months while the more drastic Senate bill pushed by Majority Leader Joseph Bruno legislates a permanent repeal for both gasoline and diesel fuel. Either provision threatens to shrink the already oversubscribed pot of transportation funds.

Both tax cut proposals were **firmly denounced in all major NYC dailies and the Albany Times Union** as the worst kind of political grandstanding in which motorists stood nothing to gain.

Of the total spent by federal, state, and local agencies on highways, bridges and roads in New York State, motorists pay for approximately 65% through gas taxes, (city, state, and federal) registration fees, parking fees, tolls, etc. The other 35% is derived from revenue sources such as income taxes borne by all citizens regardless of how much they use roads. The estimated \$375 to \$500 million a year - 5%-7% of all highway spending - generated by the 4% state tax would likely be recouped from these latter funds.

Based on Mayor Giuliani's remarks this week, some fear that if the state cuts its gas tax, New York City will follow suit (as it did when the state dropped the sales tax on clothing) and do away with its own 4% gas tax and the .25% surcharge which provides 5-10 million/year to the MTA, **jacking taxpayers' subsidy to drivers up to more than \$600 million annually.**

Nor is a tax cut likely to benefit people at the pump. As lower gas prices simply give suppliers a greater

margin for raising prices, in a tight gas market only producers stand to gain. As shows the *Daily News'* incontrovertible math, if the average increase of 6-cents a week continues, a 4% Monday tax cut off today's gas prices would be invisible to drivers by Friday evening.

Meanwhile Congressional Republicans, initially supportive of a similar 4.3-cent reduction in federal gas taxes, **have withdrawn their proposal because of its impact on transportation spending.** The federal tax is 18.4-cents per gallon and provides an anticipated \$210 billion in dedicated transportation funds over the 1998-2003 period. Of this, 94% pays for maintaining and constructing roads and 6% for transit projects.

The two budget bills still face the conference committee process and can ultimately be vetoed by Governor Pataki. The Governor told reporters this week that any gas tax roll-back measure **must be accompanied by equivalent spending cuts** in the proposed budget programs. That House and Senate leadership might force such trade-off seems especially contradictory at time when both budget proposals contain large line items for transportation (see previous article).

#### NYC Projects Last in Line

An analysis of the MTA's proposed 2000-2004 capital program by the Regional Plan Association shows spending for suburban projects is concentrated in the earlier years of the plan, while **city transit projects tend toward the program's later years.** The analysis furthers city complaints that the MTA proposal tips the city/suburban capital funding split in favor of the suburbs when compared to past capital programs.

Approximately 75% of the Metro-North and LIRR investments are scheduled in the first two years of the program, but **only 45% of NYC Transit investments are made in that period.** There is a similar dichotomy in the MTA's expansion program. Investments in connecting the LIRR to Grand Central are distributed relatively evenly across all five years, while more than 80% of anticipated investment in the Second Avenue "subway" is pushed off until 2004. RPA argues that if the region enters a recession during 2000-2004, or if capital program financing otherwise collapses, then it is the New York City expansion programs that will disproportionately suffer.

#### CDOT's I-95 Congestion Reduction Bust

In July 1997, with strong backing from the business and environmental community, Governor Rowland signed into law an ambitious bill that pressed for a solution to the growing traffic grid-lock in south-western Connecticut's I-95 corridor (MTR #134).

The bill mandated Connecticut DOT to pursue a **5% reduction from 1997 base-level peak-period vehicle miles traveled (VMT)** - a cut-back of 8600 cars - along I-95, US 1, and Route 15 between the New York State border and Branford by 2002. Goals were also set for expanding participation in the region's mass transit systems and encouraging telecommuting and off-peak travel. A ConnDOT progress report released in January shows the agency **has shied from necessary steps** and lags behind two-year benchmarks by almost 50%.

Across the corridor, total VMT has either remained roughly equivalent to 1997 levels or increased, with a notably strong 5.8% upswing along Rt. 15. **Results of direct traffic measurement at southbound I-95 in Norwalk may be grounds for optimism,** tallying an impressive VMT drop of 9.1% between the peak am hours. However, agency watch-dogs are frustrated that **no further analysis** of shoulder hour traffic has been made to find out if drivers are shifting from peak hours or choosing an alternate route. Also disappointing, consultants for two other valuable studies - one of rail station facilities and service, another on how to better market mass transit - were only recently hired and are unlikely to finish work before the 2002 deadline.

According to analysis of Metro-North statistics, rail and bus commuting is up in the corridor, yet only slightly more than the system-wide annual 1.6% increase. Schedule improvements on the New Haven Line, added station parking in Bridgeport, and a new Milford-Norwalk bus route may have been a factor. And "Deduct-A-Ride", Connecticut's version of the employee transit benefit program begun in late 1999, could boost transit commuting in upcoming years. **To build on these gains and to make up for stagnant van-pool and car-pool numbers,** ConnDOT must push for more frequent bus and train service along existing routes, better schedule integration between Shore Line East and bus feeders, and reductions in both bus and train fares.

#### MTA Capital Program Allocations (\$000)

Program/Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
NYCT	2,565.0	1,969.4	2,996.3	1,599.9	943.2	<b>10,073.8</b>
Long Island Rail Road	339.9	1,263.3	173.8	224.6	144.9	<b>2,146.5</b>
Metro North	669.3	331.2	227.2	44.2	50.2	<b>1,322.1</b>
<b>System Expansion Projects</b>						
East Side Access	370.6	181.3	514.7	295.2	138.3	<b>1,500.1</b>
Second Avenue Subway	50.0	75.0	-	-	575.0	<b>700.0</b>
LaGuardia Access	20.0	50.0	-	-	575.0	<b>645.0</b>
Other Studies	-	25.0	50.0	-	-	<b>75.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,014.8</b>	<b>3,895.2</b>	<b>3,962.0</b>	<b>2,163.9</b>	<b>2,426.6</b>	<b>16,462.5</b>

### Subway Ads Uncensored

Today the MTA notified the U.S. District Court and Straphanger's Campaign and RPA officials that it would **end its objections** to ads urging investment in NYC transit. Scheduled to run on 2,280 subway cars starting April 1st, the ads will be **seen by hundreds of thousands of riders** at the same time that budget decisions critical to the future growth of the transit system are made in Albany. The ads direct riders to **www.bettertransit.org**, where they can send pro-transit investment letters to Governor Pataki and leaders in the Senate and Assembly.

### NYC Buses: Poor Progress By Any Measure

This week the Straphanger's Campaign released *Standing Still*, its third annual report on MTA bus service. The report reviews performance measures collected by the agency for 40 of its 203 routes. The group concluded that in **1999 bus service improved not at all over 1998's poor showing** and in some ways became worse. In all areas, the MTA failed to meet its own stated goals.

Only 59% of all buses showed up within half the time interval between it and the next bus. **Just 61% arrived within 5 minutes of when scheduled.** Neither percentage is significantly different than what was found the previous year. The most irregular route was the M104 running down Broadway and 42nd St. on which 60% of buses arrived bunched or with significant service gaps.

The average number of miles an MTA bus was in service between interruptions declined 4% after years of steady improvement. This trend is particularly alarming as since 1997, new purchases reduced the number of the oldest circa 1980 buses from 1,315 to 600.

Bus interiors were dirtier on average, falling from 92% in 1997-1998 with no or light dirt to just 80% last year. Riders understood fewer announcements on-board year; now less than 1/3 of the time do drivers make themselves understood. However, more correct and legible maps were found on buses, an increase of 4%.

The Straphanger's blame the stagnation, particularly in bus bunching and on-time service, on the **MTA's failure to add enough service** to meet the enormous 662,000 person surge in ridership over the last three years. The agency has increased service levels only 9% since then and has allowed for only a 2% increase over the next five years in its proposed capital plan. But the report also **urges City Hall to do its part** by creating more bus-only lanes, better enforcing parking restrictions around bus stops, and giving buses priority at stop-lights.

Along with these statistics, the City's dailies quoted an MTA spokesman claiming the Straphanger's conclusions were "intellectually dishonest" because they compared the months of September to October (1997-1998, 1998-1999) instead of full calendar years. The Straphanger's later countered that the MTA's slow release of its data determined their choice and went on to produce analysis that **showed no statistically significant difference** in their conclusions if calendar years are instead compared.

### NJ Transit Tests Bus Fleet Bike Racks

Last Friday, a Delaware Valley bicycling advocate sighted a NJ Transit metrobus fitted with a front-mounted bicycle rack on NJ Route 70 between Philadelphia and Marlton. Currently, riders across the state can store bikes on board Transit's large "Cruiser" buses by stowing them in the under-floor carrying bay. But all other bus models, **roughly 65% of the fleet, do not have facilities for bikes.**



For years, bus bike racks have been on the wish list of cyclists and transportation reformers in NJ both because they offer bicyclists an alternative to cycling in bad weather and because **they give riders the ability to bicycle to and from bus stops, instead of drive.** Having this option is also likely to encourage more use of bus transit as a passenger could travel by bus to a final destination not circumscribed by convenient walking distance or limited to the route of a connecting mass transit line. Advocates' desires - most recently discussed at winter meetings of the newly formed New Jersey Bicycle Advisory Council - seem to have been heard.

A NJ Transit official **confirmed that various bike rack models are being tested** for safety and maintenance problems with two different types of buses on routes in southern Jersey. NJ DOT bus inspectors want to check into whether or not racks block bus drivers' line of vision or impede the functionality of windshield wipers. As the same bike racks are now safely used by bus systems across the country, **these tests should be swiftly completed** and Transit riders and others widely notified of this important new option.

### More Stuff, More Trucks

The Port of NY and NJ shipped a record amount of cargo last year. The number of containers handled at the port increased 7.9% to 2 million and general cargo increased 7.3% to 17.9 million long tons - **outpacing the national growth rate of 6%.** As a percentage of East Coast market share, the port's cargo jumped 1.7% to 57.4%. Should the two states' governors end their stand-off, the PA could close some high-priority deals, including the Sealand/Maersk container hub, and expect similar freight flows in the future (MTR 216).

On the downside, **transportation of freight by rail did not keep pace with the overall growth.** As reported in the Journal of Commerce, CSX and Norfolk Southern's cargo shipping grew by only 2.4% in 1999. Thus, although the absolute numbers of trains increased, their market share went down.

New York and New Jersey are far behind West Coast ports in their commitment to reducing freight transportation by truck. The Port of Tacoma, WA moves 80% of its freight by train. And at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, a 20-mile high capacity rail corridor is being built to speed trains - increasing their efficiency and making them more competitive.

## MTA's T-Z Rail: a pie-in-the-sky?

This week, Governor Pataki treated the prospect of a new bridge as a political hot potato conceived of by an unrelated entity when he responded to an "Ask the Governor" WCBS radio query by saying, "In all likelihood...the recommendation [of the I-287 Task Force] will be for a new bridge."

While that much has been known for months, **Governor Pataki is getting bad advice** regarding the claim that a new bridge would accommodate rail and reduce traffic. An East-West rail line extending off the bridge would carry few riders and cost between \$2.9 and \$4 billion. Governor Pataki said that repairing the bridge "limits the ability to have rail transportation as part of the bridge, whereas a new bridge could accommodate rail transportation, ease congestion and get people off the roads in Rockland County." Reinstitution of the West Shore Line passenger service would do that too, at far less expense.

At Congressman Gilman's transportation forum in Rockland County last week, an MTA spokesperson said that **the agency was participating in NJ Transit's West Shore Rail study** and that "we have not rejected it as an option." This contradicts MTA Chairman E. Virgil Conway's announcement to the Rockland Business Association two months ago that West Shore passenger service is "dead as an option."

The MTA representative refused to answer questions about paying for rail in the Tappan Zee corridor, claiming that the matter is for Governor Pataki's I-287 Task Force to figure out, not for the MTA to discuss. Yet last month, the Thruway Authority said in letters that rail line funding issues should be referred to the MTA, "since they could best respond to inquiries on rail links including financing."

After the fourth major public meeting this year with Thruway Authority officials, **Hudson Valley residents still have no solid answers** as to how or whether an east-west rail would be funded, and whether the bridge really needs to be replaced.

Governor Pataki's Hudson Valley aide did not take questions, but spoke briefly, "The Governor wants you to know that he has received your many letters postcards and calls, and he is aware of your concerns."

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site:

[www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

## Calendar

**March 21, 12:30 pm** "What's Best for Buses?", Infrastructure Committee of the Women's City Club of NYC brown bag lunch discussion with Victor Wouk, 35 E. 21st St., Manhattan, ?'s 212-353-8070 or margieshea@RCN.com

**March 21, 1 pm** NY/NJ PA Steamship Affairs Committee Meeting at La Belle Ristorante, 34 Exchange Place, Jersey City, NJ ? 212-425-5704

**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@spyrail.net

**March 22, 9:30 am** NJ Senate Public Hearings on 2001 State Budget; Burlington County College, Gymnasium, County Route 530, Pemberton, NJ ? 609-292-8030

**March 22, 4pm** "Planning Problems in the 21st Century", Mr Edmund Bacon, Exec. Dir. of Phil. City Planning Commission, 2000 Smart Growth Lectures, Special Events Forum, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, RSVP, 732-932-1700

**March 22, 4-8 pm** NJ Transit Open House on the West Trenton Rail Line, NJ Dept. of Transportation, Multi-Purpose Room, 1035 Parkway Ave., Ewing, NJ, ? Tom Clark, 973-491-7000

**March 23, 7 pm** Public Forum on the future of the TZ Bridge, Assemblyman Gromack, Assemblyman Colman and Senator Morahan, Rockland Community College, 914-634-9791

**March 27, 10 am** NJTPA Project Prioritization Committee Meeting, funding for the West Trenton Commuter Rail Line Environmental Assessment tbd, One Newark Center, 17th Floor, Newark, ? 973-639-8420

**March 28, 8 am- 4 pm** REBUILD NEW YORK Infrastructure 2000 conference, CUNY Keynote Address by Robert Caro, 365 5th Avenue, 212-669-3500, [www.comptroller.nyc.ny.us](http://www.comptroller.nyc.ny.us)

**March 28 4-8 pm** Public hearing on drastic Long Island Bus service cuts. Nassau County Medical Center. 516-542-0100

**March 28 4-8 pm** NYC Waste Prevention Coalition Meeting, INFORM, 120 Wall St., 16th Fl., Manhattan, ? 212-361-2400

**March 28, 6 pm** "Update on Electric Cars and Buses." Patrick Centolanzi, NY Power Authority. Auto-Free NY, @ Transportation Alternatives, 115 West 30th St., Manhattan #1207. 212-475-3394.

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