

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Strong Early Signs for PA Variable Pricing

Last week, the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey released a first-cut analysis of how its new variably priced toll schedule has affected traffic and transit patterns at the agency's Hudson River crossings and PATH. Although preliminary, the data suggests that the Port Authority's substantial discounts (see table) for E-ZPass users, off-peak drivers and over-night truck drivers, and car-pools have already led thousands of travelers to make decisions that reduce traffic congestion.

All Port Authority Facilities				
	Cash	E-ZPass peak	E-ZPass off-peak	E-ZPass Overnight
CARS	\$6	\$5	\$4	n/a
CAR-POOLS	n/a	\$1	\$1	n/a
TRUCKS per axle	\$6	\$6	\$5	\$3.50

Peak hours = Mon-Fri 6-9am, 4-7pm; Sat-Sun 12-8pm
Overnight hours (trucks) = Weekdays midnight - 6am

Comparing one typical day in May 2001 - less than 2 months after the variable pricing program went into effect - with a typical day in May 2000, the Port Authority analysis found that **7% fewer drivers** used the agency's bridges and tunnels **during the morning peak hour period** and that 4% fewer were traveling the crossings during the afternoon peak hours. These declines amount to 5,150 fewer vehicles in the morning's most congested hours and 2,500 fewer during the early evening rush. (The Port Authority believes it is more accurate to compare two un-extraordinary days than to average counts over days on which severe weather, holidays, or sporting events may have skewed traffic patterns.)

Significantly, the shift of traffic out of the peak hours was accompanied by **an increase in off-peak travel**, as well as by increased car-pooling and transit use. The same May-to-May analysis found that 7% more vehicles (+ 2,150) used Port Authority facilities between midnight and 6am in 2001, with roughly half of the total vehicle increase occurring between 5-6am. The agency also said there were "significant" gains in traffic between 3-4pm and that 3,350 more trips were

made during the off-peak hours, 9am-3pm.

Also, 7% fewer trucks (-450) are traveling Port Authority crossings during the morning peak, while 4% more (+270) are traveling during the overnight hours of midnight to 6am. The shift out of the afternoon peak hours, at 50 trucks, is less significant.

At the same time, the agency reports that the number of transactions from E-ZPass carpools (3 or more people) increased by 21% between September 2000 and May 2001 to a running total of 92,200 since paper carpool tickets were phased out last June. While likely supported by peak toll increases, this rapid increase must also be explained by the fact that the Port Authority also began discounting carpools 24 hours a day, rather than just during the rush hours.

Combined April and May PATH ridership is also up 3% over the same months last year, matching transit growth nationwide (MTR #316).

Equally important are the results of the E-ZPass discount. As of the end of May, 24-hour E-ZPass usage at all Port Authority facilities has increased to 65% from 52% in May last year. 5% of this increase has occurred since January. Among truckers, E-ZPass use increased to 60% from 51% last year.

All of the above numbers prompted the generally skeptical *Staten Island Advance* editorial page to remark on Friday, "**It appears the Port Authority knew exactly what it was doing** when it pushed for the congestion-pricing scheme." E-ZPass usage on the Outerbridge Crossing has increased from 67% to 81% during the morning rush hour since late March. Ken Philmus, PA Director of Tunnels and Bridges told the *Advance* that because of the large gains, the Outerbridge Crossing and the George Washington Bridge Palisades Parkway toll plazas will be the first to receive non-stop high-speed toll facilities.

NJ Legislature Fails Fix-It-First

During late night sessions last Thursday, the New Jersey Senate and Assembly approved a 2002 budget and capital program that holds capital spending on road and bridge repair to levels proposed by the NJ Department of Transportation. The DOT has called the "fix-it-first" mandate in the 2000 Transportation Trust Fund Renewal Law — to reduce the backlog of

the bridge and pavement repair projects by half within five years —“not feasible.” Advocates argue that repair goals are reachable if departmental spending priorities change to emphasize repair as directed by the new law. The \$22 million allocated from the Trust Fund for bridge repair **will reduce spending by more than half** over last year’s budget, prepared before the Trust Fund law went into effect.

Votes on the budget bill were split mainly along party lines, with substantial Republican padded approval margins in both houses. Among the main topics of contention of dissenting Democrats during debate were fiscal mismanagement, mounting debt, and the budget’s betrayal of the Transportation Trust Fund Law. Calling the budget a **“fix-it-last” bill**, Senator Nicholas Sacco (D - North Bergen) said that NJ roads and bridges were failing and the budget would “keep them this way.”

Transportation advocates agree that the **repair spending goals will be dangerously under funded** in 2002. The Tri-State Transportation Campaign and four environmental, civic, cycling, and taxpayer groups are pursuing a lawsuit in court that seeks DOT compliance with various points of the Transportation Trust Fund Law (MTR #320). A hearing for the case is scheduled for late July.

NJ DOT Rethinks Committee Ban

The New Jersey Department of Transportation has reconsidered its ejection of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign from eight citizen advisory committees and groups after reports in the *Asbury Park Press*, *Courier News* and *New York Times* focused public attention to the action. However, the Campaign is **still banned from speaking directly to DOT staff** and must make all information requests through DOT counsel, an order that affects day-to-day functioning at the watchdog group. Lawyers for the DOT had issued the order in response to a lawsuit filed by the Campaign and other groups that argues the Department is in violation of the Transportation Trust Fund Renewal Law.

Many observers found the DOT response to the lawsuit extreme. Curtis Fischer, Executive Director of New Jersey Public Interest Research Group, a party in the lawsuit not subject to the order, told the *Courier News*, “We’ve been involved in litigation for over 25 years and **never had something like this done to us by the state**. When you file litigation, there are rules, but to say you can’t have a conversation on any matter is ridiculous.”

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign on-line:

www.tstc.org

Manhattan Bridge Path Opens

The refurbished southern Manhattan Bridge path officially re-opened to pedestrian and cyclist traffic last Monday morning for the first time since the 1960’s. The new crossing is expected to **relieve crowding on the Brooklyn Bridge path** and offer a more direct cycling route between downtown Brooklyn and midtown Manhattan.

The path’s current narrow 5-ft. lanes and access via stairs in Brooklyn is temporary. The reconstruction of the Bridge’s northern side that will begin this summer will include a wider path designed for cyclists with ramps on both ends. Pedestrians will have full use of the southern path once that project is completed, anticipated by 2004. In the interim, Transportation Alternatives is advocating for a **fully ramped interim path** to accommodate wheelchairs and cyclists not able to lift their bikes up the stairs.



Flanked by Transportation Alternatives reps, NYC DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall inaugurated the Manhattan Bridge path during Bike Week.

Hartford Region Policy Aids Walkers, Cyclists

At a committee meeting last week, the Capital Region Council of Governments approved a policy to give funding priority to municipal road construction or reconstruction projects that accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians. Connecticut’s regional planning bodies make annual recommendations to the state Department of Transportation regarding which municipal road and transit projects should be first in line to receive state and federal funding. The new policy will add substantial points in the agency’s calculus to **projects that include bicycle paths, sidewalks, or traffic calming** infrastructure.

“The intention is basically to get the region and state thinking more about bikes and pedestrians as they go through their design processes,” Thomas Maziarz, director of transportation planning for the Capital Region COG told the *Hartford Courant*.

COG reps also said that if Conn DOT does not respect their new policy in its allocation of funds, they will likely approve an even firmer recommendation or requirement.

The CT Bicycle Coalition strongly supports approval of the measure and says it will be approaching the state's fifteen other council of governments and regional planning bodies to do the same.

NY/NJ Port Business Grows, Facilities Expand

The Port Authority of NY & NJ announced last month that port imports and exports continued to grow during the first quarter of 2001, in spite of a nationwide economic downturn. The Ports of Newark, Elizabeth, Howland Hook, and Brooklyn experienced **an increase of 14% in standard container exports** and an increase of 6.3% in imports this quarter over the first quarter last year. These increases build on gains in 2000 when standardized container volumes grew 6% over 1999 and total general cargo increased 12% (MTR #309). The Port Authority's steady, rapid growth gives backing to the agency's oft-cited projections that **container traffic will quadruple or quintuple** in the next 20 years.

Simultaneously, the Port Authority (see next article) and other entities are taking steps to meet the expanded business, some of which have the potential to reduce port dependence on trucking.

The New York City Economic Development Corporation recently announced selection of the engineering firm, Moffat & Nichol to complete final construction design for **waterfront rail freight facilities** at Brooklyn's South Brooklyn Marine Terminal and the Red Hook Container Terminal. The NYC EDC has also delivered two new cranes to the Red Hook Terminal and plans to revamp two of the four existing cranes as well as to expand warehousing facilities. Sal Catucci of American Stevedoring told the *Daily News* that the new cranes and other improvements should allow the Red Hook Terminal to handle double its current through-put of 65,000 containers annually.

The *Journal of Commerce* reported recently that the City of Bayonne will acquire ownership of the Military Ocean Terminal at Bayonne from the US Army for no charge on September 30th. Instead of leasing or selling the property to the Port Authority, Bayonne plans to sell and lease MOTBY's 430 acres to private companies. However, 160 acres of the compound will be set aside for a new commercial container terminal. Nicholas Chiaravalloti, director of the Bayonne Redevelopment Authority told the *JOC*, "We'd like to see a modern, high-tech facility that would **include the use of rail to move containers quickly off the site.**"

PA, Elizabeth, Union County Resolve Dispute, Major Hurdle Crossed for NY-NJ Freight Rail

On June 1st, the Port Authority of NY & NJ and the City of Elizabeth, NJ signed an agreement settling long-held land and revenue disputes seen as a major stumbling block to negotiations over land needed for the Port Authority's planned construction of a rail-link between the Staten Island Railroad and the north-south running Chemical Coastline.

With the backing of top Union County administrators and Freeholders, Elizabeth Mayor Christopher Bollwage agreed to the fifty year lease of 10 acres near the New Jersey Turnpike's Exit 13A to the Port Authority for use as a 1200 space parking lot and to allow the agency to build a rail overpass for its on-dock ExpressRail service. In exchange, the PA will increase its annual contribution to the city's development fund and will conduct a feasibility study for Newark Airport extension of the proposed Union County Light Rail. Although the SIRR link project was not explicitly part of the agreement, the resolution of these issues is expected to facilitate future discussions and bodes well for a favorable outcome.

The SIRR link would **allow rail access to the PA's busy Howland Hook Marine Terminal**, now served exclusively by trucks. Transportation reformers and Staten Island community groups and politicians believe that aggressive use of the link will cut truck traffic on the Goethals Bridge. The NYC Economic Development Corporation completed an \$11 million restoration of Staten Island's SIRR track and the Arthur Kill Lift Bridge to New Jersey in 1998 and is currently investing in inter-modal upgrades at the Island's Arlington Railyard. However, the lack of serviceable track from the Bridge to a mainland rail line remains a central obstacle.

Howland Hook now sees approximately 20% of the Port Authority's freight traffic. A fraction of this cargo is currently hauled by truck over the Goethals Bridge to the PA's on-dock ExpressRail facility for long-distance transport. This traffic is expected to switch to exclusive use of rail via the SIRR. Further modal shift should occur with the development of service to middle-distance markets like Buffalo, NY. Chris Ragucci, former manager of Howland Hook, told the *SI Advance* in March that the PA's recent purchase of the adjacent Port Ivory site and the track and railyard refurbishment **should allow a 20% shift to rail transport** after mainland rail links are completed. Other likely users of the revamped SIRR are the Pratt/VISY recycling plant located on a spur and freight bound for NYC and Long Island markets that can be transferred to trucks at Arlington Yards.

The Port Authority project is seen as a preferable

alternative to the less expensive repair of existing SIRR tracks to Cranford Junction for two reasons. The Chemical Coastline route would direct trains through a primarily industrial area of Union County, **reducing unpopular residential grade crossings**, and would allow more efficient passage of double-stacked containers.

The Port Authority's Chemical Coastline cloverleaf is estimated to cost \$85 million and to require roughly 5 years per link to complete. \$35 million is earmarked for construction of the northbound link in the agency's 2000-2005 capital plan, as well as \$5 million for design and planning for the southbound link. SIRR service can begin with the completion of the first link expected by 2005. Negotiations for land are likely to begin after the PA completes engineering and design work to determine the agency's preferred alignment for the northbound connector.

MTR Wins APA Award

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is proud to receive the **American Planning Association New York Metro Area 2001 journalism award** for its weekly newsletter, *Mobilizing the Region*. The Metro area chapter encompasses New York City, Long Island, and the Hudson Valley.

The APA chapter Spring newsletter announcing the award reads, "For almost a decade, the Tri-State Campaign has been an observer and analyst of the current state of transportation in the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut region....As a result of topics reported in [MTR], bigger **newspapers have given the topics more coverage** and have encouraged reassessment and reform on a number of matters."

Other APA Metro chapter award winners last week were Tri-State board members Regional Plan Association (Jeff Zupan - Distinguished Service Award) and Scenic Hudson (Lawrence Orton Award for Leadership in City and Regional Planning).

Job Announcement

Sustainable transportation policy advocate based in Jericho, Long Island

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign seeks a well-organized individual with college and graduate degree to represent the Campaign in public forums, to build alliances with community groups and government, to research issues and draft correspondence, reports, and articles. Good writing, public speaking, and computer skills required. Experience in advocacy, media relations, organizing, knowledge of local/state politics and planning issues are a plus.

Full benefits package; \$35,000 salary, depending on experience. Visit www.tstc.org/about/jobs.html for more information.

Fulton Fish Market Study Draws Civic Ire

The NYC Economic Development Corporation held hearings on its DEIS for moving the Fulton Fish Market from its lower Manhattan site to Hunts Point in the middle of June. Citizen groups, who turned out nearly 100 people to the hearing, were upset that the EDC did not include **improved truck routing** in the peninsula or a **greenway link** around the periphery of the market in the DEIS .

During the scoping process, community organizations requested a direct connection from the Bruckner Expressway to Leggett Avenue so that trucks would stop using local streets to move between the expressway and the Market. They also asked for an easement on the water side of the property that would provide a bicycle and pedestrian path from the Bruckner Expressway to Port Morris.

At the DEIS meeting, a spokesperson for EDC said that the transportation concerns of community groups would be put in an EIS supplement. However, those in attendance felt that was inadequate and **requested a new DEIS**. The EDC must receive permits from both the New York DEC and the Army Corp of Engineers to proceed with their plan.

Mobilizing the Region will not be published next week, July 9th. Look for MTR #325 July 16th

CALENDAR

July 11, 11am NYMTC Meeting on Draft Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), NYMTC Conference Rm., One World Trade Center, 82nd Fl, Manhattan, ?'s 718-482-4559

July 12, 8:15am South Western Region MPO monthly meeting, SWRPA, 888 Washington Blvd., 3rd Fl., Stamford, CT, ? 203-316-5190

July 24, 6-8pm Auto-Free NY meeting, "Unclogging New York - the role of transportation in the Mayoral Race," Steve Weber, Regional Plan Association. 104 Washington St. (near Rector St.), Manhattan. 212-475-3394.

[See additional calendar items at www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

West Shore Rail DEIS "scoping hearings.

All meetings 3-5am; 6-9pm

July 10, Cross County Line; Bergen County Freeholder's Room, 5th Floor, 1 Bergen Plaza, Hackensack, NJ

July 11, Northern Branch, John Harms Arts Center, 30 North Van Brunt Street, Englewood, NJ

July 12, West Shore Line, Orangetown Town Hall, 26 Orangeburg Road, Orangeburg, NY

July 17, Cross County Line, Passaic County Freeholder's Room, Room 223, 401 Grand Street, Paterson, NJ

July 18, West Shore Line, Teaneck Recreation Center, 250 Colonial Court, Teaneck, NJ

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