

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

State of the Subways, 2001

The Straphangers Campaign released its annual ratings of NYC subway lines last week. The upshot: several **key service measures have improved**, but crowding remains the system's #1 problem.

In recent years, Straphangers' State of the Subways reports have tracked six measures of service, based on NYC Transit data. A formula's yardsticks — the amount of scheduled service and the regularity of train arrivals; mechanical failures of subway cars; the chance of getting a seat; car cleanliness; and the adequacy of announcements — to produce an overall rating for each major line (see chart). This year, system-wide data showed **fewer breakdowns, more regular service, and cleaner cars.**

In this year's line by line comparison, the big story is the end of the #7 line's four-year tenure atop the charts. In the cellar, the C train displaced the #5 for lowest honors.

NYC Transit Issues Standard Denunciation

Despite the good news aspects of the report, NYC Transit spokespersons told reporters: "We don't believe these reports have any credibility." Transit officials appear to have an "F13" computer console key that automatically spits out **denials and refutations** to any public comment by the Straphangers Campaign.

Newsday said the credibility problem was in the **other direction**, stating "NYC Transit still speaks with all the candor of the old Soviet Politburo."

Find the report on-line: www.straphangers.org

Straphangers Campaign Subway Line Ratings		
	2000	2001
Q	\$1.00	\$1.25
D	85¢	\$1.20
7	\$1.05	95¢
1/9	75¢	95¢
3	80¢	90¢
N	70¢	90¢
B	75¢	85¢
L	75¢	85¢
6	75¢	85¢
4	85¢	85¢
M	85¢	85¢
1/2	95¢	85¢
F	75¢	80¢
R	75¢	80¢
E	75¢	80¢
A	75¢	80¢
2	65¢	70¢
5	60¢	70¢
C	65¢	65¢

Bloomberg Pledges to Ride Transit, Attack Congestion

Republican candidate for NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg released a plan for "untangling traffic" last week. The 8-page document makes reference to the **Unclogging NY plan** issued by business, labor, and environmental groups earlier this summer (MTR #321). In it, Bloomberg pledges to implement several policies long-sought by city **pedestrian advocates**, and to cut back on the **privileged parking** now enjoyed by city workers, state federal employees, diplomats and several other groups, many of whom work in transit-rich areas.

He also said he would fight for more frequent subway service and implement **new bus lanes**, including some form of dedicated busway on Manhattan's **First and Second Avenues**, pending construction of a Second Ave. subway.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the plan's release was the widespread press attention Bloomberg received for pledging to **use mass transit or taxis** at least once a day during his administration. It appears to indicate that editors and reporters at least are refreshed by a candidate proposing to attack an aspect of the problem of political leaders experiencing daily life very differently than do most of their constituents. Transportation policy making in New York has long suffered from the **limousine perspective** of top elected and appointed officials, including mass transit executives (in London, Mayor Ken Livingstone abolished company cars for London Transport officials last year). By our count, Mayor Giuliani has been on the subway fewer than five times during the past 8 years, and he has violently berated reporters who published reports of his official SUV significantly exceeding speed limits on highways around the city. During this campaign season, Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer has lamented the existence of MTA bridge and tunnel tolls. He says people should be able to travel "for free" within the city, seemingly oblivious to the fact that most people travel within NYC on **buses and subways**, for which they pay fares.

Since 1989, Transportation Alternatives and the Straphangers Campaign have issued "car potato" challenges urging city leaders to use transit and occasionally forego use of official cars. The efforts

have not met much success, but Bloomberg's pledge seems to have struck a chord in the city that other candidates should heed.

Other specifics of Bloomberg's plan are:

- Pedestrian-only phases at major intersections;
- More red light cameras, a new photo radar program and other speed enforcement and signs to slow speeding traffic and increase motorist awareness of pedestrians;
- Expanded congestion pricing for trucks, and a wider parking pricing program;
- Shorter headways for subway service, and real-time information at subway and bus stops;
- A larger bus fleet;
- Better infrastructure maintenance;
- Support for big transit projects like LIRR-Grand Central, #7 extension to the far West Side and 2nd Ave. subway.

The plan is the most detailed transportation platform yet issued by any candidate for NYC mayor, although **Mark Green** has said he endorsed the "Unclogging" plan backed by business and transit

Staffed Subway Stations: Popular Issue for NYC Hopefuls

Last week, three of the four Democratic candidates for NYC mayor — Fernando Ferrer, Mark Green and Peter Vallone — convened news conferences announcing their opposition to the MTA's plan to close or reduce hours at **token booths** at 53 NYC subway stations. Green released a report saying there would be serious safety problems at 18 stations if staff is eliminated or cut back.

Meanwhile, a City Council hearing on the issue brought out dozens of community groups and elected officials who oppose the proposed cuts. Candidates for Public Advocate and Bronx Borough President were there in force — observers counted Kathryn Freed, Steven DiBrienza and Norman Siegel, Adolfo Carrion and June Eisland. However, some accounts noted that **Council questioning** of NYC Transit president Lawrence Reuter on the issue was **tepid and disorganized**.

State Senator Eric Schneiderman has threatened to sue to MTA if it does not hold hearings on the proposed staffing cuts. The Senator and others say that the reductions in staffed booths amounts to a reduction in service which should automatically trigger the need for a hearing. The MTA says MetroCard vending machines perform the same service as the clerks and that no service has been cut.

Transport Workers Union Local 100 continues to organize a labor-community coalition to stop the subway station staff cuts. Contact 212-873-6000 x225 for help or to become involved.

groups, and last year presented a mix of short and long-term transportation measures that also included more bus lanes, including a Gowanus express bus-way, expanded rail freight, congestion pricing for trucks and other measures (*MTR #259*).

More Mayoral Musings

At a Municipal Arts Society forum on the future of planning in NYC last week, mayoral candidate **Mark Green** again mentioned his interest in projects like the proposed Gowanus Expressway and cross-harbor rail freight tunnels (see *MTR #'s 308, 316*). He referred several times to the problem of heavy truck traffic in neighborhoods. Green said he wanted to use the NYPD's statistical mapping of crime locations and trends and develop similar systems to address the city's environmental and economic problems.

Candidate **Alan Hevesi** said he supported the idea of a Gowanus tunnel and other community highway impact reduction projects "in principle" but suggested they might be a lower priority than some other projects in an environment of **scarce capital resources**. He mentioned the Second Ave. subway, the #7 subway extension and cross-harbor rail freight tunnel as projects he considered important to the city's future. Hevesi said the city could only pay for such projects if its economy is booming, and mentioned several of his ideas for attracting key industries to NYC.

West Shore Rail Hearings Sharpen Positions

NJTransit hearings on proposals for new rail service in Bergen County began last week. While officials and citizens at the hearings agreed that Bergen and Rockland Counties are grossly underserved by rail transit and suffer from severe road congestion, positions varied widely regarding the best solution.

The three proposed rail lines — the **West Shore** line (between West Nyack and Hoboken), the **Northern Branch** (between Tenafly and Hoboken), and the **Cross-County** line (between Hoboken and Passaic County) — would all utilize freight rail right-of-way or track. Each line features some **conflict with freight service**, which may require right-of-way purchase for passenger service.

Bergen County Executive Pat Schuber got a jump on the hearings with a press conference presenting his vision for a regional rail network based on intra-county hubs. He pushed for the construction of all three lines, but his hub **plan relies heavily on the construction of the Cross-County line**.

Schuber proposed adjusting the alignment for the planned third segment of the Hudson-Bergen light rail to run from North Bergen to Edgewater, rather than to the Lombardi Park & Ride in Ridgefield. The Hudson-Bergen Edgewater station would serve

as a hub with transfers between the Cross-County line, the Northern Branch and Hudson-Bergen. The plan includes construction of a transfer station in Hackensack and a stop in East Rutherford along the Pascack Valley line.

In contrast, the Tri-State Campaign suggested that officials and planners set clear criteria for **prioritizing the proposed lines** because it is unlikely that federal and local funds will be sufficient to pursue all three lines in the near term. Starting service on each line is projected to cost at least \$240 million — and up to \$330 million in the case of the longer West Shore line. The Campaign argued that criteria for a decision should be level of ridership, maximum regional mobility, reduction of auto trips, multi-modal station access, funding potential, and simplicity of construction and operation. The Campaign said the West Shore line best meets these conditions.

Additionally, only the West Shore will bring new transit service to Rockland County and reduce Rockland-based car trips into Bergen County. The West Shore would also serve private interests like Continental Airlines Arena redevelopment and the Palisades Center Mall, which may also contribute to local funding.

Hearings on West Shore rail proposals continue this week. See our Calendar section, and visit the [internet action alert](http://actionnetwork.org/campaign/rail?source=tstc) developed by Environmental Defense and the Tri-State Campaign:

<http://actionnetwork.org/campaign/rail?source=tstc>

Legislature OK s NJ State Employees for Transit Benefit

Before breaking for summer vacation in late June, the NJ Senate unanimously approved Assembly bill A190 making **76,000 employees of state agencies and NJ public authorities**, commissions and boards eligible for federal **pre-tax transit benefits**. The Assembly approved the bill in March (*MTR* #311). Acting Governor DiFrancesco has given no indication that he opposes the bill.

Taxpayers, employees, and citizens stand to gain from the bill's approval. The NJ Treasury estimates the state could save up to \$367,000 annually in payroll taxes, a figure that will increase when the federal benefit cap increases from \$65 to \$100 per month in 2002. State workers stand to save significantly on transit commuting costs. The region's Congressional representatives are backing a bill to raise the monthly cap to \$175 (*MTR* #262).

Acting Governor DiFrancesco should sign the bill and direct the Treasurer and heads of state authorities to offer the benefit to employees. Expanding the pro-transit program should be adopted as a pledge by gubernatorial candidates as well.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign on-line:

www.tstc.org

Short Lines

- The Associated Press reported Friday that NY Senators Schumer and Clinton had secured federal appropriations of \$20 million for the LIRR-Grand Central connector and \$3 million for Second Avenue subway planning work. The Senate measure builds significantly on House appropriations, which gave only \$10 million for the Grand Central project and zeroed 2nd Avenue. But the amounts are still short of MTA federal aid expectations.
- Legislation to remove a prohibition on New York City's Industrial Development Agency from providing assistance to railroad projects is still in limbo in Albany. The bill's supporters, who say its passage will provide a boost to freight rail development by encouraging more industrial sites to develop connections to freight lines in NYC, are still hoping for State Senate approval. The Senate bill, **S4256A**, is sponsored by Sen. Serphin Maltese.

Suffolk Towns Propose Transit Hubs

Hoping to encourage more high-tech businesses to locate along **Route 110** in western Suffolk County, town officials from Babylon and Huntington have recently put forward a worthy plan to reduce growing auto congestion in the corridor. It rests on providing **shuttle bus service** to business parks along the highway via transit hubs at either end of the highway. The hubs would be developed at the LIRR **Huntington station** and by reviving a defunct Ronkonkoma Branch station **near Republic Airport** in Farmingdale. Employees could arrive by train or drive to proposed Park & Ride lots at the stations, then transfer to frequent buses that would drop them off and pick them up at work.

Babylon town Councilman Steve Ballone told the Campaign that he and his colleagues are now approaching State and county leaders and the business community to win support for the proposal, which faces one major obstacle. **New York State DOT** currently **owns the old East Farmingdale station** and has been in negotiations to lease to property to developer Fairchild Corporation. In exchange, Fairchild would sell 11 acres of its property along Republic Airport to DOT for a runway safety area. However, NYS DOT told *Newsday* last week that it would not move to complete the deal until both the Long Island Railroad and elected officials have time to consider the new Route 110 proposal.

A previous attempt to tackle Route 110 congestion — the Suffolk Express Clipper, an express bus

funded by DOT and operated by Suffolk County has attracted fewer than 200 riders per day on 10 runs. It operates during morning and evening rush hours between Farmingdale and Melville, with stops at the Hauppauge industrial park. Business community leaders say this is in part due to infrequent service and **only three scheduled stops** in the corridor. The Babylon-Huntington plan seems to hold more promise. Officials intend to develop the plan with businesses, providing incentives for employers to encourage workers to use transit and **transit-supportive zoning** around each hub.

Reduction for Overweight Trucks Halted

In June, we reported that the NY State Assembly seemed poised to pass A9230, a bill to **increase the permissible weight of trucks in NYC** and reduce fines for overweight trucks (*MTR #323*). Community and advocacy groups contacted city Assembly Members, all of whom claimed not to have heard of the bill but were appalled at its contents. That outreach seems to have halted it in its tracks.

At the end of June, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver told the City DOT Commissioner Weinshall he would not let the bill pass this session. It has been passed by the Senate and the Assembly transportation committee, but has now languished in the codes committee for three weeks.

A Walking City? Not According to Project List

Last week, the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council held hearings on the New York City portion of the 2002-2004 draft "transportation improvement program (TIP)." The TIP is a big list of projects that a region's agencies must collectively compile to receive federal transportation aid. NYC's portion of the three-year TIP includes 650 projects costing \$9.4 billion.

Overall, 81% of the spending in the TIP will go to **mass transit**, including \$6.8 billion for the MTA and \$900 million for other bus and ferry projects.

The short end of the stick goes to pedestrians and cyclists. Spending dedicated to stand-alone bikeways, traffic calming and greenways amounts to less than \$50 million — .5% of the total or less than 2% of the non-MTA total. Some road projects may have bike and pedestrian elements not reflected in this figure.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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CALENDAR

July 17, 3-5, 6-9pm West Shore EIS "scoping" hearing. Focus on Cross County Line, Passaic County Freeholder's Meeting Room, 401 Grand Street, Paterson. 866-658-9874

July 18, 3-5, 6-9pm West Shore EIS "scoping" hearing. Focus on West Shore Line, Teaneck Recreation Center, 250 Colonial Court, Teaneck. 866-658-9874.

July 19, Noon Metro-North Commuter Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 10th floor. 212-878-7087.

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

July 26, 8:15am SWRPA monthly meeting, Darien Town Hall, Room 119, 2 Renshaw Rd., Darien, CT, 203-316-5190

July 26, 1:15pm NYMTC Program, Finance, and Administration Committee meeting, One World Trade Center, Manhattan, 212-938-3305

August 4 First public meeting for the Sustainable East End Development Study. Southampton Village Hall. 631-477-0300.

August 19, 11am NY Transit Museum tour along original South Brooklyn Railway and NY Cross Harbor RR, RSVP. www.mta.nyc.ny.us/museum 718-243-8601

August 28, 6-8pm Auto-Free New York meeting, "Lower Manhattan Transportation," walking tour, 104 Washington Street (near Rector St.), Manhattan, 212-475-3394

See additional calendar items at www.tstc.org

Job Announcement

Sustainable transportation policy advocate based in Jericho, Long Island

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

Full benefits package; salary depends on experience. More info: Visit www.tstc.org/about/jobs.html. Reply to tstc@tstc.org or fax 212-268-7333.