

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Smooth Transition for the Port Authority

The Port Authority of NY & NJ successfully transitioned last week to a new toll and fare structure. Headlines were widely positive: "**Commuters fare well under costlier ride**," *Star Ledger*; "Tolls rise at crossings and traffic flows smoothly," *Bergen Record*; "Drivers Pay New Tolls the E-Z Way," *NY Post*; "Grumbling, but still moving under new rush-hour tolls," *NY Times*.

Numbers collected during Monday morning's rush hour suggest that **auto commuters are likely to respond to E-ZPass discounts and lower off-peak tolls**. The percentage of drivers paying electronically on all PA facilities between 5am-10am increased modestly compared to the previous Monday. But the PA reported a 5.5% increase in traffic and a 10.7% increase in E-ZPass usage between 5-6am over March 19th, a possible sign of drivers shifting to off-peak travel. The *Courier News* reported that the Federal Highway Administration will work with the Port Authority to monitor and report on the effect of variable tolls.

PATH riders also **embraced the multi-ride fare-card discounts**. The Port Authority reported the percentage of rail commuters paying with the swipe-card between 6-9am increased from 58% on March 19th to 70% on March 26th.

### Variable Cordon Pricing for Manhattan?

The advent of time-sensitive tolls on the PA's Hudson River crossings could be seen as a **first step towards a variable cordon pricing program** for Manhattan. Since 1998, Singapore has operated an extensive electronic cordon pricing system that has substantially reduced auto travel into its dense center city.

Tolls ranging throughout the day from roughly 25¢ to \$1.50 (US) are collected via non-stop overhead gantries at thirty-four points of access to a roughly 3 square mile central "restricted zone," as well as at various other points along four expressways into the center city. According to *The Straits Times*, two months after the toll cordon began **traffic into the restricted zone dropped by 20-24%** during the weekday from an average of 271,000 vehicles per day to a low of 206,000.

There are obvious barriers to applying the model to Manhattan. Besides MTA reluctance to bringing variable pricing to their bridges and tunnels, the East River and Harlem River Bridges remain untolled. Pricing either set of bridges is unthinkable without using non-stop toll technology, still absent from NYC toll facilities.

### DiFrancesco Affirms NJ Fix-It-First Policy — Pledges NJ DOT Will Carry it Out —

Speaking recently to an audience of environmentalists, Acting Governor and candidate Donald DiFrancesco identified himself with the road and bridge repair directives for the NJ Dept. of Transportation in last year's Transportation Trust Fund renewal law (MTR #277).

NJ DOT long-term planning and budget documents released last month described the repair goals as "out of reach," while allocating \$1 billion to categories associated with lane additions and bypasses between FY 2002-2004 (MTR #305). The law requires the DOT to reduce the back-log of structurally deficient bridge and pavement repair projects by half within the next five years. For FY2002, NJ DOT has assigned only \$22 million from the Transportation Trust Fund towards bridge preservation projects, while over \$60 million will go for new or widened highways.

In a speech to the NJ Environmental Federation's annual conference, DiFrancesco said that **he would see that NJDOT meets the legislative mandates**. In a hand-out accompanying his presentation, DiFrancesco listed his role in inserting the popular bridge and road repair amendment into the Transportation Reauthorization Act as a prominent environmental achievement. DiFrancesco was State Senate President during the Trust Fund reauthorization. The handout describes the repair mandate as "a key provision of transportation investment that emphasizes repairs over new construction."

Appropriations Committee Hearings on the NJ DOT FY 2002 budget are scheduled for April 18th and 19th in the Senate and Assembly, respectively. **Many legislators support the repair goals** and are likely to object to the DOT budget for its lack of compliance. As Acting Governor, DiFrancesco can follow through on his promise and steer the DOT clear of budget and road program confrontations during the hearings by immediately ordering a rewrite of the agency's annual budget and capital investment strategy.

### Opinion-Makers Spotlight NYC's Transit Woes

New York City's three major dailies all called attention to pressing large-scale problems with the city's transportation systems last week, helping to set the stage for the administration that will succeed Mayor Giuliani's next year, and possibly framing part of the 2002 NY State gubernatorial debate as well.

- The *NY Times* offered brief comment, stating in a

Monday editorial that, after education, “**transportation probably ranks second...in presenting multiple challenges to the next mayor.** He will need to confront mass transit debt, get a fairer shake from the MTA and complete the Second Avenue subway.”

• The *NY Post* declared in a NYC “**transportation crisis,**” comparing burgeoning traffic and transit use to a 50-year dearth in completion of major transportation projects. A *Post* survey of transportation policy observers yielded a familiar list of big-ticket projects many think must proceed — linking the Long Island Railroad to Grand Central, a cross-harbor freight tunnel, a LaGuardia rail link, the Gowanus tunnel and a subway link to Co-op City. In the article, NYC transportation commissioner Iris Weinshall made a puzzling comment on the Gowanus tunnel, stating that its construction could lead to significant disruption in west Brooklyn neighborhoods. However, one of many appealing features of the tunnel plan is that it would result in minimal construction-related traffic diversion and construction impacts than rebuilding the elevated Gowanus in place, as the NY State DOT has long advocated.

MTA Chair Peter Kalikow again tried to direct attention away from Albany, saying building the Second Avenue subway is a matter of federal funding,

• The crusading *Daily News* issued a special series of articles on the terrible crowding on NYC Transit subways. The series translated the severe crowding many thousands of riders face daily into a week’s worth of news stories and features. The *News*’ inaugural piece

### **Downstate Regional Meeting Spotlights Transport-Land Use Planning Initiatives**

The NY Metropolitan Transportation Council’s annual meeting in Manhattan last Thursday had a refreshingly substantive program. The program focused on the “**sustainable development**” studies that NYMTC staff, the NY State DOT and Hudson Valley towns and counties have developed to resolve conflicts over road expansion proposals and seemingly intractable traffic problems (*MTR* #'s 267, 284 and 306). State Transportation Commissioner Joseph Boardman said the DOT’s involvement in the studies was a big contribution by the agency to fulfilling Governor Pataki’s “Quality Communities” smart growth agenda.

Presentations by the supervisors of Orangetown, Yorktown and Southold (Thom Kleiner, Linda Cooper and Jean Cochran) made clear that the NY suburbs are seeking a way out of the **cycle of more traffic, more roads and still more traffic.** The study along Route 303 in Orangetown is set to conclude this May — follow-up by the town to change zoning along the route, and by DOT to develop a corresponding road plan will show whether the “sustainable development study” approach can be effective.

The attention the studies received at the NYMTC meeting and from Commissioner Boardman seems to augur well for the start-up of more such projects.

laid out the rider growth that is creating the squeeze — **4.5 million passengers ride the rails** each weekday, “more than the population of any other city in the nation. Since 1991, annual ridership is up 385 million, a whopping 39%.” Ridership increased each year during the 1990s, but has been especially pronounced since discount fare policies began to take effect in 1997. Since 1998, rush-hour subway use is up 11%, weekday off-peak use jumped 17.5% and weekend riding is up 19.5%.

Still, a NYC Transit spokesperson told the *News* that the system is not in crisis, and cited subway car purchases, station work, the new Queens Boulevard connector and MTA Chair Peter Kalikow’s support for building the Second Avenue subway as evidence transit authorities are moving to address the problem.

Transit advocates want the MTA to order additional cars, delay the retirement of some that are still working well and **try to speed up delivery of cars on order** that will not hit the rails for several more years. The Straphangers Campaign and others have urged **more trains during “shoulder” and off-peak periods,** and better standards for passenger space in trains and for rush-hour service frequency.

MTA Chair Peter Kalikow told reporters last week he would visit Kawasaki and Bombardier plants to press manufacturers’ and ensure that delays in delivering new subway cars do not become more prolonged.

### **Green, Vallone On Board for More Service**

The *News*’ series prompted action by two candidates for mayor. City Council speaker Peter Vallone called for City Council hearings on subway crowding, while Public Advocate Mark Green released a Subway Bill of Rights that he urged the MTA and Governor Pataki to adopt. Green told the *News* that the “**last great quality of life issue in the city right now is...extremely overcrowded subways.**” “With more ridership comes more responsibility for the MTA,” Green wrote to the Governor and MTA Chair Peter Kalikow.

Green’s provisions included four-minute rush hour service on all lines, a bigger subway car fleet, more off-hour service, cleaner stations and trains and better announcements and public information about service.

### **Subway Re-route Fight Knocks at Speaker’s Door**

The series of running battles that have erupted across Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan following announcement of NYC Transit service change plans due to the new Queens Boulevard connector and Manhattan Bridge reconstruction has engulfed Chinatown in recent weeks. Rerouting of the B, D and Q subway lines due to Manhattan Bridge work **would leave the Grand Street station with only a one-stop shuttle train** for about four years, beginning this July. Often fractious neighborhood groups have united to demand better treatment by NYC Transit.

In an excellent column Thursday, *Newsday* subway columnist Ray Sanchez said the issue was really up to NY State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, whose district encompasses the station. Though Silver has gotten transit planners to promise a shuttle bus from Grand St. to the Canal St. subway station, the community is still dissatisfied. It wants shuttle service from Grand St. to provide access to more lines. Sanchez wrote that “When the dust settles in the battle over the Grand Street station, **Silver will emerge as either the hero or the villain.**”

### Transport Policies to Enhance CT Communities

In March, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and CT Fund for the Environment released “**Transportation Choices for Connecticut,**” a paper contributing to the debate over state transportation policy reform.

In addition to its highway and mass transit recommendations, the paper points out that many potential “payoffs” of transportation change are travel choices, policies and infrastructure that **work better for Connecticut communities.** A variety of its recommendations call for new, locally-focused programs and planning that would help bring transportation policy into line with heightened interest in smart growth and more functional towns and cities. These recommendations are:

- Significantly **increase state aid to towns for road repair**, which has been held at relatively static levels for over 30 years, to the immense detriment of aging local streets and bridges.
- Develop capacity and planning procedures for **joint ConnDOT-municipal work on land use and transportation** in congested corridors. Relatedly, empower Conn-DOT to enter into road “capacity preservation plans” with municipalities.
- Develop a new local aid program, over and above Town Aid for Roads, that provides **grants to cities and towns specifically for bicycle and pedestrian safety** projects.
- Develop a similar program to encourage municipal planning promoting **transit-oriented development.**
- Update state planning and design guidelines to encourage local implementation of **bike-friendly and traffic calming street designs.**
- Establish a funding program for New Haven Line towns and cities to begin **local transit jitneys** connecting neighborhoods and train stations.

These steps would begin a series of small changes that will add up over time to a more flexible, accommodating transportation system and streetscape, without making a big dent in ConnDOT’s core programs.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

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

### Bridge Re-do Renders Rig Respite

Residents of Manhattan’s Lower East Side report **rare relief from heavy truck impacts** in the neighborhood — including noise and vibrating buildings — thanks to extensive reconstruction work that has diverted freight traffic away from the Williamsburg Bridge. A more rational bridge and tunnel toll policy in NYC would partly alleviate truck traffic patterns that run through very dense residential and commercial areas because of the competition the free East River bridges create for more peripheral MTA toll crossings.

“Too bad [the truck relief] won’t last,” said one Lower East Sider. “**It would be great if they had tolls on East River crossings** because truckers would use the most direct route instead of the cheapest. It’s also too bad that the NYPD doesn’t enforce noise and truck length regulations in NYC. It would be a good source of revenue.”

### Push for Speed Cameras in NYC

Last week, State Senator Frank Padavan and Assembly Member Deborah Glick introduced state legislation that would pilot the use of **automated speed-radar cameras in NYC.** State Senator Marchi and Assembly Members Gottfried, Lavelle, Mayersohn, Millman and Seddio, are co-sponsors of the bill.

This legislation would provide for a three-year program that would allow the City Department of Transportation to pilot 20 automated speed cameras. The speed cameras use technology similar to NYC’s successful red light camera program. Drivers whose speed triggers a radar detector/camera assembly would have their license plates photographed, and would receive citations in the mail with a \$50 fine. There would be no points assessed to a driver’s license.

The legislation follows a report by Transportation Alternatives detailing the success of the cameras at slowing speeds and saving lives. London currently has over 300 speed cameras. According to a paper in the *British Medical Journal*, the program produced a **60% reduction in deaths on the M25**, one of the city’s busiest highway corridors.

The legislation seems to have the support of the City DOT and the Giuliani administration, but still needs a home rule message from the NYC City Council before it can make its way through the Assembly and Senate.

### NJ Assembly Approves Transit Benefit Bill

Legislation that would offer the Federal pre-tax transit benefit to New Jersey’s 76,000 state workers was approved 72-0 by the state Assembly last Monday. Its companion (S1051) **awaits a second reading in the Senate Appropriations Committee** (MTR #295). Neither Senate or Assembly committees will meet through much of April or May while both houses consider the FY2002 annual budget. But quick Senate approval of either the Assembly (A190) or Senate version of the bill is expected by early June.

## NJ Route 29 Truck Ban Now Permanent

Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco signed legislation last Friday that **permanently bans all large trucks from traveling on Route 29** between its junction with Interstate 95 north of Trenton and its northern terminus at Route 12. Backed weeks ago by the Senate, the state Assembly unanimously approved the bill last Monday.

The law makes permanent an emergency ban put into place last November by then Governor Whitman following several high-profile accidents involving trucks on the narrow, winding stretch. The ban applies to all trucks over 13 tons and **is in addition to a state regulation upheld in Federal court** earlier this month that bans large through-traveling trucks from most state and all local roads (MTR #309). Trucks found in violation of the law will face fines of up to \$1,000.

## New Ferries for LI, NJ Commuters to NYC

A new, high-speed commuter ferry will begin service in May from Glen Cove harbor, LI and Manhattan's Pier 11 near Wall Street, Glen Cove Mayor Tom Suozzi told the *Daily News* earlier this month. Operated by Fox Navigation, the 300-seat ferry providing a 45 minute one-way trip **could relieve rush-hour crowding**, particularly on the LIRR Port Washington branch.

NJTransit announced it will build a second ferry terminal in Weehawken adjacent to a planned Hudson-Bergen Light Rail stop, providing **further options for cross-Hudson commuters**. The terminal is planned to open within three years when a 32-year lease and operation contract granted to NY Waterway will begin.

### April Conferences

**April 10,11,&12** Transaction 2001, Tropicana Resort Hotel, Casino and Conference Center, Atlantic City, NJ, \$, 908-903-1077

**April 23** NY Smart Growth Conference, Albany. Program in formation. National Audubon Society of NY, 518-869-9731 or aheaphy@audubon.org

**April 26, 6pm** "Thinking Big Again: How to Implement Large Transportation Projects", multiple speakers, Cooper Union, Wolman Auditorium, 21E, 51 Astor Place, Manhattan, 845-634-7178.

**April 27, 7:30am-1pm** Regional Plan Association Regional Assembly: "Re-Engineering the Region's Centers." Grand Hyatt, Manhattan. 212-253-2727, www.rpa.org

## CALENDAR

**April 5, 10:30am** NYMTC Pedestrian and Bicycle Working Group, Department of City Planning, 2 Lafayette St., 12th Fl. Rm. 1200, Manhattan, Maggie Cusack, 212-938-3319

**April 5, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum, "Ferries Across New York Harbor: Past, Present, and Future", Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St., Manhattan, \$, 212-435-4086

**April 16, 2pm** NJ Transit Board of Directors meeting, Camden, NJ, 973-491-8800

**April 18, 3:30pm** NYC Transit Riders Council annual Bus Forum, Queens Borough Hall, Rm. 213.120-55 Queens Boulevard, 212 878-7087

**April 18, 7:30pm** Monthly meeting of the CT Metro-North/Shore Line East Rail Commuter Council. SACIA, 1 Landmark Square, Stamford. www.trainweb.org/ct, 203-655-0138.

**April 19, 9am** Central Jersey Transportation Forum, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Building 3A.005, 311 Pennington-Rocky Hill Road, Pennington, NJ. Linda Haskins, DVRPC 215-238-2872

**April 19, 6pm** Full Length Second Avenue subway project kick-off/public meeting. MTA/NYC Transit are beginning a supplemental environmental impact statement to extend the earlier 2nd Ave. study. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 5th floor. www.mta.nyc.ny.us 718-694-5164.

**April 24, 6pm** Auto-Free NY meeting. "Using carrots and sticks to cut traffic in NYC." George Haikalis, Inst. for Rational Urban Mobility. 104 Washington St., Manhattan (Rector or Wall St. subways). 212-475-3394.

**May 4, 9am-1pm** Alternative fuels vehicle workshop. City College, West Harlem Environmental Action. Steinman Hall at 140th Street and Convent Ave., Manhattan. 212-961-1000 x304

**May 16, 7pm** Monthly meeting of the CT Metro-North/Shore Line East Rail Commuter Council. ConnDOT, New Haven RR station. www.trainweb.org/ct, 203-655-0138.

**June 7-10** 9th Annual Congress for New Urbanism. New York City. For registration info, 800-788-7077, www.cnu.org

**June 10, 10am-3pm** NY Harbor railroad cruise. Waterfront rail facilities past and present. Narrated by Tom Flagg, author, "NY Harbor RR's in Color." Starts at 42nd St., Manhattan. \$ epcp@worldnet.att.net

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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