

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Second Avenue Subway Takes Shape — MTA Says Digging Could Start in 2004 —

The MTA kicked off its supplemental environmental impact study for the “**full build**” Second Avenue subway last week. For the route south of Houston Street, the agency will study two alignments. One would use existing tunnels and connections under Christie Street to link to J, M & Z train routes in Lower Manhattan. The other would run in a new tunnel under Water Street.

The J, M & Z option has two advantages. First, since it utilizes existing infrastructure, it would be cheaper to build. Second, an eventual **connection to Brooklyn** would be simple to establish along the M’s existing route. On the other hand, the Water Street alignment would provide new stations on the Lower East Side and a connection to the B, D and Q trains.

Both alignments would allow passengers to connect with 53rd Street V & E service, 42nd Street #7, the 14th Street L and the F at Houston Street. Although the trains will be able to switch onto the 63rd Street tracks, allowing for a potential Queens Boulevard-2nd Avenue service, present plans do not include a passenger connection to F service under 63rd Street. Nor do the present plans call for a 59th Street transfer to the N and R.

The MTA said the study would include a look at a **station at 116th Street**. That feature was left out of the EIS on the Upper East Side “stubway” segment of the line, causing protests from elected officials.

Perhaps most striking in the MTA’s presentation was the **aggressive timeline** it offered for the project. Spokespeople said the supplemental EIS and preliminary engineering would be finished by November 2003, with **construction beginning in 2004**. The MTA is considering a “design/build” contract to speed the process.

Elected officials attending the meeting stressed the need to submit a viable project plan during the next big **federal transportation reauthorization**, scheduled for **2003**. They included Members of Congress Carolyn Maloney and Jerrold Nadler and Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields. Although money is available to do the \$20 million environmental and engineering study and the first year of construction, the project is largely unfunded after that.

NJ DOT Takes Heat on Budget Priorities — Flouting Bridge Repair Mandate —

At legislative hearings on its proposed budget and capital program last week, New Jersey Department of Transportation officials fielded tough questions about the agency’s **violation of the Transportation Trust Fund law**. Members of budget and appropriations committees in both houses voiced concerns raised over the past month by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign: namely, that NJ DOT has simply **rejected the law’s bridge and road repair goals out of hand** as “not feasible,” while committing substantial funding to other parts of its internally-determined program. The Congestion Relief and Transportation Trust Fund Renewal Act approved last July directed DOT reduce the state’s backlog of structurally deficient pavement and bridge repair projects by half within five years. In recent months, the Department has claimed it does not have enough money or time to achieve that goal.

In response to questions from legislators, Transportation Commissioner James Weinstein that **only \$22 million** from the state Transportation Trust would be **spent on bridge repair**. In comparison, DOT plans to spend \$66 million of the Trust Fund in FY 2002 and \$360 million from 2002-2004 on new highways and highway widenings. Clearly, far more resources would be available to meet repair needs if DOT chose to make them a priority, as the Legislature and voters have.

Although DOT says \$400 million will be allocated to bridge repair in FY2002, the amount drops off substantially in future years. \$119 million of 2002 bridge money is one-shot funding from the **1999 Bridge Bond** and the remainder are **federal funds**. The DOT capital program commits only \$17 million and \$18 million to bridge repair in fiscal years 2003 and 2004. Both the Bridge Bond funds and federal allocations were known quantities when the TTF law was approved. The intent of the legislature was to **advance bridge and road repair** efforts further than these funds allowed with an additional long-term commitment from the Trust Fund.

Budget committee members pressed DOT to admit that the Trust Fund law directs a reduction by half of the repair project backlog within “at least five years.” In long-term planning documents, the agency misconstrues the requirement as a four year mandate to bolster its resistance to it. Nowhere does DOT spell out any time frame for meeting the goal.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site:

www.tstc.org

DOT has also claimed that it cannot meet bridge repair goals because the law's quantitative goal would force the agency to leave unattended larger bridges that would require more time and cost more money. This is another case of DOT hiding behind **self-generated technicalities**. DOT could clearly meet the law's goals by counting its progress towards reducing the repair backlog in total deck area repaired rather than on a project basis.

Another controversial revelation during hearings was the fact that the 2002 budget would **redirect \$90 million** of Trust Fund money to **New Jersey's general fund**, while the Trust Fund takes on \$30 million more in debt. Transportation Trust Fund law requires all new funds acquired from earmarking further portions of existing gas and sales tax to go the Trust Fund only, in order to reduce transportation debt. Assemblyman Alex DeCroce, head of the Transportation Committee, and Assemblywoman Barbara Buono, member of the Budget Committee told the *Star-Ledger* they would urge the state to return the money. The Campaign believes that this money would be well spent on the early design and planning work needed to launch new bridge and road repair projects. Investing in these preparations would put achievement of the repair goal in sight within the five year time horizon or reasonably soon after.

East End Kicks Off Land Use/Transport Study

NY State DOT and Long Island Railroad officials joined elected leaders from five towns and nine villages to begin the extensive "Sustainable East End Development Study" last Friday. "We are inviting our citizens, community groups, business interests, transportation providers and others to learn about the connections between land use planning and our transportation networks, and to articulate how they want the East End to look and how they want to get around here in the next 25 years," said Shelter Island Supervisor Gerard Siller.

The NY Metropolitan Transportation Council has helped municipalities and agencies establish joint land use/transportation studies in the Hudson Valley (see *MTR* #311). The East End study is the first such effort on Long Island. The range of municipalities involved makes it the largest yet of NY's "sustainable development" studies. The organization several years ago of the **East End Transportation Council**, an arm of the East End Mayor's and Supervisors Association, is permitting the unusual scale of inter-municipal cooperation.

The Campaign has learned that the **Town of Brookhaven** has recently asked NY State DOT and Suffolk County to employ the "sustainable development" approach to resolve debate surrounding plans to widen **NY Route 347** and nearby state routes. So far, the Town has not had any reply to its request.

The East End study is expected to take 18-24 months. The extensive public outreach aspect of the work will begin in late May. For information, contact Suzanne Donovan, East End Transportation Council at 631-477-0300, or Gerry Bogacz at NYMTC, 212-938-3443.

Bus Service Lags Behind Ridership Across NYC — Crowding on Many Routes —

The Straphangers Campaign released data last week showing that on nearly **one-third** of 186 NYC Transit bus routes for which statistics are available, ridership has increased by at least **10% more than service** over the last three years. The largest gap was found on the M60 that operates between West 106th Street in Manhattan and LaGuardia Airport — providing one of the few transit options to LaGuardia — where ridership increased 134.4% from September 1997 to September 2000, but service increased only 83.2%. In other boroughs, the worst offenders are: the B77 between Brooklyn's Park Slope and Red Hook with a 42.8% greater ridership gain than service increase; the Bx33 between Port Morris in the Bronx and Harlem with a difference of 41.6%; the S60 between Grymes Hill and Victory Boulevard with a difference of 37% and the Q2 between Jamaica and Belmont Park with a difference of 22%.

In Manhattan, **five routes** (M8,9,18, 60, and 106) show a **ridership-service growth gap of more than 25%**. Brooklyn (B17,35,70,77) and the Bronx (Bx6,12,18,33) each have four bus lines that show this indicator of dramatic crowding, though SI and Queens have none. Borough-wide and in the system as a whole, the gap between new ridership and service increases was not as dramatic, ranging between .2% for Queens and 7.6% for Brooklyn with a system-wide average lag of 4.6%. This points to the fact that directed increases in service are needed now on the most crowded routes.

Pressure Unabated on Subway Route Changes

NYC Transit was under fire at its board meeting, in City Hall chambers, in the subways, and on the streets last week for two route changes the agency plans to put into effect this summer.

Enraged Chinatown community leaders rallied in front of the MTA headquarters on Madison Avenue during a Thursday NYC Transit board meeting to protest the near-total closure of the Grand Street Station during renovations to the Manhattan Bridge. Later that day, more than 100 Brooklyn and Queens G-train riders gathered at the line's Court Street station to speak out against the permanent cropping of 13 stops of the only line directly connecting the two boroughs. The change is due to the service plan for using the new 63rd St. Tunnel-Queens Boulevard connector (*MTR* #296).

In comments to the NYC Transit board, Chinatown community leaders did not deny rail lines on the Manhattan Bridge must be repaired, but argued for supplementary services so community and area businesses can weather the process likely to take at least four years.

Their requests include expansion of a planned shuttle subway between Broadway-Lafayette and Grand Street north to 34th Street, shuttle buses between Brooklyn's DeKalb St. station and Grand Street and **expanded M-train service** from Brooklyn. The measures have the support of a wide swath of politicians including Con-

gressman Jerold Nadler, Public Advocate Mark Green and City Councilwoman Kathryn Freed. So far, however, NYC Transit has refused to do more than a two-stop shuttle and intra-Chinatown bus service between Canal and Grand Streets.

City Council members from Brooklyn and Queens harshly criticized NYC Transit on G-train cuts at a Thursday public hearing, according to the *Daily News*. **G ridership has increased by 20%** in the past five years due to the revitalization of north Brooklyn neighborhoods like Fort Greene, Williamsburg and Greenpoint. NYC Transit officials pulled approval of the cuts at last month's board meeting and say they are studying the possibility of maintaining current service on the line when Queens-Manhattan V-train service begins.

NY, N.E. Reps Seek Freight Tunnel Earmark

Representatives Jerrold Nadler of NYC and Christopher Shays of western Connecticut are leading the charge to insert a \$15 million earmark for the environmental impact study of the proposed **Cross-Harbor freight rail tunnel**. The major investment study for the project found it could remove up to 1 million trucks per year from crowded regional highways and roads by allowing rail freight to move more cheaply and directly to and from U.S. and Canadian rail lines to New York City, Long Island and southern New England.

In early April, the NYC Economic Development Corp. announced the selection of consultants for the study, projected to cost \$20 million. The companies and sub-contractors chosen — STV Inc., Cambridge Systematics, Allee King Rosen Fleming and Hatch Mott MacDonald — have prepared designs for the Long Island Railroad's East Side Access Project and the English Channel Tunnel. The Federal Railroad Administration and the Federal Highway Administration will be the lead agencies in the study. Once funding is secure, the study is expected to be completed within two years.

Congressman Nadler, a long-time freight tunnel advocate, told the *Daily News* it was essential to complete the tunnel's environmental review study before the omnibus **federal transportation reauthorization in 2003** so that the project is in line for significant federal construction funding. He pledged to meet with the congressional delegations of metro region and southern New England states and said support was growing rapidly for the project. Winning the funding for the study should be a top priority in budget negotiations this year for all of the NY, NJ, and CT delegations in particular.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



MTR#314 Contributing: Chris Hewitt, Lisa Schreiberman Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kristen Fountain Executive Director, Janine Bauer

240 West 35th Street #801, New York, NY 10001 tel. (212) 268-7474 fax (212) 268-7333 tstc@tstc.org

CALENDAR

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

April 24, 8:30am-2pm Gallivan Conference on Real Property Law, "Sprawl and Its Enemies," University of Connecticut School of Law, Starr Hall Main Reading Room, Hartford, CT. For reservations: 860.570.513 or ahoben@law.uconn.edu

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

April 25, 10:30am Freight Transportation Working Group Meeting, NYMTC, One World Trade Center, 82 East, Manhattan, 212-938-3353

April 25, 7-9pm NYC Conservation Challenge Forum, "Solid Waste Saga: Can We Solve the City's Trash Troubles," Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 116th & Broadway, 3rd Floor. 212-361-6350, x.202

April 26, Noon NYC Transit Riders Council monthly meeting, 347 Madison Ave, 5th floor. 212-878-7087.

April 26, 6:30pm Metropolitan Greenways Council meeting. 30 Bay Street, Staten Island. 212-352-9330, lenore@treebranch.com.

April 30, 4-8pm NY State Thruway/MTA open house for Tappan Zee Bridge replacement study. Palisades Mall — Raso Community Room, West Nyack. 518-436-3190.

May 2, 4-8pm NY State Thruway/MTA open house for Tappan Zee Bridge replacement study. SUNY Purchase — Humanities Bldg. 735 Anderson Hill road, Purchase. 518-436-3190

May 3, 7pm. Dan Burden of Walkable Communities presents, "Redesigning Route 25 and our Communities," Longwood Junior High Auditorium, Sponsored by Longwood Alliance and Sustainable Long Island. 631-924-1427

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 4, 1:30-7pm "The Future of Planning in NYC." Panels, Mayoral candidates, more. Planning programs of Columbia U., Hunter College and Pratt Institute. Hunter College Auditorium, 129 E. 79th St. www.nyu.edu/wagner/urban.planning