

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Crackdown Pits Stop & Go Tolls Against True Promise of E-ZPass

New Jersey toll road authorities began stricter speed limit enforcement for E-ZPass lanes last Sunday, angering some motorists and eliciting calls for installation of **high-speed toll plazas** from advocates.

Drivers caught passing through lanes by electronic monitors on the **NJ Turnpike, Garden State Parkway, and Atlantic City Expressway** at speeds far above the 5 mph limit now will receive a warning by mail. After three warnings, drivers face a suspension of their E-ZPass account from 60 days up to a year for continued violations. The **Port Authority** of New York & New Jersey has said it will start a similar program on August 1st.

The toll authorities presented the crackdown as a response to notable **increases in crashes** at plazas. According to the *Star-Ledger* and the *Bergen Record*, toll plaza crashes increased by 4.4% on the Turnpike and 33% on the GSP after the first year of E-ZPass, though **crashes dropped** by 20% after **Parkway lanes were made more uniform and visible**.

Transportation groups from the AAA to the Tri-State Transportation Campaign have called for the near-term reconstruction of selected NJ toll plazas to allow drivers to pass through at **normal highway speeds**. Operators of toll facilities in Illinois, Georgia, Oklahoma and Delaware have told the Campaign that accident rates were reduced after electronic, non-stop collection equipment and plazas were in place. High-speed facilities also process 50% more vehicles per hour than E-ZPass-only lanes fitted into old-style toll booths.

Regardless, a spokesperson for the New Jersey Turnpike told the *Courier News* last week that although a planned new toll plaza at Exit 1 will have non-stop capabilities, the agency would not retrofit existing plazas due to concerns over lane widths. The Port Authority hopes to retrofit toll plazas on approaches to the George Washington and Staten Island bridges **once E-ZPass users make up 70-80%** of daily traffic. High speed tolls are also being considered as a solution to the public outcry over plaza congestion on the Garden State Parkway by a task force convened by Acting Governor DiFrancesco (MTR #320).

### Ferrer, Vallone: City Should Pay More for Transit

At a forum organized last Wednesday by the NY League of Conservation Voters, candidate for NYC mayor and Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer said the Giuliani Administration was wrong to reduce the **city's contribution to the MTA capital program** in 1994. Ferrer said the move opened the door for the Pataki Administration to subsequently impose a round of state transit budget cuts. Ferrer said that for NYC to increase transit service and build projects like the Second Avenue subway, **"the city must step up and so must the state."**

Ferrer said the logical step was reimposition of the repealed commuter tax with revenue dedicated to transportation. Ferrer also said he backed big increases in freight rail service, facilitated by a cross-harbor freight tunnel. He said he would develop better relations between the city and New Jersey so that such projects could proceed on the basis of common interest.

At the same forum, candidate and **City Council Speaker Peter Vallone** said the city would have to pay more for better transit, but said that if the city paid a "fair share," then he would challenge New York's representatives in Albany and Washington, D.C. to come up with the rest of the funding for projects like the Second Avenue subway.

### Ferrer Opposes Goethals Twin Construction

Speaking to Staten Island business leaders last week, mayoral candidate Fernando Ferrer said the Port Authority should **abandon its Goethals "twin"** bridge project. According to the *Staten Island Advance*, Ferrer remarked, "You want to double the capacity for dumping cars onto the Staten Island Expressway with no place to go?" Ferrer said better projects for the PA are a cross-harbor freight rail tunnel and a light rail link between Staten Island and Bayonne. Assemblyman John Lavelle, S.I.'s Democratic leader, told the *Advance* he agreed with Ferrer's comments. Ferrer's web site covers transportation: see [www.ferrer2001.com](http://www.ferrer2001.com).

### Vallone Releases Transit Plan

Last Wednesday afternoon, Peter Vallone issued a plan calling on the MTA to offer new services on its

commuter rail lines within NYC. Vallone said such measures would ease subway and bus crowding during long-term planning and construction for new transit capacity. Overall, Vallone's plan to **make the railroads work better for the city** is on the right track. However, some of his proposals for new services and stations are unlikely to attract many riders. The best bang for the buck would probably be obtained by **reducing in-city fares** and **increasing the number of stops** at little-served stations.

Earlier in the week, Vallone called for stricter enforcement of laws prohibiting bicycle riding on sidewalks.

The Vallone campaign's web site has a section on transportation issues: [www.vallone2001.com](http://www.vallone2001.com).

These web sites for major mayoral campaigns now also have transportation pages:

[www.markgreen.com](http://www.markgreen.com), [www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com)

The Hevesi campaign's web page is at [www.hevesi2001.com](http://www.hevesi2001.com), but has no specific information on transportation.

### NJTransit Gains Operating Funds

The 2002 operating budget approved by the New Jersey Transit Board of Director earlier this month included an additional \$51 million in state funds, according to the *Star-Ledger*. This figure is less than the \$120 million the agency said it needed earlier this year to meet **increasing bus and train ridership** and less than the \$74 million proposed by the Whitman administration. However, it adds significantly to last year's state funding level of \$209 million and will allow the agency to **avoid any fare increase** for the eleventh year in a row (*MTR* #306). NJTransit told reporters that the majority of additional funds would pay for overtime, fuel, and additional drivers to increase frequency on **crowded bus routes**.

It is unclear whether the additional funds will reduce the pressure on New Jersey Transit to continue **diverting Transportation Trust Fund monies** — intended purely for capital investments — to cover operating costs (*MTR* #314). NJTransit reported to its board in 2000 that the combination of insufficient funding, increasing ridership, flat fares and an aggressive capital program would result in the accumulation of a \$2.2 billion combined operating and capital budget deficit from 2001-2005. This figure excludes the dozens of proposed new rail starts favored by various coalitions of lawmakers and local interests around the state.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign on-line:

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

### Suozzi, DiNapoli Pledge Support for Long Island Bus

At a NY League of Conservation Voters forum in Mineola last Friday, Democratic **candidates for Nassau County executive** Thomas Suozzi and Thomas DiNapoli said they would restore the county's budgetary support for Long Island Bus. Because of cuts Nassau County has made in its contributions to bus transit, Long Island Bus has required emergency state funding for two years in a row to prevent reductions in service (see *MTR* #249, 292). Long Island Bus service moves over 100,000 passengers each weekday, and the agency has seen strong and steady ridership growth over the past five years.

**"I would support Long Island Bus 100 percent,"** said Suozzi, who is mayor of Glen Cove. "I believe in Long Island Bus very much." Suozzi said additional bus service is needed to improve north-south travel on Long Island. He said the LIRR East Side Access project is critical to Nassau County, and he called for more ferries like the Glen Cove-Manhattan service he recently helped establish.

Suozzi said he would **energize the largely defunct county planning department** to develop environmental and other visions and plans for Nassau. He said his planning priorities would be downtown revitalization, in-filling commercial strips with more mixed uses and preserving open space. Glen Cove recently received an award for the most successful downtown revitalization in New York State. He also expressed an interest in expanded freight rail and barge service.

Thomas DiNapoli, who is the senior Democratic State Assembly member from Nassau County, also said he would restore county support for Long Island Bus, and stated that he believed Nassau County needs more, not fewer, bus routes. He cited his work to secure the extra state funding LI Bus required in the face of the county's recent cuts. DiNapoli said he hoped that in time, Long Island Bus could be fully financed by the MTA, but he said it would be necessary to **"restore the county's credibility" on bus funding** issues before approaching state and MTA leaders on the issue.

DiNapoli said **Nassau had learned a lesson about the importance of Long Island Bus** to the county in the vehement protests that followed the threat of bus service cuts over the past few years.

DiNapoli said open space preservation was one of his top priorities, and that as county executive, he would promote collaborative planning among all levels of government in areas like housing and transportation.

### Bridgeport Casino Would Swamp I-95

Last week, Connecticut's South West Regional Planning Agency released a study commissioned to estimate the traffic impacts of a proposal by a local Native American tribe to build a mega-casino and family entertainment center in Bridgeport. The

Golden Hill Paugussetts have petitioned for federal recognition. If successful, the tribe intends to press **land claims** against the state that it hopes to resolve through the acquisition of acreage for the casino. Plans displayed on the tribal website place the Paugussetts' **preferred site** along Long Island Sound, near the University of Bridgeport, on land currently occupied by **the 340-acre Seaside Memorial Park**.

Based on the website plans, the report assumes the casino would contain roughly 15,000 gaming positions, **35% more than eastern Connecticut's Foxwoods** mega-casino (*MTR #297*). Trip generation figures from studies of Foxwoods and the smaller Mohegan Sun casino suggest that the Bridgeport casino would generate roughly 155,000 person trips (to and from the casino) on an average Friday. This level of patronage amounts to an **additional 42,000 daily vehicle trips** — 11,000 on I-95 alone — assuming that 50% of all trips from the west, 20% of all trips from the north and east, 60% of local trips, and 100% of trips from Long Island would be made by train, bus, or ferry.

Models project a 13-14% increase in daily traffic volumes on I-95 and the Merritt Parkway. In real terms, the study reports that **"bumper to bumper" traffic** conditions (level of service F) on Fridays would **expand from a current 6 hours to 14 hours on I-95**, lasting from 9am to 11pm, and from a two hours to four on the Merritt. Other roadways in the region would be impacted less heavily.

The report offers no picture of average weekday traffic impacts, but does suggest that **congestion could be even worse** than estimated. The authors confirmed to the *Stamford Advocate* that mass transit assumptions are "generous." Mass transit use at Foxwoods stands at 30%, even with large-scale promotional efforts. Also, existing transit services in CT's coastal corridor currently do not have sufficient capacity to meet the demand generated by the casino.

### Senate Bumps Up Harbor Tunnel Funding

Earlier this month, the U.S. Senate included \$5 million for the **NY Harbor rail tunnel** project's environmental impact review in its Dept. of Transportation appropriations bill.

The Senate appropriation is more than the \$2 million allocated to the project by the House of Representatives. In a press release, **Congressman Jerrold Nadler**, the rail tunnel's most vocal and active advocate, **thanked Senators Clinton and Schumer for backing the project**.

The New York delegation in Washington and rail freight advocates like the Tri-State Campaign will urge Congress' conference committee to adopt the Senate's funding level.

### NJ Jitneys: Undelivered

New Jersey Transit has again delayed delivery of rail station access jitney vehicles to 16 municipalities, according to last Friday's *Bergen Record*. The paper said the vehicles were initially supposed to arrive this spring, but were first delayed until summer and **won't be available until October or November**, according to NJ Transit. Transit blamed the problem on manufacturing delays.

Officials in Hackensack, who are expecting two new jitney buses, told the *Record* they were disappointed the vehicles wouldn't be available to ease downtown parking crunches this summer.

Since Congressmen Bill Pascrell and Donald Payne **secured federal funding** for local transit services in **1998**, towns have anticipated developing new local and station-access transit services (*MTR #270*). Early last year, New Jersey Transit set aside \$1 million in federal air quality/transportation funds to help the cities and towns operate the services, but without the vehicles, the opportunity to spend funds is still on hold. Still, the towns want Transit to come up with a **more sustainable, long-term operating assistance plan** for the shuttle services (*MTR #303*). So far, Transit has balked at doing so — the matter was debated at length earlier this year at the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, but was not resolved.

NJ Transit will undoubtedly develop a big wish list it will expect **the state's congressional delegation** to carry in Washington in 2003, when the federal government will reauthorize its transportation assistance programs. Transit will probably get a better response then if it can get relatively simple, widely supported programs like the "Community Shuttle Program" out the door in the meantime.

### Funding for NYC: Unspent

Last weekend, *Newsday* outlined a number of New York City projects that received **funding earmarks** from members of the city congressional delegation in 1998's massive TEA-21 transportation funding authorization, but still have yet to get off the ground.

City and state transportation officials told the paper that part of the problem was integrating what they seemed to think of as off-the-cuff ideas from members of Congress into their "regular" programs. Indeed, Mayor Giuliani said later in the week the Congressional projects are not "initiatives that emerge from the agencies themselves." But John Kaehny of Transportation Alternatives said the **agencies should have been ready** to coordinate with members of Congress during the two-year battle over TEA-21. "It shows how the city and state DOT's do not have a vision or a plan," he said.

An interesting question that *Newsday's* analysis raises but did not investigate is whether there are also **federal**

**formula funds** – distinct from Congressional earmarks – available to city transportation agencies **that have not been fully used.** Investigating whether or not this is the case would be a good early undertaking for the next city administration’s transportation commissioner, in addition to looking at factors that keep the city transportation department’s **project pipeline** at a crawl. Mayoral candidates blasted the city for not spending all available federal funds after publication of *Newsday’s* report.

### **Chinatown Transit Advocates, Silver Win**

An eleventh hour agreement announced Thursday by NY Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Governor Pataki is a major win for residents and businesses in Manhattan’s Chinatown that depend on the Grand Street Station (see *MTR* #318). To help compensate for the four-year loss of B/D/Q subway service at the station, which connects Chinese neighborhoods in Brooklyn to Chinatown, a subway shuttle will extend from Grand St. to West 4<sup>th</sup> Street., and M-trains will have hours of service extended from peak-only to 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. The Grand Street Station is in Silver’s legislative district, and civic groups like the Grand Coalition had called on the Speaker to help them win the interim service improvements.

### **Reclaiming Times Square**

NYC DOT has begun widening sidewalks in Times Square, along both 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Broadway. The work is analogous to last year’s reclamation of pedestrian space in Herald Square. In both areas, pedestrian crowding had become so acute that foot traffic typically spilled into the street, with consequent conflicts with motor traffic. City officials suggested to the *Daily News* that any problems stemming from the removal of space from cars, buses and trucks would be more than offset by having fewer pedestrian spilling into the street. It’s unclear if the city intends to go through with the entire plan it described last year, which involved ambitious car and truck restrictions (see *MTR* #287).

### **NYC Council Squeezes Accordion Buses**

A NYC Council study of the M79 and M86 bus routes in Manhattan has found that NYC Transit’s over-sized articulated buses had more crashes than regular transit buses. NYC Transit has 400 of the buses and has ordered 140 more, and says they present no special operating issues. Critics say the agency uses the big buses to reduce labor costs while maintaining the same number of “seats” on routes, and that they slow service due to the time it takes large numbers of passengers to enter and exit.

## **CALENDAR**

**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 25, Noon-2pm** Final public advisory committee meeting for MTA Lower Manhattan Access study. 22 Reade St., Manhattan. 212-799-2206, [www.lowermanhattanaccess.com](http://www.lowermanhattanaccess.com).

**July 25, Noon-2pm** “42<sup>nd</sup> Street Auto-Free Light Rail Boulevard” presentation by George Haikalis, Roxanne Warren. City Club of NY. 25 West 43<sup>rd</sup> St 19<sup>th</sup> floor, Manhattan. RSVP, 212-227-0129

**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 8, 4-9pm** Open House for Southerly Crossings Corridor Study (Mercer Cty, NJ/Bucks Cty PA). Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission. College of NJ. 610-896-9909

**August 19, 11am** NY Transit Museum tour along original South Brooklyn Railway and NY Cross Harbor RR, RSVP. [www.mta.nyc.ny.us/museum](http://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

**November 27-28** Northeast regional conference on “context-sensitive design.” ConnDOT, Northeast Assn of State Transportation Officials, other agencies. \$ Westbrook, CT. 860-486-1384.

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



*MTR*#326 Contributing: 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](mailto:tstc@tstc.org)