

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NYC Seeks Expanded Harbor Rail Service



The NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) released a request for proposals from potential operators for the city's **65th Street Rail Yard** along the Brooklyn waterfront. Since taking ownership in 1982, New York City has improved the site by constructing two new transfer bridges — ramps with railroad tracks that allow the transfer of **rail cars to barges**. Proposals must be submitted by Sept. 25th.

Currently operated by NY & Atlantic Railway under a short-term lease as a rail-truck transloading facility, the 65th St. yard is connected to the rail network via the LIRR Bay Ridge Branch and allows truck access via the 63rd St. entrance to the Brooklyn Army Terminal.

By beginning float barge service at 65th St., the NYC EDC hopes to increase the tonnage and market share of freight moved by rail through the region, as well as **build momentum and demand** for its harbor **freight rail tunnel** plan (MTR #269). NY Cross-Harbor Railroad currently provides the harbor's only float barge service, transporting roughly 4,000 cars per year back and forth from Jersey City's Greenville Yard to a rail transfer bridge at the 51st Street Rail Yard in Brooklyn.

A study commissioned by EDC found that floating rail cars across the harbor was more cost efficient than the railroad route down the Hudson Valley via Selkirk for traffic arriving from the Mid-Atlantic, South, and parts of the Southwest and Mexico. The 65th St. Yard RFP suggests that a competitive service could garner up to 8,000 additional cars per year in current conditions, with a potential market of 40,000-70,000 cars per year by 2020, equaling 2 to 4.4 million tons per year, or 25,000 to 55,000 truckloads.

The toughest requirement for any potential bidder is mentioned only briefly in the RFP: "Use of the 65th Street Transfer Bridge...requires access to a rail transfer bridge on the **west side of the harbor**." Jersey City's Greenville Yard currently houses the only available West side barge transfer facility. The facility is part of the "Shared Assets Area" created when CSX and Norfolk Southern divided Conrail, but is leased until 2023 to Cross-Harbor Railroad. Other potential operators, like the Port Authority, NY & Atlantic, CSX, or NS would have to develop a new float bridge site in New Jersey or Staten Island. Some say Greenville Yard is congested and has little capacity for expanded barge operations.

Truck Battle is Daily Fare

Aspects of NJ citizens' fight to reduce truck impacts are in the papers almost every day now. Among a variety of news items last week, including accounts of more car-truck crashes, a Wednesday *Asbury Park Press* editorial urged Governor Whitman to consider empowering local police forces to **enforce truck rules** designed to keep big, inter-state truck trips off of smaller state and local highways (see last week's *MTR*). The paper backed the state's approach to truck impact problems, stating "Keeping most large trucks off local roads, many of them unsuitable to handle this traffic, **won't restrict interstate commerce**. But it could save more lives."

The state is tightening its truck rules further, to close a loophole that allows long-distance truckers based in NJ to use smaller roads on inter-state hauling jobs.

A freeholder is seeking support for her proposal to ban all 102-inch trucks from most north-south roads in western NJ's **Warren County**, according to the *Star-Ledger*. Mayors in towns where those roads become main street support the idea. Others are worried it would concentrate even more trucks on other roads.

What is NYSDOT Hiding?

377 days have passed since the Tri-State Campaign first requested projected traffic volume data for NY State DOT's projects to widen NY Routes 347, 112 and 25 in northern Brookhaven. DOT's first responses **ignored the data requests** and offered vague defenses of the highway expansion projects. More recent requests have been met with lame talk about the traffic numbers as "preliminary" and in "need of refinement." That's a mountain of bureaucratic baloney. DOT has developed **detailed plans for widening 347** over the past two years, and clearly has an idea of the traffic volumes it hopes to accommodate. Anticipated traffic on the road is as much an aspect of the picture of Route 347's future as DOT's plans to rebuild intersections. Interested parties deserve to know what the highway planners know about the road. DOT's Long Island office should reform its Soviet-style attitude about access to information.

NJ Admits No Study in I-95 Land Sale

Last year, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and Delaware Riverkeeper filed suit in state court in Trenton to protest the sale of 6 acres of open land to construct a **full cloverleaf interchange** along I-95 at Scotch Road in Hopewell Township, NJ. The lands were originally

bought with state Green Acres (open space) funds by Mercer County, meaning that to sell them for any reason, the County had to persuade the state Dept. of Environmental Protection and the State House Commission, which handles the state's property, that the lands were **necessary for a public purpose** and no feasible alternatives to the taking of the land existed.

No such alternatives analysis was done, and since the full interchange facilitated the private purpose of locating a massive, auto-dependent sprawling office complex for Merrill Lynch in a cornfield, the Campaign and the river group immediately challenged the deal.

This week, the State Attorney General's office blinked by admitting that the State House Commission "**made no separate verbal statement of findings of fact** nor written findings and conclusions" to justify its sale of the land to DOT for the ramps.

The State asked the court for a remand back to the Commission so it could articulate its "factual findings and legal conclusions" leading to its sale of the land. The Tri-State Campaign is opposing the state's request as out of order, and will continue to oppose the sale or **swap of open space parcels** for more **highway development**.

Though purchase of open space and farmland parcels was recently tightened by new ethics rules, it seems New Jersey is having a hard time complying with rules already on the books.

Congressman Fights Rail Freight

NJ Congressman Frank Pallone promised Edison residents last week he would fight plans to move NYC garbage south on freight trains after the city closes its Staten Island dump next year, according to the Home News Tribune. "We're going to do everything we can" to stop the trash trains, said Pallone. Opposition to increased rail freight operations in Union and Middlesex Counties is concentrated in areas directly adjacent to freight lines. The Congressman may not have considered that if NYC's municipal waste cannot run on trains, it will mean that many more trucks on Garden State highways, and that much more diesel exhaust in communities along roads like the NJ Turnpike.

Highway or Street? A Call to Action

Queens Boulevard, one of the deadliest streets in New York City, has drawn the concern of activists for years. However, the release of a report by NYC DOT this summer (see *MTR* #280), which called for little more than the striping of crosswalks for ten blocks of the approximately 7-mile street, has outraged community associations.

The **Forest Hills Action League** and the Tri-State Campaign are looking for groups along Queens Boulevard that are interested in both **short and long-term safety improvements**. Some elected officials have already indicated interest in an ambitious initiative to make Queens Boulevard safe for pedestrians. Contact the Campaign for more information — 212-268-7474.

Queens Leaders Fight for Better LIRR Stations, Service

Last week, the *Daily News* reported that the MTA plans to repair decrepit platforms, stairs and shelters at three Queens LIRR stations starting this Fall. After prodding by State Senator Malcolm Smith (D-Queens), City Comptroller Alan Hevesi and others, the agency has set aside \$5 million for **new platforms** at St. Albans and Rosedale and for **repairs to stairs and lighting** at the Hollis Station. State Senator Smith told the *Daily News* that the much-needed repairs should draw far-Queens commuters now undergoing a difficult bus-subway transfer back to the LIRR.

Comptroller Hevesi highlighted the poor condition of the platforms at Rosedale and Hollis Stations in his office's annual audit of the Long Island Railroad, but reported no unsafe conditions at the St. Albans Station. New York City was billed almost \$35 million for the operation of the 26 LIRR stations within the boroughs in FY99. The audit of labor, overhead, and direct charges is used to verify those costs and to check **levels of station maintenance**. Stations were inspected at the end of May and revisited in July, 1999. A similar audit will soon be released for Metro North Railroad.

The Comptroller praised a number of stations as well maintained, others he found in potentially dangerous or simply poor condition. Dangers cited in the report include damaged steps and staircases, rotted wood on station platforms, and exposed broken glass. Maintenance issues included damaged platform shelters, peeling paint, and graffiti. The worst stations in these regards were Auburndale, Broadway, Hunterspoint Avenue and Murray Hill, all in Queens. LIRR officials agreed with the report's findings and provided the Comptroller's office with a time-table for repairs of the most serious deficiencies, many of which should be now completed.

Revisions to the LIRR fare structure, now highly unfavorable for intra-city commuters, would also encourage more ridership in Queens. A report by Public Advocate Mark Green's Office released last February showed that intra-NYC riders can pay more than \$3 more per ride than intra-Long Island riders over a comparable distance, with prices during peak period topping at \$5.50(*MTR* #257). The report recommends targeted cuts in fares and increased service.

The *Woodside Herald* reports that Assemblywoman **Catherine Nolan** (D-Queens) is also pushing hard for **reduced LIRR fares** in Queens. She told the newspaper that the 24 more trains the LIRR plans to run into Grand Central Terminal through Queens after the completion of the East Side Access project creates a huge opportunity for better service if the price is right. As the Assembly representative to the MTA Capital Program Review Board, Nolan asked the MTA to examine the LIRR fare structure in Queens prior to approving its 2000-2004 capital plan. She wrote again recently to ask

what plans the agency has to examine fares with the goal of "reducing crowding on Queens subway lines." Assemblywoman Nolan herself secured MTA funds for station improvements in Woodside and Forest Hills in the 1992-1996 capital plan.

Strong Backing for GCT Bike Parking



National, state, and local New York City and Hudson Valley elected officials have recently endorsed Transportation Alternatives' request that Metro North Railroad install secure bicycle parking at Grand Central Terminal. The long list includes Congressman Jerrold Nadler, Congress member Caroline Maloney and Sue Kelly, State Senator Tom Duane, State Senator Suzi Oppenheimer, State Senator Roy Goodman, Assembly member Richard Gottfried, Assembly member John Ravitz, Council member Christine Quinn, Council member Gifford Miller, Greenburgh Town Supervisor Paul Feiner. The Dept. of City Planning has also given its support to the proposal.

T.A. has worked with Metro North and the MTA over the past three years to put safe and dependable bicycle parking at Grand Central. Unfortunately, the effort has stalled because a construction trailer occupied the desired site near the taxi stand on Vanderbilt Avenue. The trailer has now been removed and elected officials and advocates are anxious to see the parking put in place.

Bicycle parking at Grand Central would serve dozens of **reverse commuters** who are deterred from riding because of concerns about bicycle theft. Secure parking facilities would follow the recommendations made in the NYC Dept. of City Planning's 1999 "Bicycle Parking Needs Report" and would create an even more accessible transit hub.

NJ Transit Prepares for M-O-M EIS

Last week, NJTransit released a request for expressions of interest from consulting firms for preparation of the environmental impact statement and preliminary engineering plans for a **new central NJ commuter rail service**. The consultant will consider the route from a new station in Lakehurst to the Northeast Corridor's Monmouth Junction in South Brunswick, as well as an alignment from Lakehurst to the North Jersey Coast Line's Red Bank station. Both alignments are along existing rail track. Letters of interest are due Sept. 18th.

Legislation adding the Central Jersey project to the definition of NJ's "Circle of Mobility" project group was signed into law July 11th, which puts the \$300-400 million project in line for federal funds (MTR #273). The towns of Jamesburg, Monroe, and South Brunswick continue to **oppose the Monmouth Junction route**, citing grade crossing and other safety concerns. Transit officials and planners believe that a new rail service through those fast-growing counties would reduce congestion on Route 9 the Garden State Parkway and other roads.

NYMTC, NYS DOT Launch Long Island Land Use-Transport Project

The NY Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) launched a "sustainable development study" for **Long Island's East End** in August, issuing a Request for Proposals for consultant services. Modeled after similar projects in the Hudson Valley (MTR #274), the eighteen-month analysis will be carried out with the cooperation of the NYS Department of Transportation, the Long Island Railroad, Suffolk County, and the **East End Transportation Council**, a group of five East End towns and eight villages.

The purpose of the study is to create agreement among citizens, municipal leaders and agencies on plans for future land use and transportation projects. The consultant team will look at a wide range of issues including residential and commercial density, housing types and numbers, land ownership, parking facilities, as well as commuting patterns and existing transportation services. The project will apparently involve dozens of public meetings and workshops. Proposals are due by September 15th; a firm will be chosen by mid-October.

The study may be a good education for **NYS DOT's Long Island regional office**, which tends to protest loudly at the very mention of land use changes that might reduce future traffic growth. A central component of the "5-point plan for a Better Route 347" gaining widespread support in northern Brookhaven is that DOT and NYMTC initiate a similar study along that corridor.

Hudson-Bergen Rail Fishes for Riders

NJ Transit will offer free parking and new fare incentives to boost **disappointing ridership** on the new Hudson-Bergen light rail system, Transit director Jeff Warsh announced yesterday. The *Star-Ledger* reported that the light rail is seeing 5,100 riders per day, up from 3,700 counted a month after the line's April inauguration. But the numbers are still well shy of the 18,400 Transit hoped to see in the line's first year.

Incentive measures will be **free parking** at the line's little-used park and ride lots in Bayonne and in western and southern sections of Jersey City, **\$1.50 all-day weekend passes** and new uni-ticket deals for the light rail and two NY Waterway ferry lines.

Warsh said he now hoped for 10,000 daily riders by mid-2001, and pointed to the line's extension and Jersey City's development boom as keys to the light rail's success. NJ Transit plans to open a single track extension to Pavonia/Newport in mid-November, creating access to the mall there and to **PATH's 33rd Street line**. Warsh said the line will see a huge boost in ridership when it reaches Hoboken.

Visit the Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

New: Hudson Valley municipal resolutions expressing reservations over proposals to replace the TZ Bridge.

Fanfare for New Hudson Valley Ferry Service

Politicians, ferry fans and potential riders were out in force for the inaugural voyage of NY Waterway's **Haverstraw-Ossining ferry service** last Wednesday. Starting Tuesday, Sept. 5th, regular service will be free for the first week and free all September for those who purchase a \$193 monthly uni-ticket for the ferry and Metro-North. After opening week, a one-way ticket for the ferry alone will cost \$3.

With the new service, Rockland and Orange County commuters can take advantage of a grid-lock free, 80-

minute trip from Haverstraw to Grand Central Station, via Metro-North's Ossining station. Metro-North expects the new service to attract 150 daily customers initially, and eventually to **remove up to 300 cars per day from the Tappan Zee Bridge** (MTR #276).

Under a partly federally financed two-year pilot program, Haverstraw ferries will meet four in-bound morning and four out-bound evening peak hour trains each weekday. Local leaders would like to see the experiment expanded to include weekends and off-peak rides.

CALENDAR

September 5-8 11th Pro-Bike/Pro-Walk Conference, Philadelphia: "Smart Choices for Smart Growth." www.bikewalk.org

September 7, Noon Permanent Citizen Advisory Council to the MTA Meeting, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org

Sept 8, 9am Central Jersey Transportation Forum meeting, Sarnoff Corporation, 201 Washington Rd., Princeton, NJ, DVRPC 215-238-2872

Sept. 10 Transportation Alternatives NYC Century Tour:Manhattan-Brooklyn-Queens-Bronx. \$ Proceeds benefit better NYC cycling and walking. www.nyccenturybiketour.com, 212-629-8080.

Sept. 11, 1pm North Jersey Transportation Authority board meeting. 17th Floor, One Newark Center, Newark. 973-639-8400.

Sept. 11, 2pm New York State Thruway Authority Board Meeting, Geneva Rm., Crowne Plaza, 70 State St., Rochester, NY 518-436-3000

Sept. 11, 6:30pm NYMTC public meeting for regional study of access to jobs and commuting options for low-income residents in NYC metro region, P.S. 8 Auditorium, 465 West 167th St. (betw. Amsterdam Ave. and Jumel Pl., Manhattan, 212-475-3030, www.mya.nyc.ny.us

Sept.13,10am NJTransit Board Meeting, NJ Transit Headquarters, One Penn Plaza, Ninth Fl., Newark, NJ, 973-491-7000

Sept 14-15 "Transportation, Communities and System Preservation Program" (TEA-21 Section 1220, on transportation/land use planning) workshop: FHWA, USDOT, and EPA. Washington, DC. More info: <http://tcsp-fhwa.volpe.dot.gov/>

Sept 15, 8:15am NJ Future's "Best Practices in Smart Growth" Conference, speakers, strategy seminars, George St. Playhouse, 9 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick, NJ, \$, www.njfuture.org, njfuture@njfuture.org, 609-393-0008, ext. 101

September 18, 9am-5pm, "Ports and Terminals 2000: Meeting the Challenges of A Changing Shipping Industry", Journal of Commerce Group Operations Conference, Downtown Athletic Club, Manhattan, Alyssa Schneiderman, 212-837-7163

September 19, 3-5, 7-9pm NJTransit scoping meeting for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for restoring passenger service to the West Shore Line in Bergen County, Bergen County Administrative Building, Hackensack, ?'s 201-646-2528 or 2896

Sept. 20, 3-5pm, 7-9pm NJTransit scoping meeting for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for restoring passenger service to the West Shore Line in Rockland County, Orangetown Town Hall, Orangeburg, NY, 973-491-7000

Sept. 21, 7:45-9:30am Regional Planning Partnership Breakfast Series. Carol Collier, Executive Director of the Delaware Basin River Commission, "NaturalResources: Protecting Them As We Grow", \$ 609-452-1717, Rpp2050@aol.com

Sept. 23rd, 10:30am NJ Association of Rail Passengers Annual Meeting, Jamesburg, NJ, Doug Bowen, 201-798-6137 x2.

Sept. 25, 1-5, 7pm 2nd public hearing on the Meadowlands Mills Mega-mall Environmental Impact Statement, Henry P. Becton High School in East Rutherford, NJ, 212-264-0183 or <http://meadowlandspartnership.org>

Sept 26, 12:30-2pm NYC Department of City Planning Brown Bag Lunch, Chris Ward, NY/NJ Port Authority Chief of Planning and External Affairs, "Promoting Major Capital Programs for New York and New Jersey," 212-442-4630.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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