

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 266

April 21, 2000

NEWS

New Jersey Inaugurates Major Addition to Region's Rail Transit System

Elected officials from across northern New Jersey celebrated the opening of a major addition to NJ's — and the metropolitan region's — rail transit system in the pouring rain last Saturday. The first 7.5-mile segment of the **Hudson-Bergen light rail transit line** began regular passenger service that morning.

At the opening ceremonies at the new Liberty State Park transit station, transit fans, urban development specialists, an orchestra and citizens cheered loudly and carried on almost giddily as big-fish politicians, quoting everyone from Shakespeare to Jackie Gleason, touted the new train line. It now runs from **34th St. in Bayonne** to the **Exchange Place PATH** station. Officials passed out commemorative passes like proud new parents. They also recalled just how difficult the labor was.

Never ones to miss an opportunity, Union County

officials turned out wearing lapel buttons that proclaimed, "Congratulations Hudson Bergen, **Union County's Next!!!**" referring to the cross-county service on an old Central NJ line they hope to push to the head of NJ Transit's list of possible new projects.

Several elected leaders also acknowledged the light rail project as the brainchild of citizens and rail advocates who persevered throughout the decade and more of the planning, routing and funding process. These included Doug Bowen (NJARP), Sue Mack, Susan O'Kane, Phyllis Elston and the Tri-State Campaign's own Bill Sullivan.

On the rails, NJTransit expected between 7,000 and 8,000 riders on the first Monday, April 17th. Transit workers reported a "light turn-out," though during rush hour all seats were full. NJTransit director Jeffrey Warsh told the *Record* that ridership as safely in "the thousands." Actual ridership figures will not be released until May. Except for lines at the new ticket vending machines, most riders interviewed by reporters seemed impressed. NJ Transit believes lines will end as more riders begin purchasing monthly passes.

Ensuring **speedier construction** of the rest of the **planned segments** of the Hudson-Bergen line seems essential to building ridership. Building significant state funding for these phases into NJ's Transportation Trust Fund (see box at left) could accelerate the process. But a contract with the FTA for full funding of phase 2 is still needed to extend the rail line north to the **Hoboken Terminal**, with its important connections to ferry lines, NJ Transit commuter trains and the Midtown PATH line, within two years. Unfunded phase 3 would bring the line north to the Lombardi park-n-ride off the NJ Turnpike in Ridgefield by 2010, and south to 5th St. in Bayonne. Ultimately, the line could run over the Bayonne bridge into Staten Island (see article, next page).

Last week, Bergen County's chief planner, Chester Mattson, argued before the NJ Assembly Light Rail Legislative Panel that economic growth and traffic projections show Bergen residents cannot **wait until 2010** for another rail connection. The County is seeking funding to begin building the line itself from Ridgefield south to the Weehawken Tunnel.

NJ's Trust Fund:

A Chance to Fast Track Transit Projects

New Jersey could accommodate demands for speeding up the next phases of the Hudson-Bergen rail system, and for projects like **light rail in Newark and Union County** and restoration of commuter rail service on the **West Shore Line** by making them top priorities when the state reauthorizes its **Transportation Trust Fund**.

The Trust Fund is the main state source of transportation capital spending — it needs to have new revenue sources dedicated to it by the end of June to keep state construction dollars flowing.

Currently, about 40% of trust fund spending is going to transit projects, but that high level is an anomaly due to a heavy infusion of state funds for construction the Trenton-Camden light rail line (the project is not receiving any federal funding).

Trust Fund reauthorization should make **40% for transit the annual rule**, so that important transit projects like those mentioned above can get off the ground and into service within a reasonable time frame. Hudson-Bergen's first phase took too long. On the other hand, NJ DOT seems able to accelerate highway projects and get them into construction when political powers apply the requisite pressure.

More Trust Fund spending, plus a clear message from the Governor and Legislature that they expect to see the next generation of projects up and running during their political lifetimes could ensure a 21st Century mass transit renaissance in New Jersey.

Inside

- Pataki Task Force Backs New T-Z Bridge
- MTA Approves Big Debt Plan

Hudson-Bergen Light Rail:



The Facts

- Trains leave 34th St. in Bayonne for Exchange Place in Jersey City on a 23 minute trip every fifteen minutes. A branch line runs from West Side Avenue, joining the Bayonne line at Liberty State Park. From the Park to Exchange Place, the ride is 13 minutes and runs every 7-8 minutes. The light rail runs 310 trips per day. [A Tri-State Transportation Campaign observer made the trip yesterday at mid-day from 34th St. Bayonne to 34th St. Manhattan via the light rail, World Trade Center PATH and 7th Ave. subway in 45 minutes. Cost: \$2.50 plus a MetroCard swipe. Getting to the Midtown PATH line from the light rail presently requires a transfer within the PATH system].
- Each 90-foot linked-pair vehicle has 68 seats and can carry almost 190 people.
- The train operates between 5:30 am to 1 am on weekdays, on Saturdays between 6 am to 1 am, and between 6 am to midnight on Sundays and holidays.
- Fares are \$1.50 for one-way tickets, \$13 for 10-trip ticket, and \$53 for a monthly pass. Only monthly pass cards allow free transfers to NJTransit buses.
- NJ Transit buses connect to the rail at ten of the twelve stops. Riders switch to the PATH at Exchange Place and NY Waterway ferries at Marin Boulevard and Exchange Place.
- Bicycles are OK on board during off-peak hours.

Slow-Cook Recipe for Light Rail

1) **Money**, lots of it (some private) and a bi-partisan team to bring it home. Former Representative Bob Roe was oft-mentioned as the father of ISTEAs who performed on this count, along with Senator Frank Lautenberg and Congressmen Bob Franks, Rodney Frelinghuysen and Bob Menendez.

2) **Route Consensus**, brought home by Hudson County Executive Bob Januszewski, who forged the deal with Bergen County and 12 local mayors.

3) **Design, Build, Operate and Maintain Contract**. Numerous speakers noted that the project didn't get off the ground until DOT Commissioner Frank Wilson started the Office of New Rail Construction within NJTransit, gave the job to Frank Russo, and awarded the DBOM contract to a private firm that had an incentive to finish and get fare-paying customers.

4) **Good Engineers** Jerry Kernan and John Lane saved the project a thousand times from those who would have "saved" it through a better route or design

5) **Patron Legislative Saints** in the form of Rose Heck, N.J. Assembly Light Rail Comm. Chair and Alex De-Croce, Assembly Transportation Committee Chair.

6) **Patience** Senator Lautenberg reminded the audience that the project was conceived in 1983, began in earnest in 1986, the route agreement was struck in 1996, and the first segment opened in 2000. Way too long.

Staten Island Access to Light Rail?

For Staten Islanders who took the Hudson-Bergen light rail to work, the cost was more than \$1.50. A round-trip drive to Hudson County included a \$4 Bayonne Bridge toll, plus several bucks for parking at park-and-ride lots at 34th St., 45th St. or Liberty State Park.

If **decent bus connections** are created, the new rail line could entice a large portion of the roughly 2,800 Islanders that work in Jersey City out of their cars. NYC Transit estimates suggest that at least 1,200 Staten Islanders would use a light rail bus connection daily. If not, the Bayonne Bridge could see hundreds of additional cars heading for the rail-line terminus.

With these concerns in mind, Congressman **Vito Fossella** wrote to NYC Transit chief Lawrence Reuter last week to press him to **begin bus service** between Staten Island and light rail line in Bayonne, as well as increase express bus service to Midtown Manhattan via New Jersey. Securing bus service over the Bayonne Bridge is also a goal of Borough President Guy Molinari. Although Reuter made no promises, some NYC Transit spokespersons indicated a service is in the works.

NJTransit Executive Director Jeffrey Warsh told the *S.I. Advance* that bus service from Staten Island should begin by the end of this summer, though it is unclear whether he was referring to an NJTransit or NYC Transit initiative. A Port Authority spokesperson also reportedly said his agency hoped to facilitate the bi-state endeavor and would support it financially.

Warsh also revealed broader ambitions for the Hudson-Bergen line. He told the *Advance* that he hopes the line will eventually "go **over the Bayonne Bridge** and all the way down to Tottenville. Then someday over to Middlesex County."

The Bayonne Bridge was built to accommodate transit with wide platforms flanking the bridge at either sides. Al Fazio of 21st Century Railroads — the firm that designed and built the light rail — said extending the line across the bridge to the North Shore railroad could be completed within 2 to 3 years. Still, planned phases of the light rail system that do not involve bridge crossings or bi-state politics are slated well into the future (see previous page).

MTA OKs Big Debt Plan



A special Metropolitan Transportation Authority board meeting convened on Wednesday approved a new version of the MTA's 2000-2004 capital program proposal. The revised plan will go next to the state Capital Program Review Board, where representatives of the Governor, Mayor, State Senate and State Assembly are expected to approve it.

The changes hike the transit program from \$16.5 billion to \$17.1 billion. Additions include \$350 million more for NYC Transit's work on the Second Avenue subway, \$100 million more for the clean bus program and a \$150 million pork program for local MTA projects

to be identified by legislators. *Newsday* reported that \$14 million was found in the plan for design and engi-

Tappan Zee II Recommendation is Official

Governor Pataki's I-287 Task Force issued its final report this week. The findings were not a surprise, as the outline had been made known in January (*MTR #252*). The I-287 Task Force was charged with developing transportation strategies in the Rockland-Westchester/Tappan Zee Bridge corridor after public opposition forced cancellation of a plan to build car-pool lanes along the Cross-Westchester Expressway in 1997.

In a letter to the Governor, Task Force Chair E. Virgil Conway recommended that in the near term, appropriate agencies develop transportation demand management measures, like corporate van-pools, and that the NY State Thruway Authority board consider implementing **congestion relief pricing** on the Tappan Zee Bridge. The long-term recommendation, which generated controversy all winter and spring, is for the Thruway and Metro-North Railroad to begin environmental impact reviews for replacing the Tappan Zee Bridge and constructing an **extensive rail transit** or guided bus system serving **Orange, Rockland and Westchester** Counties.

Concerns about the long-term recommendation that continue to be expressed by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and others turn largely on the relative feasibilities of building the new bridge and the transit system. Where the Thruway Authority is solvent and could raise revenue for a Tappan Zee replacement, the transit system's route, operator and financing are unknown. Moreover, the MTA is launching a new capital program based on extraordinary levels of debt (see above) that could preclude the agency's future ability to build the Orange/Rockland/Westchester transit system, estimated to cost \$3 billion. These very **different tales of the road and transit agencies** led the Regional Plan Association's Jeff Zupan to tell the *NY Times* that any Tappan Zee replacement project would likely be remembered more as a highway widening project than a mass transit one.

The report gave short shrift to restoration of passenger service on the **West Shore Line**, even though it said the project could be done much sooner than a Rockland-Westchester rail line, and that nearly 30% of peak Tappan Zee traffic consists of Rockland-NYC trips.

On WCBS radio Thursday, Governor Pataki expressed support for a replacement bridge with rail, but did not address questions on rail feasibility or funding. Four public information meetings on the Task Force report will be held in May (see Calendar section).

Meanwhile, Hudson Valley citizens and elected officials **joined forces** to protest the fast-tracking of the TZ replacement bridge. Greenburgh Supervisor Feiner, Orangetown Supervisor Kleiner and Tarrytown Mayor Janos are leading an effort to pass resolutions against the project in local town and village boards. Monthly rallies are expected to be held along the Thruway. The first attracted nearly 100 protesters to Tarrytown on Saturday.

neering for addition of a **third track along the LIRR mainline** between Hicksville and Queens Village.

Reports said that the general-obligation transportation bond that the state wants to issue **if voters approve it in November** would reduce fare-backed borrowing by \$1 billion, but the agency will still sell \$22 billion in new and refinanced debt, much of it backed by fares instead of taxes. The *NY Times* said the plan would represent the **largest sale of municipal bonds** in history.

At the hearing, the Straphangers Campaign urged MTA board members to reject the plan because of the debt-ridden financing scheme. The Straphangers' Gene Russianoff told reporters that the huge debt the plan is based on could "make it harder to build the Second Avenue subway because you have to find another seven or eight or nine billion for it in the next 10 or 15 years in the context of an agency that has **mortgaged every stick of furniture** it has on the property."

The *NY Times* reported that MTA Chair E. Virgil Conway equivocated when asked if the plan would necessitate transit fare increases after 2000.

L.I. Town Promotes Parking Innovation

Legislation was approved by the Town of North Hempstead board this week requiring that companies seeking to expand parking facilities to first investigate **parking "cash-out,"** or cash-in-lieu-of-parking, strategies. The local law defines cashing out parking as "a plan in which employees would be offered additional compensation in exchange for their agreement to use alternative transportation." The law requires affected employers to prove that a cash-out program is not feasible or does not solve the parking problem that any proposed parking structures are meant to address.

Cash-in-lieu-of-parking programs offer workers the option of giving up a subsidized parking space in exchange for its monetary value. Pressure to cut air pollution in California has made employers in that state leaders in parking cash-out programs. Companies using the strategy have seen **significant reductions in drive-alone commuting.**

NYC Express Bus Ridership Booms

— **Groups Renew Call for I-278 Busway** —

According to recently released NYC Transit statistics, express bus ridership in NYC is up over 60% in two years. From January, 1998 to January 2000, fare incentives and larger buses caused average weekday express bus use to climb from 23,990 to 38,482. Weekday Staten Island ridership, accounting for 71% of express bus riders city-wide, rose 12.8% in 1999, to 27,373.

Transit advocates welcomed the increase and predict that **ridership will grow further** as NYC Transit adds buses to these routes and continues to introduce new, larger express buses. But groups warned that booming bus use increases the urgency for the NY State Dept. of Transportation to develop a dedicated Staten Island-to-Manhattan express route for buses on the **Staten Island and Gowanus Expressways.**

“A rapid bus-way along I-278 could act as the ‘subway’ link that Staten Islanders have never had,” said Dee Vandenburg of the Staten Island Taxpayers, Inc.

A DOT study based on data from several years ago showed that **80% of travelers** in the Gowanus Expressway HOV lane are **bus riders**. The new NYC Transit ridership numbers likely indicate that bus riders’ share is even higher today. The DOT study also showed that increasing car use of the HOV lane is bogging the buses down to speeds only 7 mph faster than those on the Gowanus general traffic lanes.

In December, 17 Staten Island groups wrote to elected officials in support of a bus-only route to Manhattan. Six Staten Island and Brooklyn elected officials have also called for a dedicated Gowanus busway. In January, the S.I. Chamber of Commerce also called for use of “guided busway” system along the S.I. Expressway.



Also last week, City Councilmembers Stephen Fialan-James Oddo submitted a resolution supporting a state bill (*MTR #262*) that would force the MTA to extend **express bus service** to areas south of Huguenot Avenue.

According to Fiala, 80,000 people — 20% of all Staten Island residents — live in **South Shore** communities that have no access to express bus service. The state bill would mandate that four express bus routes be started by the MTA before September 30th, 2000. Mayor Giuliani, Borough President Molinari, and the Amalgamated Transit Union have all pledged support.

LI Bus: Shell Game Outed

Despite some confused reporting, opinion leaders in Nassau County have caught onto the Long Island Bus **budget shenanigans** pulled last week by County Executive **Thomas Gulotta**.

Just as State Senator Dean Skelos and State Assembly Member Thomas DiNapoli announced that they had secured enough state funding to stave off any Long Island Bus service cuts this year, Gulotta declared he was cutting another \$3 million from the county’s contribution to the bus system operating budget.

Today, *Newsday* denounced the shell game in an editorial: “No sooner do legislators bail out LI Bus than Gulotta tries to grab the money — again.”

The County Executive threw the bus budget into chaos when he withdrew \$7 million in county operating support in December. LI Bus, with over 100,000 weekday passengers, announced it would impose severe service cuts unless the money was restored. Gulotta’s latest move still leaves the system \$3 million short.

On Monday, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, ACORN and Sustainable Long Island staged a mock game of three-card monte at the county legislative building. In the game, bus riders and state legislators were hustled by the County Executive. Cable TV and radio reporters attended the festivities.

Calendar

April 22 Manhattan Earth Day bike parade. Contact Transportation Alternatives, 212-629-8080.

April 25, 11:45am “Long Island Mobility: Unfinished Business.” Action Long Island forum, w/ MTA’s E. Virgil Conway, LIRR’s Thomas Prendergast, NYSDOT’s Craig Siracusa. Huntington Hilton. RSVP, \$. 631-425-2700.

April 25, Noon NYC Transit Riders Council, monthly meeting. Madison Ave, Manhattan. 5th floor. 212-878-7087.

April 25, 6pm “Strategies for Reducing Car Use in NYC” George Haikalis. Auto-Free NY, @ Transportation Alternatives, 115 West 30th St., Manhattan #1207. 212-475-3394.

April 25-27 Transaction 2000, NJ state-wide transportation conference, Atlantic City. 50+ workshops, major expo, more. 908-903-1077

April 26, 6pm Nassau Hub Citizens Advisory Committee, Hofstra University Club. Long Island Neighborhood Network, 516-541-4321.

April 27, 1:15pm NYMTC program committee meeting, 1 World Trade Center, #82e, Manhattan. 212-938-3300.

May 2, 6:30pm Public information session on findings of Governor Pataki’s I-287 Task Force. Westchester County Center, 198 Central Ave., White Plains. 914-285-4050.

May 3, 7:30am-2:30pm Regional Plan Association’s 10th annual regional assembly: “The Tri-State Region: World Capital for a New Millennium.” www.rpa.org, 212-253-2727.

May 4, 7:30am-4:15pm 2nd Annual NY Smart Growth conference. Audubon Soc. of NY State. Empire State Plz, Albany. 518-869-9731.

May 4, 11:45am Transportation Research Forum luncheon. “L.I. Rail Freight: an Update,” w/ Bruce Lieberman, NY & Atlantic Railway. 100 Washington St. \$ 212-435-4086. pgressner@panynj.gov

May 4, 6:30pm Public information session on findings of Governor Pataki’s I-287 Task Force. Palisades Center Mall, Adler Room. 1000 Palisades Center Drive, West Nyack. 914-348-1000.

May 9, 12:30 pm “Boston’s Central Artery ‘Big Dig’ Project.” NYC Dept. of City Planning brown bag lunch w/ Parsons Brinckerhoff’s Louis Silano. 22 Reade Street, Manhattan. 212-442-4630

May 9, 6:30pm Public information session on findings of Governor Pataki’s I-287 Task Force. Holiday Inn, 3 Executive Blvd., Suffern. 914-357-4800.

Extended calendar listings at www.tstc.org

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