

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Mayoral Candidates Weigh in on S.I. Bus Wars

In late July, NYC City Council Speaker and mayoral candidate Peter Vallone joined the Amalgamated Transit Union in suing Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the NYC Economic Development Corporation and Atlantic Express Coachways over the award to Atlantic of two new Staten Island express bus routes. Vallone and the ATU contend that the **contract with Atlantic violated city procedures**, which call for a more extended and open contracting process, involving the City Council. The contract was awarded through the EDC to avoid this process.

The issue is a charged one on Staten Island because the deal with Atlantic, which stemmed from public and legislative pressure on the MTA to introduce express service to Staten Island's south shore, caused a rival private bus company, Academy Bus, to abandon seven other Staten Island express routes in June, **stranding thousands of bus commuters**. The problem has been only partly remedied in the short run, with Atlantic picking up two of the abandoned runs and the MTA making modest service increases on some of its routes. Sentiment on Staten Island strongly favors MTA over private service — for years, riders have complained of **shoddy and unreliable service** by companies like Atlantic and Academy. A bill passed by the state legislature last year would have created four new MTA express routes on the south shore. Governor Pataki pocket-vetoed the bill, instead creating two MTA routes and two private ones. But instead of adding service, the move triggered the current crisis, leaving Staten Island with less bus service than before (MTR #323).

The ATU said it hopes the suit kills the deal with Atlantic.

Last week, NYC Comptroller and mayoral candidate Alan Hevesi also got involved, issuing subpoenas to the NYC Economic Development Corp., demanding documents related to Atlantic's contract. The EDC had refused earlier requests for the documents, and Atlantic has refused to provide any information about the contract's terms.

### Inside

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- **Safe Routes to School Takes Hold in CT**

### Groups Urge Veto of Newark Airtrain Fares

Last week, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and the NJ Association of Rail Passengers called on Acting Governor DiFrancesco to veto the minutes of the July 26th Port Authority of NY & NJ board meeting, unless changes are made to the agency's plans **to charge Airtrain passengers much more than car drivers** to access the monorail at Newark Airport. The agreement between the Port Authority and NJTransit authorized at that meeting would allow a \$3.50 surcharge on every Newark Airtrain ticket, leading to one-way fares of \$6.95 from Newark Penn Station, and upwards of \$11 from NYC Penn Station and the Trenton area.

The Port Authority has argued that the surcharge is needed to pay for construction of the new rail station and for the operation of the monorail. But the groups point out that **air passengers who drive to the airport and park are not charged such high rates** for their facilities or access to the monorail, which costs little to operate as it is almost fully automated (MTR #327). They also argue that with such high rates the new rail service cannot successfully compete with auto transport to reduce the congestion on airport roads and terminal curbs.

The outcome of the Newark fare debate is likely to have repercussions for the cost of riding the Jamaica-JFK Airtrain where the Port Authority has suggested one-way fares could reach \$5.

### DiFrancesco Mum on Parkway Report

Last Wednesday, New Jersey Transportation Commissioner James Weinstein delivered a report to Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco containing an analysis of **how to remove the barrier toll plazas on the Garden State Parkway** as well as a plan to bring about a "toll holiday" on the Parkway on Labor Day, September 3rd. A spokesperson for the Acting Governor said he is reviewing the report, but does not expect to release its results to the public for at least a week. The report was commissioned through executive order by the Acting Governor in May and is expected to compare the costs and benefits of installing high-speed collection facilities with removal of tolls from the highway (MTR #320).

Previous statements by the New Jersey Highway

Authority suggest that the cost of demolishing the 11 cross-highway toll plazas and of replacing or retrofitting them with high-speed collection facilities would be roughly equivalent — between \$120-\$130 million. In addition, toll removal would **force state taxpayers to shoulder the burden** for the \$150 million annual (non-toll related) cost of operating the Parkway, as well as the Highway Authority's \$620 million in outstanding bonds and its \$200 million E-ZPass installation debt.

The *Star Ledger* and *Gannett* reported a leak from the report last week that removing tolls for Labor Day alone would cost the state upwards of \$800,000

### **Green Outlines View of NYC-PA Relationship**

In a speech to NY's General Contractors Association and an interview with reporters and editors for the *NY Times*, NYC mayoral candidate Mark Green detailed his plans **to remake New York City's relations with the Port Authority** of NY and NJ.

Green says he has been critical of the Port Authority, but would not wage political war against the agency as Mayor Giuliani has done. Rather, he would use what leverage the city has with the agency, like the leases for LaGuardia and JFK airports, to strike a new deal that will result in greater funding for projects the city and region need.

Institutionally, Green would like this approach to pay off with at least two of New York's Port Authority commissioners being appointed on the recommendation of NYC's mayor.

Substantively, Green wants to see significant contributions from the Port Authority to **a harbor rail freight tunnel, the 2nd Avenue subway** and infrastructure for development of Manhattan's far west side. Green would also use increased city revenue from the Port Authority, like fairer airport leases, to increase the city's contributions to such projects.

"By 2010, the same partnership that completed the Holland Tunnel 75 years ago can be well on its way to building a Second Avenue subway and a cross harbor rail tunnel," Green said to the General Contractors Association.

### **Daily News Pushes PA on Rail Freight Tunnel**

In an editorial last Wednesday, the *NY Daily News* called on the Port Authority of NY & NJ **direct the \$800 million in savings expected from its new compressed dredging schedule** into construction of a rail freight tunnel under New York Harbor (MTR #327). The cost of the proposed tunnel now under environmental study stands at \$2 billion at minimum.

The newspaper writes, "The tunnel would significantly cut freight transportation costs, reduce deterioration of local roadways and improve the region's air quality by cutting down on truck traffic."

in lost revenue, overtime pay, and other expenses.

In a letter to Commissioner Weinstein in June, the Campaign asked that the study look at the effectiveness of toll removal in relieving congestion on the Parkway. In particular, the group said that the report should determine how many drivers previously traveling Routes 1, 9 and 35 and other parallel routes are likely to shift to the Parkway and the resulting impact on peak period congestion.

### **Environmental, Transportation Groups Call for NJ High-Speed E-ZPass Lanes Now**

Last Monday, five environmental and transportation reform groups asked Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco, state legislators, to work with New Jersey's toll authorities to identify funds for the immediate installation of high-speed toll collection at selected plazas across the state. The call came two weeks after toll authorities began stricter enforcement of the existing 5mph speed limit for E-ZPass-only lanes, to the widespread frustration of drivers.

"The toll plaza speed limit problem shows **you can't improve tolls by strapping new technology into antiquated toll booths. It's the toll booths, stupid,**" said Janine Bauer, Executive Director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. The Campaign was joined by the NJ Environmental Lobby, NJ PIRG Citizen's Lobby, the NJ Environmental Federation, and the NJ chapter of the Sierra Club.

The groups put forward a variety of locations as potential sites for model high-speed toll lanes, including the NJ Turnpike's Exit 18 near the George Washington Bridge. The Garden State Parkway's Tom's River Plaza and Barnegat Plaza's were suggested due to their location on straight, flat portions of the highway. The Union Plaza and Raritan Plaza - two of the Parkway's highest volume plazas - could be retrofit or rebuilt as part of planned reconstruction of the Parkway/I-78 interchange and the Raritan River Bridge and its approaches, respectively. The New Jersey Turnpike has already installed the first high-speed toll facility in the state at Exit 6 and plans another at Exit 1 by the Delaware Bridge.

**A high-speed E-ZPass lane can process 50% more cars per hour** (1800 vehicles) than an E-ZPass-only lane in an old-style plaza (1200 vehicles). In fact, turning an E-ZPass-only lane into a high-speed lane would result in a collection speed increase on the same order as the Parkway's change from token-only lanes to E-ZPass lanes.

### **Safe Routes to School Takes Hold in CT**

Connecticut's first "Safe Routes To School" program launched in June by the Connecticut Bicycle Coalition has been **widely embraced by public elementary and junior high schools** from around the state. As of

the deadline in late July, forty-four schools had submitted application to participate. Following a model first used in Denmark, the program facilitates the development of **traffic calming** and pedestrian safety projects **along routes known to be taken by children** walking to school through a planning process involving parents, teachers, administrators, municipal leaders and traffic safety officials.

According to state statistics compiled by Safe Kids CT, **pedestrian injury is the leading cause of death among children ages 5-14** in Connecticut.

With funding for planning and construction from the Hartford Courant Foundation, the Ensworth Charitable Trust, and the Daphne Seybolt Culpeper Memorial Foundation, the Connecticut Bicycle Coalition hopes to work with between 5 and 8 schools during the first year of the project. According to Coalition Executive Director David Hiller, schools selected for the program will be those with a large percentage of students who walk to school and active parent groups that are near roadways with high traffic volumes or insufficient pedestrian amenities. Based on an initial review of applications, Hiller said that projects are likely in New Britain, Hartford, Manchester, New Haven, Waterbury, and Stamford.

If the already overwhelming demand for Safe Routes to School projects in Connecticut continues, the Connecticut Department of Transportation should look to the precedent set by cooperation between Transportation Alternatives and the New York City Department of Transportation. Currently, **pedestrian -oriented projects are dramatically underfunded in Connecticut**, receiving less than 1.4% of the total share of non-transit funding allocated in the state Transportation Improvement Program.

Transportation Alternatives launched the NYC Safe Routes program in 1997 in conjunction with the office of Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer and the New York Governor's Traffic Safety Committee. After completing traffic calming plans for 36 schools in the Bronx, Transportation Alternatives and the Bronx NYC Council delegation won the backing of NYC DOT (MTR #258).

Next month, **NYC DOT will take-over TA's Safe Routes program**, expanding it city-wide with the commencement of a \$2.5 million contract with consultant RBA Group. According to the contract, RBA will analyze pedestrian crash data and survey pedestrian facilities at all 1,357 NYC schools. Within the next 30 months, **traffic calming projects will be completed around 135 schools**, with 32 schools receiving extensive, state-of-the-art redesign of network roadways. The NYC DOT expects to spend up to \$50 million on these projects, making the agency's program the largest thus far in the US.

### No Approval Yet For T-Z Study

The July 26 NY Metropolitan Transportation Council meeting came and went without discussion or approval of the outline of the major investment study the NY State Thruway Authority and Metro-North Railroad will undertake concerning the fate of the Tappan Zee Bridge. The Council had been set to approve the study in May. But **intervention by Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano** resulted in further discussion of the study's direction. Spano said he wanted to ensure that any plan for a new bridge would be transit-oriented and not part of a highway expansion plan (MTR #318).

Thruway officials recently told the *Journal-News* that the agencies and Hudson Valley counties were still working on a "statement of approach" for the bridge replacement study. Westchester officials said they believed NYMTC would approve funds for the study at its Sept. 20 meeting.

### Human-Powered in the Hudson Valley

The NY State DOT has published a new map of Hudson Valley bikeways and trailways. The new map shows the **routes of existing and future greenways**, on-road bike routes and walking trails from Yonkers to the Catskills and Columbia County. Get a copy from DOT's Poughkeepsie office: 845-431-5723, [www.dot.state.ny.us](http://www.dot.state.ny.us)

### NYC DOT Satisfied With Queens Blvd Quick-Fix

The NYC DOT appears uninterested in developing long-term plans to redesign Queens Boulevard to be safer and more people-friendly. City transportation commissioner Iris Weinshall told *Newsday* last week that "We didn't need to throw the whole thing out and build a new road." She said lower speed limits, more pedestrian crossing time, additional parking in service roads and a strong police presence have reduced car-pedestrian crashes on the boulevard by 21% during the first half of 2001.

But the city has undertaken a much more comprehensive overhaul process for the Bronx' Grand Concourse, which suffers from many of the same ills as Queens Boulevard. The Concourse project will address not only safety issues, but also **the quality of life problems** that the street's transformation into an urban highway over the past few decades poses for the communities that flank it.

It is not clear that crash reductions along Queens Boulevard will be sustained, or are enough to satisfy surrounding communities. **"Everything about Queens Boulevard encourages speed,"** University of California planning expert Allan Jacobs told *Newsday*. Jacobs says the boulevard has no worthwhile "pedestrian realm." He recommends wider medians, more pedestrian amenities and narrower service roads.

Transportation Alternatives' John Kaehny said the city should be working now to get a boulevard reconstruction project into the funding pipeline. "It would be very sad if Queens Boulevard was the same five years from now as it is today," he said to *Newsday*.

Mayoral candidates agreed. City Council Speaker Peter Vallone told the newspaper that Queens Boulevard should be submitted as a candidate for Federal funds. Republican Michael Bloomberg said that, "**Clearly, the long-term solution is to redesign the boulevard.**" NYC Public Advocate Mark Green has maintained since March that the City should pursue a Queens Boulevard make-over (MTR #307).

### **Congress Votes to Allow Polluting Vehicles**

Last week the House of Representatives passed President George Bush's proposed energy plan. The plan was voted on in three parts. A vote to increase fuel efficiency standards for cars and light trucks was defeated 269 to 160. A vote to allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was approved 223 to 206 and a vote on the "full" energy bill was approved 240 to 189.

The proposed fuel efficiency standards would have raised the miles per gallon that light trucks get from 20.7 to 27.5 by 2007. According to Congressional reports, the **new standard would have saved 1.5 million barrels of oil a day**. By comparison, according to President Bush, opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling will produce 600,000 barrels of oil a day in 2010.

New Jersey's entire delegation, both Republicans and Democrats, voted in favor of raising fuel efficiency standards for light trucks and cars as did all but one member of Connecticut's delegation, Rob Simmons. New York's delegation split with 6 Republicans and 15 Democrats supporting the increased standards and 6 Republicans and 4 Democrats voting for the status quo. Among those who **voted to allow new cars and trucks to continue polluting** are Vito Fossella, Gregory Meeks, Major Owens, and Joseph Crowley. Auto manufacturer and labor groups reportedly exerted pressure on the vote, claiming they would be at a disadvantage with foreign competitors under the new standards.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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### **Suffolk Route 110 Hub Plan Gains Allies**

The proposal by town officials in Babylon and Huntington to create transit and Park & Ride hubs served by express buses around one existing Long Island Rail Road station and one they are pressing to re-open has **gained the support of Action Long Island**, a business group with membership and high visibility in central Long Island.

According to *LI Business News*, Action LI sent a letter requesting that the LIRR restart the East Farmingdale station on the Ronkonkoma Branch to Governor Pataki and MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow. New York DOT, which owns the property around the closed station, has said it will hold off on plans to lease the land to a retail developer until the MTA has an opportunity to evaluate the proposal (MTR #325).

### **CALENDAR**

**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 11, 16, 17, 18, 22, 25** SEEDS Vision Workshops in Towns of Southampton, Shelter Island, East Hampton, North Haven, Riverhead, Southold. ?'s Jan Khan 212-938-6951, [jkahn@gw.dot.state.ny.us](mailto:jkahn@gw.dot.state.ny.us)

**August 9, Noon** Long Island Railroad Commuters Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan 5th floor. ?'s 212-878-7087.

**August 16, Noon** Metro North Railroad Commuter Council meeting, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan, ?'s 212-878-7087

**August 19, 11am** NY Transit Museum tour: South Brooklyn Rail, 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

**September 13-16** Rail-volution conference, San Francisco. "Building Liveable Communities with Transit." Federal Transit Administration, APTA, BART, City of Portland, others. 800-788-7077 [www.railvolution.com](http://www.railvolution.com).

**September 20, 1:15pm** NYMTC Program, Finance, and Administration Committee Meeting, One World Trade Center, ?'s 212-938-3305 or [amiles-cole@gw.state.ny.us](mailto:amiles-cole@gw.state.ny.us)

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