

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NJ Papers Tough on Parkway Toll Removal

A consensus among NJ editorial boards emerged last week in response to Governor DiFrancesco's plan to remove Garden State Parkway barrier toll plazas: His near-term steps, high-speed E-ZPass facilities and congestion pricing, are needed and should be pursued promptly. The plan's goal of eliminating Parkway tolls by 2012 is an unrealistic non-starter that would stretch tight transportation budgets.

On **high-speed toll collection**, E-ZPass discounts and congestion pricing:

- "would be a smart step." (*Trenton Times*)
- are "practical ways to reduce the madness" and "one wonders why the geniuses at the parkway authority did not do this years ago." (*Bergen Record*)
- "Such improvements could achieve an appropriate balance between easing traffic backups and maintaining a necessary revenue stream." (*Courier News*)
- "solid, overdue ideas for reducing congestion and improving safety on the parkway." (*Phila. Inquirer*)
- "excellent proposals..." (*Press of Atlantic City*)

On **removing all tolls**:

- "Given our state's massive transportation deficiencies, reducing the resources available to deal with them makes no sense at all." (*Trenton Times*)
 - [the notion that] "future legislators and governors will cough up more than \$200 million a year in cash to remove tolls" is "not realistic" and a "fantasy." (*Star Ledger*)
 - "Expense alone is a good reason for going slow on any elimination of parkway tolls." (*Bergen Record*)
 - "an unfortunate and potentially dangerous recipe for shortcuts on road improvements and other maintenance projects along the highway." (*Courier News*)
 - "... it's fiscally reckless to toss out the tolls with the tollbooths." (*Philadelphia Inquirer*)
 - "...there is little reason to shift the financial burden from parkway users...to state taxpayers." (*Press of AC*)
- The pressure is on for NJ's next governor to take quick steps to reduce Parkway congestion. The response to DiFrancesco's plan charts an obvious path.

New Census Data Charts Transit Growth in NY and NJ, Stagnation in CT

Earlier this month, the U.S. Census Bureau released state-by-state data on how Americans over age 16 **traveled to work** last year. Results are based on an experimental survey supplementary to the 2000 census distributed to 700,000 households in 1,203 counties nationwide. The supplementary format, if continued, would provide the same information annually as the decennial census long-form from which commuting information has previously been gleaned.

The 2000 supplementary survey finds transit commuting high and increasing in New York and New Jersey, while **Connecticut commuters choose transit at a lower rate** than the national average. More than one out of every four New Yorkers who did not work at home commuted by transit, boosting mass transit's overall modal share 2.8% from 1990, an increase of roughly 167,000 commuters. (NYC Transit subway ridership is up 34% and bus ridership rose 27% during the 1990s. Although the gains cannot all be attributed to commuters as defined by the census, the fact that this huge gain is not reflected in statewide statistics suggests **a loss in transit ridership elsewhere in NY State**). New Jersey also saw a transit modal share gain of roughly 2.8% since 1990, an increase of close to 100,000 workers. In Connecticut, transit's commuting modal share grew less than .7% over the last decade, according to the Census.

New York has the highest statewide transit modal

	US	NY	NJ	CT
Car, Truck, or Van	90.4%	65.7%	84.2%	92.1%
Single Occupant	78.8%	57.3%	74.4%	82.8%
Carpool	11.6%	8.4%	9.9%	9.2%
Public Transit Total	5.3%	27.6%	11.6%	4.6%
Rail	2.2%	19.3%	4.2%	1.9%
Bus	2.9%	7.3%	7%	2.6%
Other (Ferry, Taxi)	.2%	1%	.3%	.1%
Walked	2.8%	5.5%	2.8%	2.6%
Bicycle	.5%	.4%	.5%	.2%
Other means	1%	.8%	1%	.6%

Mode choice by workers over 16 not working at home
(Total may not equal 100% due to rounding)

SOURCE: Census 2000 Supplementary Survey

share in the country. **New Jersey**, where more than **11% of commuters travel to work by transit**, is a distant second, followed by Massachusetts, Illinois, and Maryland (only NY, NJ, and MA registered transit modal shares of more than 10%).

The other side of the transit findings is that roughly the same percentage of workers are traveling by car, truck, or van in NY and NJ as in 1990, but **driving gained** a 3% modal share **in CT** (and in most other states). Carpooling declined and drive-alone commuting increased nationwide and in metro region states.

Average commuting times were computed as 24.3 minutes in the U.S., 24 minutes in Connecticut, 27.9 minutes in New Jersey, and 31 minutes in New York, the longest average commute in the nation. Whether longer commute times are attributable to the high level of road congestion in our region or higher transit use is debatable. States with lower transit use like California and Georgia also had long average commutes, both at 26.7 minutes. However, other states with high transit use tended also to have longer average commuting times, with Illinois at 27 minutes, Maryland at 29.2, and Massachusetts at 26.1.



The supplementary census suggests that **walking's national mode share declined** by roughly 30% over the last decade, dropping from 4% in 1990 to 2.8%. In New York the decline was less steep, from 7% to 5.5%. However, **bicycling increased** as a modal share by 30% in New York (from .3% to .4%) and 25% nationally (from .4% to .5%).

Experts have **cautioned against relying too heavily on the census** for data on bicycling and walking. The survey is given in March, when the weather in much of the country is not conducive to either mode. Also, the census asks for an individual's "primary" commuting mode, meaning commuters who travel two times a week by foot or bike or makes part of her trip by either would not describe herself as a walker or cyclist. Similar issues may also exist in counting transit commuters.

Port Authority Ramps Up High-Speed Tolls

Closely monitoring the uproar against toll plaza congestion on the Garden State Parkway, the Port Authority announced last week that it will begin installing **high-speed toll collection** within two years. The agency's previous estimate for was three to four years (*MTR* #313). Because of the high rate of drivers paying electronically, the Palisades Interstate Parkway connector to the George Washington Bridge and the Outerbridge Crossing plaza will be the first renovated.

The Port Authority said it will also consider raising its **E-ZPass-only lane speed limits** from 5 to 15 mph, following the limit that Governor DiFrancesco says will be set for the Garden State Parkway (*MTR* #329).

DiFrancesco OKs Newark Airport Train Tax

Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco told the *Star-Ledger* through a spokesperson last Tuesday that the fare structure for the Newark Airport train station set by the Port Authority and NJTransit is "necessary and fair." The agreement between the agencies stipulates a \$6.95 one-way trip from Newark Penn Station to the airport and upwards of **\$11 one-way from NY Penn Station** and the Trenton area. These fares are \$5 to \$7 more expensive than similar distances elsewhere on the NJTransit (*MTR* #327). DiFrancesco refused to use his power to veto the minutes of the July 26th Port Authority meeting at which the agreement was approved to lobby for any lowering of the fares.

Transit advocates say **the ticket prices are exorbitant** and warned that the high cost will make the transit service **less affordable than driving** to the airport for many travelers, reducing the impact the new station could have in cutting down on airport traffic congestion. The surcharges amount to a tax on transit riders because drivers who park at Newark Airport will continue to use the monorail for free.

The Port Authority is apparently planning to follow the same strategy in designing fares for the **Jamaica to JFK AirTrain**. In a presentation to the metro area chapter of the American Planning Association last year, an agency representative suggested that transit riders embarking at the Howard Beach subway station will pay the full fare for the train ride to airport terminals, while patrons of the Howard Beach parking lot will not be charged for the same trip.

NY Assembly Takes Wrong Turn

In early August, the New York State Assembly approved an amendment to the state traffic law that would allow drivers to make **right turns on red in Staten Island**.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Staten Island Borough President Guy Molinari have condemned the bill, saying it will only increase traffic accidents. Cyclist and pedestrian advocates have lined up with the mayor and borough president, and wrote to the Governor last week to **urge a veto** of the legislation.

Although motorists will be required to stop at red lights before proceeding, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data says **50% of all motorists fail to stop** in right-on-red situations. Such a scenario puts bicyclists and walkers, especially elderly pedestrians, at risk. A one-borough rule will also promote confusion in the rest of the New York City as motorists fail to adapt to different sets of rules for different areas.

Supporters of the bill believe right turns on red will relieve traffic congestion on Staten Island. They seem

to disregard the fact that the City DOT already allows such turns at 127 of 414, or 31% of signalized Staten Island intersections. The other intersections have been deemed unsafe to allow such a turn.

Staten Island B.P. Hopefuls Talk Roads, Right on Red

Last Tuesday, the *Staten Island Advance* managed to bring together Assemblyman **Robert Straniere** and Deputy Borough President **James Molinaro** — rivals for the Republican nomination in the race for S.I. borough president — for a discussion and exchange of views.

The paper's coverage of the session included a number of traffic and transportation policy issues. The candidates argued about whether or not opening **new roads through the closed Fresh Kills dump** would handle a high enough volume of traffic and be environmentally safe for drivers (Molinaro is in favor, Straniere is more skeptical).

Straniere said he would call for a one-year **moratorium on residential development** on the island, and a tax credit for restoring or preserving existing homes. Molinaro said such a pronouncement would be empty, because developers can build if they want to within existing zoning codes.

Straniere also said he opposes city plans to widen Rockland Avenue, but wants the state to **add lanes to the Staten Island Expressway**. He cited his fight for South Shore NYC Transit express bus service and called for better security on the Staten Island Railway. Straniere said he supported right-on-red legalization for the borough (and voted for it in Albany).

Molinaro said he backs the widening of Rockland Avenue but is **"cautious" about right-on-red**.

The Democratic candidate in the borough president race is City Council member Jerome O'Donovan. O'Donovan has opposed the Port Authority plan to "twin" the Goethals Bridge and supports right-on-red legalization. In 1997, O'Donovan signed a "statement of principles" with other officials and civic groups that urged the NY State DOT to **find means other than road widening** to meet congestion problems on the S.I. E (MTR #154), and stated: "A 'solution' that promotes an increase in either automobile or truck traffic on the Staten Island Expressway or other Staten Island roadways is unacceptable."

[The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site](#)

⇒ New pages on the NYC mayoral and NJ gubernatorial races — MTR coverage and links to candidate transportation positions.

www.tstc.org

Brooklyn: Plan is Tame, Traffic Wild

In 1998, when the NYC DOT started the "Downtown Brooklyn Area-wide Traffic Calming Project," a \$6 million project funded largely by federal anti-pollution grants, advocates hoped it would be a watershed in how NYC residents affect local traffic problems (MTR #179). This week the agency announced a **disappointingly modest** set of traffic changes for the area.

The agency will widen sidewalks and traffic islands and increase walk times at about 11 intersections. It will also add parking lanes along Atlantic Ave. and Clinton St. and re-synchronize lights on Dekalb Ave.. Commissioner Iris Weinshall said **if these measures work**, they would be replicated in other locations.

But the steps to be taken are **far from new or innovative**, making city assertions of an "experiment" or test ring hollow. Many other traffic calming techniques are available to traffic planners, but the city DOT's commitment to traffic calming in recent years has been tepid at best. The city declined to change travel directions on any streets or reduce travel lanes on key arteries.

Comments by **Transportation Alternatives** in news reports last week said the plan would do little to discourage the huge number of motorists driving to and through Downtown Brooklyn — the area's fundamental transportation problem.

Plan for Second Fairfield RR Station Finalized

The *Associated Press* reported last week that the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the Town of Fairfield and Black Rock Realty of Stamford have finalized an agreement that will include the construction of a new rail station in Fairfield, the first **new stop on the New Haven Line** in decades. The agreement, pending for a number of years, is a part of Black Rock's \$250 million **redevelopment of an abandoned industrial site** into a 1.3 million sq. ft. office, hotel and restaurant complex. The new Metro-North station will be built on the site and paid for with \$16 million in state funds and up to \$12 million from municipal bonds. Black Rock will construct a 1,200 space parking structure for the station.

Fairfield's push for a new rail station was initiated by the parking crunch at the downtown station — the waiting list for a space there is greater than 1,500. Town officials felt that adding more parking at the existing train station would have created an intolerable amount of congestion on downtown streets. Still, although the Black Rock development is expected to create 5,000 new, transit-accessible jobs, it is **unclear if it will reduce congestion** on I-95 or ease the overall parking crunch, as transportation officials hope. The site itself will presumably have additional, non-station related parking and new traffic will be

created as drivers now jockeying for spaces at the existing station head to the new one.

Elsewhere, ConnDOT has a new Shore Line East station slated for Branford and a new Metro-North

Which Way for Inter-City Travel ?

The *NY Times* reported last week on Europeans' preference for **fast trains over air travel** for trips of three hours or less. High-speed rail service has eliminated or severely curtailed airline service on a number of major routes, such as Paris-Lyon, Paris-Brussels and Frankfurt-Hannover. The paper also described the increasing synergies between passenger railroads and airlines in Europe, where rail services increasingly act as feeders to international air hubs.

In the U.S. the absence of good, frequent inter-city rail service in most of the country means a great many trips of **just a few hundred miles** are made by air or on the highway. And Amtrak has only very limited integrated ticketing arrangements with airlines.

In July, New York **Senator Charles Schumer** told the *Daily News* that the **key to relieving chronic congestion at LaGuardia Airport** was passage by Congress of the proposed \$12 billion **high speed rail act** (MTR #304). One-quarter of flights from LaGuardia go to Washington or Boston — frequent high speed rail service in the Northeast Corridor could reduce this burden, and help ease LaGuardia delays that spill into the rest of the U.S. air traffic system, according to Schumer.

Amtrak recently added more Acela Express trains to Northeast Corridor service. It said it had **sold 70,000 tickets** for the high-speed service in July. The trains are generally scheduled to run three and a half hours between NYC and Boston and two hours, forty-five minutes between NYC and Washington, D.C. The Washington-Boston route still features a plethora of antiquated features and other problems that will continue to limit train speeds in the absence of more rounds of major capital investment.

Ironically, a recent **Empire State Passenger Association** newsletter says Schumer is in part responsible for **Amtrak's loss of market share** to air travel in western NY State. ESPA wrote that Schumer pressed **JetBlue Airways** to introduce discount air fares between JFK and Buffalo, Syracuse and Rochester airports. The flights generally beat Amtrak prices. In the last 18 months, Amtrak ridership in western NY State "has fallen dramatically" according to the group. ESPA calls on Amtrak and NY State to step up its upstate marketing, reduce fares to recapture market share and proceed with its program to reduce train running times in the Empire Corridor.

station for either West Haven or Orange (MTR #304).

Station parking is in high demand all along the New Haven Line. ConnDOT is directing \$23 million to a 1,200 parking space expansion at the Stamford Intermodal Station and spent \$16 million building a new 900 car station lot in Bridgeport that opened last year. A new garage of roughly the same size is programmed for New Haven. Darien and Norwalk have also asked the state to consider added parking at their stations. ConnDOT and shore towns should look into **feeder transit services**, more transit-oriented development strategies and better pedestrian and cycling environments around stations in order to **maximize non-auto access** to commuter rail service.

CALENDAR

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.), Manhattan, 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, Finance, and Administration Committee Meeting, One World Trade Center. 212-938-3305 or amiles-cole@gw.state.ny.us

September 26-29 TrailLink 2001 trails and greenways conference, St. Louis. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. 202-331-9696, www.railtrails.org.

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

Check www.tstc.org for more calendar items

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MTR#330 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