

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

1990s Transit Use Outpaced Growth in NYC Motoring, Thanks to Policy Choices

A study released last week by Schaller Consulting, an urban transportation specialist, describes the 1990's **reversal of the decades-long trend** of ever-greater market share for cars in NYC transportation.

Growth in car ownership outpaced transit use from the 1950s through the 1980s (transit ridership and car ownership both declined in the 1970s, but transit use fell much further). But the 1990s saw a 34% hike in subway use and a 27% rise in bus ridership, compared to a 6% increase in car ownership.

The study says the trend reversal shows the impact of the city and the region's **shift in investment priorities** from highway construction to reconstruction of the mass transit system, and of the transit fare incentives implemented since 1997. Other factors in the change are increased immigration, lower crime rates, **increased traffic congestion, higher parking costs** and urban development patterns.

"If you had told somebody this was going to happen back in 1990, they would have said you were crazy," Bruce Schaller, Schaller Consulting's principal, told the *NY Times*.

The study says "mode shift came about because transit investments focused on the needs of the 1980s and early 1990s — service reliability, personal safety, comfort and fare integration. The next generation of improvements should focus on today's needs and opportunities. These include increasing service levels, **relief of overcrowding** on buses and trains, **speeding up bus travel times** and providing extensive and real-time customer information."

The study tracks city car ownership data and estimates weekday auto trips from several surveys and sources, such as NY State DOT vehicle miles traveled data for the downstate area. It argues that the absence of new highway infrastructure, higher parking costs and worsening congestion on arterial highways slowed growth in NYC motoring in the 1990s.

Schaller concludes that "public policy and commitment of public funding produced a major change in travel behavior." Officials in New Jersey, still bent on building and widening highways, and in Connecticut, which has the lowest rate of investment in mass transit in the region, should take note of the lesson.

DiFrancesco Backs High-Speed Tolls, For Now — Would Eliminate Tolls on Garden State by 2012 —

On Thursday, New Jersey's Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco unveiled his plan for the future of tolls on the Garden State Parkway. The four-phase plan would first set up **free-flow E-ZPass** facilities along the Parkway, then eliminate toll collection at on-ramps and remove all tolls in about 10 years. During that time, the state would assume the burden of an **\$800 million capital program** to widen bridges and add lanes along the highway. While high-speed E-ZPass is in use, the Parkway will implement incentives to use the electronic payment medium, and introduce a modest price differential between peak and off-peak toll prices.

Most immediately, DiFrancesco ordered Parkway officials to **increase the speed limit** at E-ZPass lanes to 15mph, and called off his plan for a Labor Day "toll holiday." Details of the plan:

Near-term steps: In addition to increasing E-Z Pass lane speeds, DiFrancesco said that E-Z Pass discounts, **congestion pricing** and a phase-out of toll tokens would be in place **by the end of the year**. E-Z Pass users would pay 33 cents during peak hours and 30 cents off-peak, compared to the 35-cent cash toll. Though modest, the price breaks are a welcome addition to the congestion pricing systems established by the NJ Turnpike and Port Authority.

High-speed E-Z Pass: The plan to implement free-flow E-ZPass facilities along the Parkway would eliminate half of the existing toll barriers in each direction of traffic flow. For instance, high-speed E-Z Pass would be installed at the Raritan North barrier, while the Raritan South barrier would be completely removed. Similarly, the Essex North barrier will be eliminated, while the Essex South barrier will be rebuilt for highway-speed toll collection. **Tolls at the alternating facilities would double** from 35 to 70 cents (62 cents for E-ZPass peak users, 55 cents for E-Z Pass off-peak).

Depending on mileage between facilities, it's possible that "free" segments of the road will **attract traffic**, changing travel patterns in unforeseen ways in the Parkway corridor.

Toll elimination After five years, NJ would begin

tearing out Parkway **ramp toll plazas**. Although documents outlining DiFrancesco's plan do not actually describe the elimination of the high-speed E-ZPass facilities NJ would install during over the next few years, the Governor's press release states that the highway will be "toll free in 2012."

Finance To make up for revenue declines from ramp toll elimination and, eventually, abolition of all tolls, the plan **shifts the Parkway capital program** over time to NJ's Transportation Trust Fund and possibly the state's general fund. DiFrancesco called for \$800 million in capital improvements over 10 years, including widening the Driscoll Bridge over the Raritan River (see *MTR #162*) and adding lanes to the Parkway in Ocean and Atlantic Counties. The state would also have to eventually assume the Parkway's **\$200 million annual operating budget**.

This issue is likely to be the plan's biggest sticking point in Trenton, both with the governor who will take office in January, and with legislators, who will have to struggle with the issue of a huge new burden for the state's stretched transportation budget.

The Campaign urged candidates and legislators to choose the progressive policy and technological aspects of DiFrancesco's offering, and **reject the bank-breaking elimination of all Parkway tolls**.

Republican gubernatorial candidate **Bret Schundler**, whose pledges to remove tolls in short order have put the issue on the map this year, said the plan would not distract him from **ridding the Parkway of tolls within nine months** of taking office. He

NJ DOT Makes Another Run Around the Law

After declaring the bridge and road repair goals in the 2000 Transportation Trust Fund Renewal Law "not feasible," the New Jersey Department of Transportation seems bent on **undermining another central provision** of that law. At a recent meeting of the "Congestion Buster Task Force" created by the Trust Fund law to "develop a commuter options plan that would result in **peak hour vehicle trips being 'capped' at 1999 levels**," NJ DOT representatives urged the Task Force to create a plan to address congestion and traffic flow, rather than reduce vehicle trips. Changing the focus in this way would allow the Task Force to **develop proposals for road widening** and other highway capacity expansion.

The Campaign and other Task Force members argued that the mission of the Task Force was carefully written and is intended to push the Task Force to look at means to reduce auto dependence. **NJ Assembly Transportation Chair Alex DeCroce** who pushed through the Congestion Buster Task Force provision is sure to be consulted regarding his interpretation of the law.

told the *Star-Ledger* that the state could get along with less revenue. Language in DiFrancesco's release that emphasized the "responsible" and fiscally balanced approach of his plan appeared to slap at Schundler's bombastic approach to the issue. Democratic candidate **Jim McGreevey**, who has been measured on the issue of Parkway tolls in the past, nonetheless criticized DiFrancesco's plan for **not getting rid of tolls fast enough**. Without explaining himself, McGreevey told news outlets that he would seek to remove tolls without burdening taxpayers.

Token Booths Coalition Sues

Last week, a coalition including the Straphangers Campaign, Transport Workers Local 100 and State Senator Eric Schneiderman filed suit against the Metropolitan Transportation Authority over NYC Transit's plan to **reduce staff and hours at 87 token booths and close 35 booths entirely**.

The suit claims the MTA is reducing service and affecting station operations without a public hearing, which the law requires. It also cites the MTA's statutory obligation to ensure passenger safety. Advocates claim **a less-staffed subway system will place more riders in crime's way**. The plaintiffs seek an injunction to keep NYCTransit from proceeding with the booth cuts, scheduled to start August 26.

At a preliminary hearing Friday, the court granted the case a full hearing, set for Friday, August 17. The court will hear arguments for both sides, and testimony from subway riders.

NYC Survey: Better Transit Talk

NYC subway riders who struggle to count syllables during on-train announcements had an easier time this year, according to the results of a new NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign survey.

Based on 6,000 observations on 20 NYC Transit lines between February and June, the survey found that **69% of basic stop and transfer announcements** were made at the appropriate time and **were audible and clear**. The finding marks a significant step up from 1999, when the same survey reported that announcements were either not given or were incomprehensible at more than half of recorded stops. Unfortunately, communications regarding service abnormalities did not improve. In 2001 and 1999, NYC Transit riders were given understandable, useful information on service delays and sudden route changes in less than 27% of situations surveyed.

"We congratulate conductors and transit managers on doing a much better job of giving riders the basic information they need," said Gene Russianoff, senior attorney for the Straphanger's Campaign. "Now we'd like to see improved announcements **when riders need them most**."

Stamford Mayor Calls For Real Progress

At a panel held by the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce last week, Stamford Mayor Daniel Malloy **criticized CT Governor John Rowland** for **not spending enough on transportation improvements** in the southwestern corridor, particularly on the repair and upgrade of local roads (*Stamford Advocate*). Traffic, he said, was a significant impediment to economic growth for the region caused in part because residents “have to get on the highway (I-95) for an exit or two to go shopping.” Malloy called on business leaders to lobby state representatives and Governor Rowland for tangible solutions to transportation: **“not just a task force, but real projects.”** Malloy is running for his third term this year.

The only major transportation bill to be signed into law so far this year creates a permanent **Transportation Strategy Board** charged with developing a long-term, integrated transportation plan for the Connecticut (*MTR #323*). An initial report is due to the legislature in mid-January 2002. The Strategy Board will be advised by five regional boards made up of municipal leaders and residents of the “Transportation Investment Areas” defined by the law. Initial meetings continue to be held to elect TIA board members. The bill also dedicates \$50 million of existing surplus budget funds for studies and modest transportation projects. However, CT House speaker Moira Lyons told a business audience earlier this year that upwards of \$1 billion would be required to meet existing transportation needs (*MTR #305*).

It remains far from clear how much the Strategy Board’s long-term plan will differ from business as usual and whether and how fast any plan will be translated into real projects and a better transportation system. The Connecticut Transportation Choices Coalition, a group composed of environmental, transit and planning groups, has suggested concrete steps the legislature and Governor could take to make a commitment to reforming transportation that is more concrete:

- Dedicate revenue for mass transit operating costs, with an eye toward transit expansion.
- Pursue an expanded, aggressive mass transit capital program.
- Offer more local aid to municipalities, with new programs based on incentives for “smart growth”-style planning, pedestrian safety projects and transit-oriented development.

Read more about the Coalition’s proposals at www.tstc.org/ct_pap/

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site:

www.tstc.org

Choices for the Bronx’ Future

The New York State DOT released the options that it will study in the next phase of the **Bronx Arterial Needs major investment study**, which covers the Major Deegan and Cross Bronx Expressways. Of the original 250 suggestions made by community groups, individuals, elected officials and agencies, 27 survived all four of DOT’s screens.

The remaining options run the gamut. **Decking over the open-cut section** of the Cross Bronx Expressway, as has been suggested at all the public meetings, remains on the list. However, possible uses of the deck range from neighborhood-enhancing park facilities and transit corridors to service roads for the expressway.

A wealth of transit ideas, including placing light rail along the Cross Bronx Expressway, a **Yankee Stadium stop** on Metro-North’s Hudson Line, and improvements to local bus services, made the list. So did pedestrian and bicycle improvements like reopening the High Bridge and **adding new corridors** to the city’s **greenway master plan**.

On the highway side, several capacity expansions are included. One would add a lane on the Cross Bronx from the Sheridan Expressway to Third Avenue. Another proposes widening along various stretches of the Major Deegan Expressway, and a third would reopen Trans-Manhattan Expressway tunnels at 178th-179th Streets. Value pricing and non-stop tolling at **existing toll plazas** made the cut. Adding new toll facilities was ruled out.

In the next phase of the study, options will be grouped and the groups compared. NY State DOT says a public meeting on these issues will be scheduled “later in the process.”

Watchdog Questions Rte 15 Corridor Projects — Road Widening, Bypass Don’t Offer Traffic Relief —

Earlier this month, representatives of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign spoke out against New Jersey Department of Transportation **construction proposals for Route 15** in Sussex and Warren Counties, saying they will draw thousands of additional cars and trucks to the corridor each day. The DOT has recently completed a series of studies that recommend **widening three segments** of the 20-mile corridor and building a new bypass around Lafayette to meet increases in traffic expected over the next 20 years. In comments to the Department and public forums, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign has said that these projects are no solution to current or future Route 15 traffic problems.

“Congestion along Route 15 today is caused by a few bottlenecks that can be addressed through small changes in targeted intersections,” said Jennifer

Jaroski, New Jersey Coordinator for the Tri-State Campaign. "Widening most of the road will roll out the red carpet for **development of the Highlands** and for through-traveling drivers who want to avoid Route 206 or I-80. Local residents headed to the store will still be sitting in traffic."

The Route 15 road widening and Lafayette bypass proposals have a powerful supporter in State Senator **Robert Littell**, Chairman of the State Senate Appropriations Committee who represents the Sussex County portion of the corridor.

"Frustrated local drivers will not appreciate long, expensive construction projects that bring unwanted new development and more traffic," said Ms. Jaroski. "Chairman Littell would better serve his constituents by helping them to preserve the rural character of their communities *and* meet their transportation needs."

NJTransit Announces New Jitney Grants

In late July, NJTransit announced the next group of New Jersey towns to receive new shuttle buses under the agency's **Community Shuttle Program**. The \$90,000 shuttles or jitneys will be used to ease parking shortages at rail stations by taking commuters to and from the station during rush hours. Communities will also receive up to \$60,000 in start-up operating costs from NJTransit.

The program is paid for in part by a federal earmark secured by U.S. Representatives Bill Pascrell and Donald Payne in 1998. The Congressmen were motivated by the success of the **Maplewood** pilot jitney service, spearheaded by the Campaign in 1996, which now serves 12% of the town's rail passengers every weekday morning.

While recipients were pleased with the grants, observers noted that the twenty first-round shuttle recipients have **yet to receive their buses**. The new jitneys were expected early this Spring, but NJTransit has announced delivery will be pushed back to Fall due to manufacturing delays (*MTR #326*).

Recipients are:

Burlington County (2)	Red Bank
Ocean County (2)	Franklin
Carlstadt	Edison
Glen Rock	Hamilton
Fair Lawn	Fort Lee Parking Auth.
Hoboken	Weehawken
North Arlington	Old Tappan
Montclair	Fanwood/Scotch Plains
West Orange	Westfield
Middletown	Roselle Park

CALENDAR

August 16, Noon Metro North Railroad Com-muter Council meeting, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan, 212-878-7087

August 16, 17, 18, 22, 25 "Sustainable East End Development Study" workshops in Southampton, Shelter Island, East Hampton, North Haven, Riverhead, Southold. Jan Khan, NY State DOT: jkahn@gw.dot.state.ny.us, 212-938-6951.

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 23, Noon. NYC Transit Riders Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 5th floor. 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org

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

September 9 NYC Century Bike Tour. Cycling event taking in the best of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx to benefit bike and pedestrian advocacy. www.transalt.org, 212-629-8080.

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.

September 20, 1:15pm NYMTC Program, Fi-nance, and Administration Committee Meeting, One World Trade Center, ?'s 212-938-3305 or amiles-cole@gw.state.ny.us

September 26-29 TrailLink 2001 trails and green-ways conference, St. Louis. Rails-to-Trails Con-servancy. 202-331-9696, www.railtrails.org.

October 25-26 Project for Public Spaces Training Session, "How to Turn a Place Around", Manhat-tan, www.pps.org/nyc_training.htm or Harriet Festing 212-620- 5660

See additional calendar items at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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