

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Postcards from LITP 2000

The NY *Times* ran letters to the editor complaining forcefully about NY State DOT's Long Island Transportation Plan 2000 in its July 9 Long Island section. The letters followed a lengthy *Times* feature explaining the DOT plan to widen many Long Island highways with new "bus lanes that admit carpools" (MTR #273).

The letters were from members of the study's **Technical Advisory Committee**, the group DOT and its main consultant, Parsons-Brinckerhoff, want approval from for their road expansion approach.

Lawrence Hahn's letter noted the workings of public committees supposed to shape the study:

"When the time came for suggestions, **the dept.'s observers** (not members of the committees) **would propose their favorite solutions**, like widening roads and building more HOV lanes. Their suggestions would be included in the summary, giving them the appearance of having been endorsed by the committee...When DOT disclosed [its] analyses in June, it became obvious that a proposal contained a 'fatal flaw' if it did not involve pouring megayards of concrete or endless acres of asphalt, to say nothing of the destruction of countless trees.

"Properly carried out, LITP 2000 could have served as a model for cooperation between government and private citizens. Unfortunately, such was not the case. Many volunteers feel we were the victims of a hoax."

Dennis Fagan, another TAC member, wrote: "So after a \$7 million study, we get more of the same — more asphalt, more traffic, more ozone-alert days. If our leaders cannot buck the car culture, why do they bother to ask the public's opinion?"

The **predictable conclusion of the plan to widen roads** is an insult to members of the public who took the trouble to take part in the study. As a member of the public committee, I can tell you that widening roads was not a majority opinion..."

### Whitman Signs Trust Fund Bill

In remarks upon signing the Transportation Trust Fund bill last Thursday, Gov. Whitman called the legislation bill the most progressive state transportation spending measure in the country, reciting the Campaign's recent quote in the *Star Ledger*. She said NJ wouldn't be paving open space anymore. Transportation Commissioner Weinstein also thanked the Campaign, and said he'd grown to have tremendous respect for us and our positions. Other speakers positively mentioned the role we and environmental groups played in shaping the bill.

### State of the Subways: More Service Needed

— Cars Cleaner, Fewer Breakdowns —

Last Tuesday, the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign issued its annual "State of the Subways" report, rating the 7 as the best line and the 5 as worst. The **findings were mixed**, with cars more crowded, arriving more irregularly and having poorer announcements, but also breaking down less often and cleaner.

The 44-page report is based on an extensive review of official data on subway service, much of which has not been released before on a line-by-line basis. It includes detailed one-page profiles of 20 lines and a "Line Rating" for 19 of the lines.

"Our report has bad news and good news for riders," said campaign staff attorney Gene Russianoff. "You are **more likely to be packed in like sardines** or kept in the dark on the subways. But you are also **less likely to ride on a dirty car** or get kicked off a malfunctioning train."

Russianoff said service has not kept up with an explosive 17% increase in ridership since 1997. There's been a gain of 630,000 riders on an average weekday day, but service has only increased 4%.

As a result, the report also found no improvement in the length of scheduled waits during rush hour. The average rush-hour "headway"— the scheduled interval between trains — remained at more than six minutes. Russianoff renewed the campaign's call for **no more than a four-minute wait** on all lines.

The profiles report six measures of service, based on recent data from MTA NYC Transit, largely covering the last half of 1999. The measures for each line are: the amount of scheduled service and the regularity of train arrivals; mechanical failures of subway cars; the chance of getting a seat at the most congested point; the cleanliness of cars; and the adequacy of announcements.

The Straphangers Campaign Line Ratings (see next page) are based on a formula developed in consultation with independent transportation experts. A line could receive a rating of \$1.50 if it scored, on average, in the top 5% on the six measures of service.

#### Key findings: mixed results overall, trains crowded

1. For the fourth year in a row, the **best subway line is the 7** — with a "Line Rating" of \$1.05. The line ranked high because there is much more scheduled service on the 7 than on most lines; riders have a greater chance of getting a seat at a peak period; its cars break down much less often than average; and it performed above average

on in-car announcements.

2. The worst subway line is the 5—with a Line Rating of 60 cents. This is the first time in the four-year history of the report card that a numbered line came in last. The 5 replaced the A, B, and M as the worst lines since our last report. The 5 line performed below average on four measures: regularity of service; chances of getting a seat during rush hour; hearing adequate subway car announcements and car breakdowns.

**Straphangers Campaign  
Subway Line  
Ratings**

<b>7</b>	<b>\$1.05</b>
<b>Q</b>	<b>\$1.00</b>
<b>J/z</b>	<b>95¢</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>85¢</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>85¢</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>85¢</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>80¢</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>75¢</b>
<b>1/9</b>	<b>75¢</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>75¢</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>75¢</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>75¢</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>75¢</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>75¢</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>75¢</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>70¢</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>65¢</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>65¢</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>60¢</b>

3. The overall picture for the subways is mixed: Line Ratings improved for seven of 19 subway lines; ratings declined on six; and stayed the same on six. The seven lines with better ratings are the: A, B, D, J/Z, M, Q and R. The six lines with worse ratings are the: 1/9, 2, 4, 5, C and N. The six unchanged lines are the: 3, 6, 7, E, F, and L. This is better than last year, where nine of 19 lines grew worse and only three improved.

4. The subways grew more crowded in the last year. A rider's chance of getting a seat during the most crowded rush-hour point dropped from 31% to 28%. Twelve lines grew more crowded; six lines grew less. One line was unchanged; there's no data for the G.

5. There has been **no improvement in scheduled times between rush hour trains**, despite a massive increase in ridership. Despite a slight improvement at midday, average scheduled time between trains in morning rush hour remained at 6 minutes, 6 seconds and in the evenings at 6 minutes, 36 seconds. Average noon-time "headways" improved by 18 seconds from 1998 to 1999.

6. Subway cars grew significantly cleaner in the last year, but announcements were slightly poorer. Sixteen of 20 routes grew cleaner; 4 grew dirtier. Systemwide, the percentage of cars with clean seats and floors increased from 59% to 75%. This improvement comes after transit officials **restored more than 200 subway car cleaners**

that had been cut in 1994.11 of 20 lines provided fewer correct and understandable announcements; eight improved on announcements; one stayed the same. Systemwide, the % of cars with correct and understandable announcements declined slightly, from 61% to 60%.

7. Subway cars broke down less often, but the regularity of service worsened slightly. Sixteen of 20 lines experienced fewer delays due to mechanical problems; four

lines had a greater breakdown rate. Eleven of 20 lines grew more irregular, with more gaps in service and bunching; eight improved; and one stayed the same.

8. The most improved line is the M, which was tied for the worst line in last year's survey. Its Line Rating went from 65 cents to 85 cents. The M showed improvement on five measures: greater regularity, a lower car breakdown rate, less crowding, cleaner cars, and better announcements. Three lines—the 5, C and N—had the biggest drops in performance: The line rating for the 5 line declined from 70 cents to a 60-cent rating; the C line dropped from 75 cents to 65 cents; and the N line declined from 80 cents to 70 cents. All three lines broke down more often.

9. There are great disparities in how subway lines perform. For example, the 4 had the best record on delays caused by mechanical failures: once every 163,227 miles. The R line had the worst, experiencing breakdown delays nearly three times as often: once every 56,852 miles. The same wide disparities among lines could be seen for all of Straphangers' measures.

**63rd St. Tunnel: More Capacity for Queens?**

Contractors have completed all substantial track and ventilation shaft construction for the subway tunnel that will allow Queens Boulevard lines to use the 63rd Street Tunnel, NYC Transit representatives reported at an MTA board Transit Committee meeting last week. However, the connection will not open until a large-scale signal system is fully installed, probably in Sept. 2001.

The new tunnel branches off the Queens Boulevard lines at 41st Avenue, bypassing the busy Queens Plaza stops, to 21st Street where Q service (at present, a temporary shuttle service) now terminates. The agency maintains that no decisions on service expansions have yet been made, though the NYC Transit speakers assured listeners that express and local services from Queens will continue to run through both the 54th and 63rd St. tunnels.

The \$645 million 63rd St. Connection will be the NYC system's largest system expansion in recent memory, but critics say it is unlikely to fill capacity needs. The crowded E/F express line is already running close to 2-minute headways during AM rush hours, leaving no room for added trains with or without a new route to Manhattan. Advocates like the Committee for Better Transit's Stephen Dobrow are skeptical that the additional local service the tunnel connector makes possible will ease the crush. According to Dobrow, relatively uncrowded morning local R-trains draw few express riders even now.

The MTA's LIRR East Side Access holds greater promise as a long-term solution for Queens, if the railroad uses the additional track space in part to expand infrequent Queens service. A recent study by NYC Public Advocate Mark Green found that Queens and Brooklyn LIRR riders pay more than their suburban

counterparts for similar distance trips (MTR #257). Some commuters now on sardine-can Queens Boulevard expresses might ride the LIRR from stops like Forest Hills if offered more convenient service at a fair price.

### Suffolk Civic Leaders Present Guidelines for Route 347

On Monday night, civic leaders from Brookhaven and Smithtown presented NY State DOT planners with a “Five-point plan for a better Route 347 project.” It states “**NY State DOT should not rely solely on road capacity expansion** to address congestion along Route 347 and other corridors.” Its main points are:

1. DOT needs to work with municipalities on **land use plans** that can minimize future traffic growth
2. The Route 347 EIS should compare road widening against a “**partial build**” **alternative** of intersection fixes and non-paving strategies like employer-based programs to reduce solo car commuting.
3. DOT should also pay more attention to aesthetic issues, and consider a **boulevard design** that incorporates more trees and cycling and walking infrastructure.
4. DOT needs to improve its ability to collaborate with stakeholders (see LITP story, front page). Citizens especially thought the Route 347 “**info-merical**” **style scoping hearing**, and the absence of any written material on the Route 347 project to be inadequate.
5. DOT should promptly comply with all requests for information about its projects. Over the past year, DOT’s Region 10 office has compiled an **atrocious record of stonewalling and non-disclosure** regarding data and other information on its projects and studies. The Tri-State Campaign recently wrote to transportation commissioner Boardman to detail this problem.

The citizens also asked DOT to answer questions about the Route 347 widening plan to other nearby highway expansion projects, and with the LITP plan to build new HOV lanes all over Long Island.

The statement was endorsed by the Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Organization, Lake Grove Civic Association, the L.I. Progressive Coalition, Mt. Sinai Civic, Port Jefferson Civic Association, Setauket Civic, Suffolk County Bike Riders Association, Tri-State Transportation Campaign and County Legislator Vivian Fisher.



**Little-used subway entrance blocks bridge promenade**  
(Transportation Alternatives)

### Notes from NYC

Earlier this month, Governor Pataki signed into law a **Bronx land swap** between the State DOT and MTA that will allow the DOT to build a pedestrian and bicycle path from Devoe and E. 177th Street to Starlight Park. The exchange is just one hurdle to opening up the southern portion of the **Bronx River Greenway**.

The State DOT will build the path along the east side of the river, two pedestrian bridges over the Bronx River and will help the NYC Parks Department reconstruct Starlight Park. The new bridges and paths will connect on the street to the northern portion of the Bronx River Greenway which now extends from Westchester to E. 180th Street. Unfortunately, a State DOT proposal to build a new truck route nearby would place a highway link through a vacant lot that community groups are eyeing as an extension of the greenway from Westchester Avenue to Bruckner Boulevard.



At a meeting this week, officials from **Cooper Union** characterized the street system near the East Village university as **overbuilt for cars and a nightmare for pedestrians**. They unveiled a plan for the campus and surrounding streets that would narrow 4th Avenue, straighten 8th Street and eliminate Astor Place between Lafayette St. and 4th Avenue.

The plan requires a change to the city's map — a planning commission action. As City DOT secured money for the project through a 1993 federal enhancements grant, the agency must apply to the commission. However, no City DOT representatives attended the meeting and no one could predict when they would begin the process that has **now been stalled for seven years**.

Some people at the meeting asked if 4th Ave. could be closed entirely. The study's traffic engineer said trucks servicing 4th Ave. buildings and M101 and M102 buses need access to the block — therefore the northbound lane would remain. However, other pedestrian-priority areas — like Brooklyn's Fulton Mall — prevent access to all vehicles except buses and certain trucks. Doing the same on 4th Avenue is certainly worth a look.



The reconstruction of the Manhattan-side approach to the **Brooklyn Bridge promenade** may yet bring important improvements for cyclists and pedestrians. After much wrangling with Transportation Alternatives and Community Consulting Services, the NYC DOT recently agreed to close and cover the Brooklyn Bridge-Chambers St. **subway entrance that blocks the center of the approach**. As well as removing an obstacle for cyclists at the bottom of a steep incline, the change will add needed width to the cyclist and pedestrian pathways.

However, the city continues to resist adding a pedestrian crosswalk from the promenade to City Hall Park north of the existing crossing often used by cyclists, a simple improvement that would reduce the likelihood of conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians.

## CT Town Awaits Road Decision

After warding off the expansion of Rt. 66 for years, Middlefield town leaders and citizen activists hope for a final victory at a ConnDOT adjudication hearing in early August (MTR #163).

The dispute revolves around ConnDOT's application for **wetlands filling** permits and a water quality certification for the project, which adds lanes to 2.1 miles of the road where it connects to the end of I-691. Water quality concerns are significant because the segment proposed for widening runs directly through the Mount Higby Reservoir preserve and is located in two public watersheds of the Mattabasset Regional Drainage Basin.

Last month, upon appeal, DEP Commissioner Arthur Roque overturned a December 1999 DEP decision in favor of the required permits. Agreeing with opponents, the Commissioner ruled that **ConnDOT had failed to provide more than "bald assertions"** that the widening was needed to improve safety or traffic flow and would have no significant impact on the watershed and reservoir system. He ordered the agency to improve its evidence within 60 days or face permit denial.

Kathy Kokoszka, chairwoman of Citizens for a Sensible 66, told the Campaign that "glaring holes" in the ConnDOT application could not possibly be filled in the time allotted, but remains concerned. Experience in other parts of the state shows ConnDOT to be undaunted by environmental rulings. Last November, ConnDOT submitted its third application to construct a new expressway in the Rt. 6 corridor through the Hop River basin, even though the two previous, similar alignments were denied by the Army Corps of Engineers and strongly opposed by the US EPA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency (MTR #'s 244, 258).

### CALENDAR

**July 25, 6-9pm** Auto-Free NY Walking Tour, "Harlem Transport Issues", Meet SE corner of 125th St. and Lexington Ave. 212-475-3394

**August 7, 9:30am** CT Dept. of Environmental Protection hearing on Route 66 widening, DEP bldg., Russell Hearing Rm., 79 Elm St., Hartford. Call Kathy Kokoszka, 860-346-5321.

**August 22, 6-9pm** Auto-Free NY Walking Tour, "42nd St. Light Rail & Ped Boulevard", Meet Grand Central upper level info booth. 212-475-3394

**September 5-8** 11th Pro-Bike/Pro-Walk Conference, Philadelphia: "Smart Choices for Smart Growth." [www.bikewalk.org](http://www.bikewalk.org)

**September 21, 7:45-9:30am** NJ Regional Planning Partnership Breakfast Series. Bruce Coe, "Natural Resources: Protecting Them as we Grow", \$. [Rpp2050@aol.com](mailto:Rpp2050@aol.com).

## Newark Arena Loses Footbridge Funds

### - Transit and Pedestrian Access At Risk -

Following a request from Gov. Whitman, Newark city officials erased a \$10 million pedestrian crossing from plans for the partly state-funded \$325 million Devils/Nets arena project, the *Star-Ledger* reported last week. The money was earmarked to renovate an abandoned rail bridge at McCarter Highway (Rte. 21) and Edison Place that would have **linked Newark Penn Station and the Ironbound community with the arena.**

Without the walkway, hockey and basketball fans traveling by rail (some of whom will drink at the games) will have to **cross the busy highway at street level** when the stadium opens in 2003, an outcome likely to cause congestion and further endanger pedestrians in Newark, already NJ's least safe walking city. The arena's pedestrian safety mitigation plans amount only to changed signal timing, not traffic-calming infrastructure to slow down cars and trucks. Heavy trucks account for 22% of traffic on Rte. 21.

Community opposition has centered around fears of traffic induced by the arena. Its transportation plan will add 1,940 parking spaces to Newark's central business district in two decks; a whopping 17,310 parking spaces already exist within a ten-minute walk of the arena. Minus the prominent transit access it was to have had, arena traffic will be exacerbated. Newark Mayor Sharpe James showed dismay at the prospect, telling the *Star-Ledger*, "This whole [arena] development...is tied to the bridge."

Governor Whitman had agreed to support the YankeeNets-led project by paying for signage, roadway improvements, parking structures, and the pedestrian bridge, but grew more conservative as costs reportedly came in much higher than the \$70 million initially projected. In this case, small savings now may lead to greater costs for both city and state in the future.

Hopes for a rational solution are now pinned on departing Senator Frank Lautenberg, an untiring transit supporter, who is lobbying for \$30 million federal dollars for the bridge renovation as well as the construction of a new bus depot at the arena.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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