

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Straphangers: Mets Line Beats Yankees' Lines

On the eve of a subway series, the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign called the #7 subway to Shea Stadium a "clear winner" over the two lines serving Yankee Stadium, the #4 and D lines.

"**The #7 serving Shea is the best line in the city,**" said Gene Russianoff, Straphangers staff attorney. He noted the #7 was the highest rated line in the Straphangers' annual state of the subways report, released in July. "The subway to Shea runs well ahead of the lines to the Bronx Bombers. The teams are well matched, but their subway lines are not."

The #7 received a "line rating" of \$1.05 from Straphangers, ranking first while the #4 ranked fourth and the D ranked sixth out of 19 lines (both had ratings of 85-cents. Riders on the #7 get **more service, a greater chance of getting a seat and better announcements**, all "crowd pleasers."

### Nassau Democrats Propose LI Bus Cuts

The *New York Times* reported last Thursday that the latest Nassau County budget proposal by county legislature Democrats would cut county support for Long Island Bus by \$4 million in the coming year, and by \$7 million during the following year.

Transit advocates quickly wrote to Judith Jacobs, Nassau County Majority Leader, urging that the legislature avoid cuts to the county bus budget, and use the opportunity of changing the county's tax system to **dedicate a small portion of revenue** to create a steady level of annual county support for bus service.

The Democrats are likely counting on another state bail-out of the Long Island Bus operating budget (see *MTR #265*). The \$7 million cut they plan for 2002 is equivalent to that proposed last year by County Executive Thomas Gulotta. Long Island Bus said budget reductions at that level would have led to a **40% reduction in service**. However, ongoing "emergency" state funding is untenable as a regular feature of Nassau's budget. It could lead other counties or municipalities to clamor for similar treatment, causing chaos for local transit systems around the state.

Meanwhile, Long Island Bus continues to continue to post **record ridership numbers** — an Oct. 10 release said the agency provided an average of 108,000 passenger trips on Sept., 2000 weekdays, the highest weekday average of any month in Long Island Bus' history.

### Port Plans Stuck on Trucks...

Last Monday, environmental organizations and port, municipal, state, and Federal agencies met to discuss the environmental impacts of future development of the Port of New York & New Jersey.

The agencies have written a memorandum of understanding regarding the shape of plans for the port and intend to follow it with a large-scale environmental impact statement. The they **refuse to include targets for reducing trucks' overall share** of port freight movement in either the agreement or the study. The Tri-State Campaign and other environmental and civic groups have pushed for the addition for almost a year. The agencies' foot-dragging bespeaks either their desire not to upset the truck-reliant status quo, their fear of failure, or their complete ignorance of the political momentum that is building against more trucks into and through NJ and NY.

In a spectacular example of this bureaucratic attitude, when the Campaign commented that the text of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority draft regional transportation plan did not support its stated goal of **reducing truck trips**, the agency **changed the goal** to increasing truck trips, rather than incorporate the needed mode-shifting strategies.

### ...But Progress at Rail-Float Meeting

The Port Authority convened freight carriers, transportation agencies, elected officials and public interest groups last Tuesday for a long-awaited "charrette" to discuss how best to invest the \$75 million allegedly in the agency's draft 5-year capital plan for improvements to the **rail car float service across the NY Harbor**.

EDC's Cross-Harbor Freight Movement Study completed earlier this year projected that the float has the potential to eliminate 275,000 cross-Hudson truck trips annually (*MTR #271*). Essentially all of these trips are long-distance truck trips that can be diverted to all-rail routes, so the benefit would go beyond traffic relief on the river crossings. While the reduction in truck trips is small (0.4% of truck vehicle miles traveled in the region would be eliminated), the float is a key early action to claim some of the huge short- to mid-range freight market now monopolized by trucking.

The discussion quickly revealed the futility of considering the float operation in isolation from **other east of the Hudson rail freight limitations**, including overhead clearances, weight restrictions, as well as insuffi-

cient trackage and yard space. Some pointed out that the 98-acre railyard proposed at Pilgrim State Hospital on Long Island, while an important step forward, would only begin to remedy the space shortage. **Representative Jerry Nadler** chided NYSDOT on its lack of initiative in gaining more yard capacity and warned that without a set-aside of hundreds of acres for future rail operations, there will never be a significant rail freight operation in NYC and Long Island.

A recurring question was the extent to which the float operation could support itself financially. New management at the current operator, Cross Harbor Railroad, insisted it could operate profitably without a subsidy, citing the small but growing volume of 3,000 rail cars per year at its single float bridge on each side of the Hudson. Cross-Harbor said \$10-12 million for infrastructure improvements would suffice to increase volumes three-to-five-fold. Others maintained that even in its heyday, when the floats carried hundreds of thousands of cars annually, the **operation did not pay for itself**, and suggested that the service might be regarded as a public good requiring some level of subsidy.

The Port Authority seemed to gain consensus around investing in New Jersey at **Greenville Yard, not Staten Island**, given the transfer, handling and other complexities associated with the Staten Island RR. In a mostly New York crowd, support for a New Jersey investment by the Port Authority was promising.

#### NY Bond Act Scorecard

Organizations and newspapers continued to weigh in on both sides of NY's Transportation Bond Act last week:

**For:** The **General Contractors Association of NY** and the **Long Island Association**, a business group, both argued for the act on the bases of mass transit investment, infrastructure repair, jobs and, in the case of the LIA, highway widening and rail freight improvements.

**Against:** The **Citizens Budget Commission**, the *New York Post* and *Crain's New York Business* gave the question thumbs down, arguing against increasing the state's debt and the Legislature's unwillingness to deal with tough revenue problems directly. Crains charged that NY State has used increases in federal transportation funding to divert state money away from transit and highway needs. Also citing debt, the **NY Conservative Party** kicked off an upstate ad campaign this weekend urging a "no" vote.

The **NYC Independent Budget Office** didn't take a position on the act but said its analysis showed NYC residents would reap more benefits than they would pay for in debt service if the act passed (the IBO assumed all transportation spending would be beneficial).

The **Committee for Safe Roads and Improved Transportation**, a road lobby group in Albany, has raised \$108,000 for an upstate ad campaign supporting the bond act, *Newsday* reported last Wednesday.

#### NJ Voters Face Transport Reform Measure - Ballot Question Could Reduce Traffic, Sprawl -

In the run-up to election day, supporters of New Jersey's Transportation Trust Fund renewal bill are educating the public about the importance of **Public Question #1**, particularly targeting backers of environmental causes. A question on the November 7th ballot will ask voters to dedicate the remaining portion of the existing gas tax and a small part of the state sales tax to **the Transportation Trust Fund**, which pays for much of NJ's transit and highway capital budgets. After heavy lobbying by transportation reformers, the NJ DOT now must expand the bicycle path network, seek the Legislature's approval for new highway projects and meet quantifiable five-year goals for highway and bridge repair.

A short article by Tri-State Transportation Campaign Executive Director Janine Bauer explains these provisions, concluding that environmentalists have reason to hope that new controls on transportation spending will "help resolve traffic problems, rather than induce more traffic by laying more highway pavement." The piece has appeared in recent newsletters of the Association of NJ Environmental Commissions, the NJ Environmental Federation, and the NJ Environmental Lobby and in e-mail messages to members of the Sierra Club, Environmental Defense, and Save the Bay. The Audubon Society, the NRDC, and the Upper Raritan Watershed plan to send the article to members next week.

Ms. Bauer is joined by prominent business leaders in **urging support** for Public Question #1 in a radio ad paid for by the Keep New Jersey Moving Coalition that will begin airing this week.



The challenge to the ballot question brought by the NJ League of Women Voters, which argues that voters should be asked separate questions about the earmarking of the gas tax and sales tax, has been successively **struck down** by the New Jersey Superior and Appeals courts. The League has appealed the case to the state Supreme Court, where justices have agreed to expedite the case and hand down a ruling prior to voting day.

#### Sheridan Expressway / Bronx River: Pataki Boosts Greenway, Ferrer Rejects Road

In September, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation obtained a waterfront property west of the Bronx River, between the Bruckner Expressway and Westchester Avenue, which it will integrate into the Bronx River Greenway. Last Saturday, Governor Pataki visited the site and dedicated more than \$10 million for various Bronx River Greenway projects.

However, a planned NY State DOT reconstruction of **Edgewater Road**, a decrepit city street that borders the newly obtained land, is one of the few highway expansion projects in New York City. The State DOT has budgeted \$11 million to turn it into an **interim truck-only road** from the Sheridan Expressway to the Hunts Point Market. (See *MTR* #250.)

The irony of obtaining land and funds for a waterside greenway while the State DOT plans to diminish its value with a truck route was not lost on the Parks Dept. or community groups, who want Edgewater Road turned over to Parks. The City DOT (which owns the property) **agreed to demap the street** if Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer endorsed the proposal.

Ferrer recently wrote to the State DOT stating that he does not support building the interim truck route. According to staff, he is considering the transfer of the street to Parks. Unfortunately, Congressman Jose Serrano, who secured funding for the truck road, has also not yet decided to kill the truck project.

### **Holt, Torricelli, Slater to Whitman: Strengthen NJ Truck Ban**

Last Monday at a press conference in Flemington, New Jersey Democratic Congressman Rush Holt and Senator Robert Torricelli urged Governor Whitman to apply the terms of her 1999 ban on 102-inch trucks from local roads to 96-inch trucks as well. **U.S. Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater** was there to offer a Federal imprimatur, reaffirming the Governor's authority to institute and extend the ban. The three were joined by State Senator William Schluter (R-Hunterdon) and a bipartisan group of municipal officials.

Rep. Holt and Senator Torricelli released a joint letter to Governor Whitman asking her to "take this opportunity to increase the safety of the drivers, passengers, and residents" by expanding the regulations and giving local police a greater enforcement role. The letter argued that restricting 96-inch trucks could significantly reduce truck traffic, citing 1997 Census Bureau statistics that 45% of the nation's tractor trailers are that size, while 41% are 102-inches wide. Congressman Holt is in a tight race this year to hold his 12th District seat. His challenger, Republican **Dick Zimmer** told the *Star-Ledger* through a spokesman that he too strongly **supports expanding the ban** to 96-inch trucks.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign applauds these efforts, but maintains the most effective way to rid communities of all but necessary truck traffic is to legislate and enforce the dictate that all trucks enter the National Network of truck routes as soon as possible. NJ's restrictions against trucks on smaller highways now applies only to trucks beginning and ending their trips in other states. A 1993 "commodity flow survey" concluded that only 30% of the ton-miles transported via NJ roads and highways were simply driven through. Of the remaining, 24% were shipped within the state and 46% had either a NJ origin or destination.

The Whitman administration has told reporters and the Campaign that it has not ruled out any of these measures. However, no changes beyond the amendments currently under public review will be considered until after the suit brought by the American Trucking Association is settled (MTR #282). Currently, the court expects to hear the case in mid-November.

### **Symposium Spotlights Sheridan-to-Park Plan**

Proposals to convert the Sheridan Expressway and Edgewater Road to river-front open space were centerpieces of an international **brownfields conference** sponsored by the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development and the Municipal Arts Society this week.



A representative of the Bronx Borough President said the Sheridan was necessary to keep trucks off local streets. His remark seemed oblivious to a report released last month by the State DOT that looked at the demapping the Sheridan. The State DOT reported that of the 3,700 trucks that use the Sheridan daily, 81% would use other highways instead of the Sheridan. Overall there would be no new truck VMT in the Bronx and that only 276 new truck miles/daily would be on local streets — a less than 5% increase over the current conditions. Fred Kent of Project for Public Spaces concluded the session by stating that the greening plans around the Bronx River were excellent planning models and that the Sheridan Expressway was a "silly highway."

A display on the Bronx River **highlighting the Sheridan's removal** is at the Municipal Art Society on the second floor until November 25th. The hours are 11-5 Mon.-Sat., call 212-935-3960 for more information.

### **NY State DOT Proceeds With Elevated Highway Plan**

Also this week, the State DOT released its final "expanded project proposal" for the northern interchange between the Sheridan, the Cross



Bronx Expressway and the Bronx River Parkway (the project proposal precedes environmental review for NYSDOT projects). In addition to the "no build" and system management options, the State lists eleven possible ways to rebuild the interchange. Eight of these **build an elevated roadway along 177th Street** — a street with two apartment buildings and a number of houses. Two other options build the viaduct a few hundred feet to the south of the 177th Street, over an MTA Bus Depot. The average cost of the build options is \$174 million.

The project proposal quotes community groups and elected officials who requested that **the Sheridan's removal** be one of the options studied. However, the tear-down option did not appear. The State DOT has stated that the environmental review of this project will be combined with that for the Bruckner-Sheridan Expressway but no start date has been given.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign on the World Wide Web

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

## Millstone Bypass Environmental Assessment Found Wanting

For opponents of the Millstone Bypass, the fact that it is now called “Relocated County Route 571” in the environmental assessment released by the NJ Dept. of Transportation last week has not erased any of its profound flaws. The proposed 2.3 mile four-lane elevated highway with full shoulders would parallel the Millstone River through West Windsor Township from Washington Road to Harrison Street in Princeton, joining Route 1 near the historic Delaware and Raritan Canal.

Although the document concludes that the bypass would “avoid or minimize environmental harm,” critics cannot imagine a more environmentally disruptive path through the scenic region. The document leaves much to be desired, particularly regarding its narrow definition of **the need for the project**, its assessment of the ability of alternatives to reduce travel demand, its discussion of compliance with NJ’s State Plan and regional and local plans, and its consideration of less environmentally destructive improvement alternatives.

In fact, data in the study shows the highway will do little in the short or longer term to “maintain or improve” traffic flow on U.S. Route 1 in the project area. The Bypass ostensibly will allow the removal of three traffic signals on Route 1 now causing back-ups. However, the same motorists now trying to cross Route 1 at the to-be-removed lights will still be stalled by the additional three lights DOT plans to add along the Bypass.

More dramatically, the “Traffic Analysis Findings” clearly state that the \$50 million elevated highway will **not improve traffic conditions** at all after it is built. Quoting from the assessment: “The Levels of Service for Build and No-Build conditions along Route 1 are equivalent LOS ‘E’ (in 2022). However, when reviewing the vehicle throughputs of the Build and the No-Build conditions, the Build condition has **approximately 35% more vehicle throughput.**”

In other words, the DOT predicts that the Millstone Bypass **will not improve traffic speed**, but will instead would draw 35% more cars and trucks into the small stretch of U.S. Route 1 and County Road 571 — commonly known as Penns Neck — twenty years after its construction. In what could be a “first” for NJDOT, the assessment candidly admits: “With the traffic signals removed, the capacity increase that is provided by removing the restraints is quickly utilized by the latent traffic demand,” i.e. the bypass will fill with new traffic.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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## Court Upholds AirTrain Funding

Last week, a federal court in Manhattan ruled in favor of the Port Authority and Federal Aviation Administration in a pair lawsuits challenging the funding for the **Jamaica-JFK AirTrain project**. The suit was brought by the Committee for Better Transit, Queens community groups and several City Council members. The *Daily News* recounted the court’s decision on the environmental impact statement for AirTrain: “[it] adequately set forth the possible environmental consequences of the light rail system,” and found FAA’s interpretation of the “passenger facility charge” statute that allows the PA to **use air fare surcharges** to pay for the transit project “reasonable and consistent.” An attorney for the plaintiffs said it was unclear whether they would appeal the decision. Courts rarely stop big construction projects that are well underway. Most of the columns that will hold the elevated rail line above the Van Wyck Expressway are completed. Construction along the route has led to numerous complaints about noise, damage to buildings and traffic impacts.

### CALENDAR

**October 24, 6-8pm** Auto-Free NY: “Pedestrian Planning for Lower Manhattan,” Michael O’Connor, Senior V.P. for Downtown NY, Inc., 104 Washington St., Manhattan, 212-475-3394

**Oct. 25, 4-8pm** Public workshop on NJ DOT proposal to widen NJ Rte 15. Meeting House, Old Lafayette Village (Rtes 15 and 94). 609-530-5329.

**Oct. 26, Noon** NYC Transit Riders Council meeting, w/ Millard Seay, NYCT Division of Buses. 347 Madison Av., 5th fl. [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org) 212-878-7087.

**October 26 7:30pm**, Regional Planning Partnership Smart Talk Seminar Series, “Governance: Making Growth Happen the Way We Want”, Panel discussion w/ U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (invited) and challenger Dick Zimmer (confirmed), McDonnell Hall, Princeton Univ., \$. [Rpp2050@aol.com](mailto:Rpp2050@aol.com).

**October 28**, Thunderhead Alliance Northeast Region Bicycle Advocate’s Training Day hosted by the Connecticut Bicycle Coalition, Hartford, CT. [www.thunderheadalliance.org](http://www.thunderheadalliance.org)

**November 1, 8-10am** Regional Business Partnership symposium on “Managing the Growth of Global Trade in the Newark Region.” NJTPA, 1 Newark Center, 17th floor. RSVP 973-242-4203.

**November 2, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum luncheon: “Consensus Building for Enhanced Rail Freight Volumes East-of-Hudson.” William Galligan. 100 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-435-4086, [pgessner@panynj.gov](mailto:pgessner@panynj.gov)

**Additional calendar listings at [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)**