

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Air Shutdown, Fear, Improve Rail Prospects

Washington appears to be discussing the future of inter-city passenger rail service more intently since issues of **airline security** and the **lack of options** to highway and air travel have come to the fore.

Amtrak's ridership jumped 60% the week of the attack, when most of the nation's air travel was shut down, according to the *Wall St. Journal*. As air travel was resuming, Amtrak's overall ridership in the seven days starting Sept. 12 remained about 17% above normal, according to the railroad.

There was some effort last week to include provisions for rail security and funding in the **airline compensation** legislation debated and approved by Congress. That effort failed, but observers say sentiment favoring a new funding program for high speed rail transportation is strong right now.

A \$12 billion high speed rail funding bill came close to passage last year. Prior to Sept. 11, Don Young, Chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, was at work on different high speed rail legislation. Rather than providing federal funds directly to Amtrak, Young's bill, "Ride-21," would offer over **\$70 billion** in federal **loan guarantees** and **tax exempt bonding** authority for states to invest in high-speed rail projects. Young's arguments cite Amtrak estimates that more than \$12 billion is needed to develop a significant set of quality rail projects. But they avoid identifying Amtrak as the inevitable operator. Many Amtrak critics, and some rail advocates, are concerned that problems within Amtrak's corporate culture will prevent the emergence of world-class rail service. Amtrak says it is operating under the incompatible mandates of running a national rail system and turning a profit, and that Congress has never adequately funded its infrastructure and service.

Some believe the current crisis will lead Congress to discard its requirement that Amtrak achieve operating self-sufficiency by next year.

If greater support for rail is sustained, the challenge for legislators will be to craft a plan with funds for sizeable rail investments that avoids the coordination problem of making states primarily responsible for long-distance rail and addresses Amtrak's continuing service weaknesses through institutional reform or competition.

Attack's Aftermath: Impacts and Opportunities

The attack on the World Trade Center towers on September 11th also wreaked short- and long-term disruption on the region's transportation system. Recovery operations continue to limit access to lower Manhattan, with many other restrictions on travel in place for cars and trucks. The MTA has suggested that damage to the subway tunnel will take the 1 & 9 line out of service south of Chambers Street for many months, if not years. The PATH World Trade Center station and tunnels, previously used by 70,000 riders daily, will require even more extensive reconstruction.

Although born out of crisis, many temporary policies that encourage mass transit use, cycling, and walking could also **address ordinary problems of roadway gridlock and transit crowding** over the longer term. The *Daily News* urged political leaders and transportation officials last week to build on a renewed public desire for robust transport options, editorializing that "more than ever, more [commuters] are willing to consider alternatives to their cars. Attractive alternatives must be offered. **This is mass transit's moment. Seize it.**"

Some reforms now in place should be considered for more permanent status. At the very least, their impacts on the movement of people and goods into and within New York City's business districts should be measured and studied.

Less Room, Fewer Drivers?

Despite reports of 90-minute traffic delays at the **Lincoln Tunnel** last week in New York City and New Jersey daily newspapers, Port Authority of NY & NJ vehicle counts show that **roughly 9,000 fewer vehicles** used that crossing on Thursday than on the same day last summer. This 7% reduction is remarkable in light of the fact an emergency shutdown barred 98,000 cars and trucks from their normal weekday routes through the Holland Tunnel.

Although vehicle crossing figures from Thursday were not available for the George Washington Bridge or the Staten Island bridges, it appears that thousands, and likely tens of thousands, of drivers either stayed at home, changed commuting patterns, or entered Manhattan by transit or carpool. Backups

experienced at the Lincoln Tunnel cannot be explained by diverted traffic, but are rather likely due to police searches and by driver confusion and traffic constraints caused by the closure of the lower West Side Highway, streets around the PA bus terminal and other Manhattan avenues, streets and highways. The intriguing finding should lead transportation planners to analyze Port Authority, MTA, and the NY Thruway Authority toll crossing numbers from last week and coming weeks to better understand the effect of the closures.

If true, the fact that fewer people now drive into Manhattan would be only the latest example of the theory that cutting back on the amount of lane or road space available to cars and trucks actually reduces traffic. (The inverse of this maxim is that the more lanes and roadways constructed, the more people will drive.) A 1998 study of 60 cases of road and bridge closures in London by the Department of Transport found that on average 20% of previous vehicle traffic vanished after the closure (*MTR* #163). In San Francisco, after a 1996 earthquake forced the closure of the Central Freeway, CalTrans officials tracked a decrease in rush hour traffic along several major alternative corridors (*MTR* #101). Any work along these lines for NYC today would have to attempt to take account of job and other economic disruptions caused by the Sept. 11 crisis.

Rapid Buses for Staten Island, New Jersey

Emergency measures immediately created a bus rapid transit corridor through Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Manhattan that before existed only in transit planners' dreams. NYC Transit express buses share an **exclusive right-of-way** with emergency vehicles in one eastbound lane from the beginning of the Staten Island Expressway at the Goethals Bridge over the Verrazano Bridge, along the Gowanus Expressway HOV lane, through the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel and up the FDR Drive to Houston Street. This route is normally the least preferred by Staten Island commuters because express buses are regularly stuck in SIE stop-and-go traffic and delayed on the clogged Gowanus HOV lane, which is open to cars with two or more passengers. Under the new rules last week, **bus drivers reported "flying" into Manhattan** at speeds that one transit official told the *SI Advance* reduced trip times by as much as **45 minutes**.

On the New Jersey side, the Port Authority opened

Transit Business Left Unfinished in Albany

In its flurry of activity last week, which newspapers characterized as the effective end of the protracted stand-off over the **2001 NY State budget**, the NY Legislature did not address several outstanding mass transit funding issues.

First, the reductions in state transit aid to a variety of agencies around NY State resulting from the **"bare bones" budget** the Legislature passed this summer still stand. Long Island Bus, for instance, is about **\$6 million in the hole** in terms of state aid. Other agencies are likely in similar straits.

Similarly, the "2000-2004" **MTA capital program** remains in limbo, without legislative approval. The absence of the approved plan is delaying issuance of MTA bonds, and could impact federal consideration of major projects like the LIRR-Grand Central connection and the Second Avenue Subway. The capital program may in fact need to be amended to include reconstruction of the **destroyed 1/9 train subway tunnel**, which could provide an impetus to get the plan approved and nailed down.

Some have hopes that the Governor Pataki and the Legislature will take action on these issues after NY's compressed election season. Albany will certainly be hearing from stretched agencies and concerned riders by then.

the Manhattan-bound **Lincoln Tunnel bus-only lane** one-half hour earlier than usual, at 5:45 a.m., and are reportedly considering greater expansion if necessary. The agency expects to open the Holland Tunnel to transit buses and emergency vehicles as early as Monday morning, offering another rapid transit route to commuters who leave cars at home.

The Tri-State Campaign has urged the NY State DOT to study the bus-only operation on the Gowanus, with a view toward increasing the **HOV lane's access standard** permanently. The Campaign has also urged the Port Authority to impose some **HOV restrictions** on passengers cars using the Lincoln Tunnel, to further meter the traffic clogging Manhattan.

Ferries Pick Up Riders, Prominence

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, private ferries operating across the Hudson River provided emergency evacuation from lower Manhattan and, before rail and bus service resumed that evening, were one of the few means home to New Jersey for stranded commuters. As Wall Street area businesses re-opened last week, New York City and New Jersey transportation agencies and commuters have looked to ferries to fill **PATH service gaps** and as an alternative to car commuting.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign on-line:

www.tstc.org

Daily ridership on **NY Waterway**, the largest cross-Hudson carrier, **increased last week by more than 50%**, from 34,000 passengers to over 50,000. The company's re-routed downtown service between Hoboken and Pier 11 operated at 100% capacity during the morning and evening rush hours, while normal service to and from Weehawken and northern Hoboken and Pier 78 in Midtown was also crowded. Private operations between Monmouth County and lower Manhattan also saw big passenger increases, according to the *Star-Ledger*. NJTransit will offer ferry service Monday by Liberty Water Taxi between **Liberty State Park** and Pier 11 to the 5,500 riders of private and NJT express buses that usually run in the Holland Tunnel. No commuters arriving by private car will be allowed to board.

For Brooklyn commuters, a free ferry service offered by the NYC DOT between 58th Street in Bay Ridge to the Whitehall Ferry Terminal during the morning and evening rush hours served over 1,000 commuters daily last week. For Manhattan commuters, NY Waterway will begin service Monday **up and down the East River** with stops at 90th St., 34th St. and Pier 11.

Cross-Hudson and East River ferries will surely continue to be a backbone of transit commuting to and from lower Manhattan for coming years while rail connections are reconstructed. A focus on bolstering and expanding ferry transport would also help ease crowding on **NJ Transit commuter rail** into

Whither NYC's Big Projects?

Few are saying yet whether last week's terror attack on the World Trade Center will make it more or less likely that NYC will get the **federal and state aid** it needs for long term projects like the **2nd Avenue subway**. On the plus side, the rest of the United States seems to have dropped the attitude that New York City is on a different planet, and has demonstrated clear, strong support and sympathy in the aftermath of the attack. City Council Speaker and mayoral candidate Peter Vallone told the *NY Times* that an influx of federal aid presented opportunities "to rebuild New York." On the other hand, the job of **rebuilding lower Manhattan** — including subway and PATH tunnels — will have a strong pull on official, public and budgetary attention, from City Hall to Washington.

Nonetheless, most **mayoral candidates** remained firm on the need for the Second Ave. project. In interviews with the *NY Times*, reported last Thursday, every candidate except Michael Bloomberg said proceeding with the Second Avenue line is essential. Bloomberg said he supported the project but told the paper it would be harder to get it done in the foreseeable future.

Manhattan. NJ trains were crowded prior to the catastrophe, but some now feature "**#6 train conditions**," in the words of one commuter.

The redesign of Penn Station platforms needed to allow NJTransit to add cars to existing trains and the long-desired second Hudson River tunnel that would allow the agency to offer more train service are unlikely to be completed in less than a decade.

Cycling Gains Respect, Sees Some Discrimination

When the Williamsburg, Manhattan, and Brooklyn Bridges remained closed to passenger cars and commercial trucks for the week following the World Trade Center attacks, the city moved quickly to re-open them to cyclists and pedestrians. With some subway lines not running between Brooklyn and Manhattan and many skipping stops, cycling became the most reliable and speedy option for many NYC residents. Based on counts on bridges and streets, **Transportation Alternatives** estimates that **daily cyclists in the city have doubled** from 100,000 to 200,000 over the past two weeks. Last week, T.A. asked Mayor Giuliani, the MTA, and newspapers to mention cycling as an important alternative to driving into the city and to crowded rush hour transit.

Long-time and new cyclists were not welcomed as warmly in other areas of NYC and the region. The NY State Bridge Authority closed its five Hudson River bridges (between Bear Mountain and Albany) to cyclists and pedestrians from Sept. 12th to 17th, citing security concerns, although the crossings remained open to cars and trucks. In Manhattan, the Hudson River greenway — the U.S.' busiest bikeway — was closed to cyclists between 56th and 44th Streets last week. The NYPD had located a gathering site for families of attack victims on the path at 55th St. The FBI refused cyclists access to the path below there, though cars drive undisturbed on the adjacent Route 9A. Like 9A, the greenway is closed between Battery Park and Canal St.

Emergency Creates Foot-Only Zone Downtown

While the still-rising smoke and piles of rubble on the western side of Lower Manhattan testify to the unfolding tragedy of September 11th, the eastern side provides a glimpse of what a rebuilt downtown could be. Due to the ban on all non-emergency vehicular traffic south of Canal Street, the streets north, south, and east of the "Secured Area" (bordered by Chambers Street and Broadway) have become a haven for pedestrians.

Downtown Manhattan might look to **London's financial district** for guidance. Following a number of street-level terrorist bombings there, city officials **pedestrianized a group of streets**. The result was greater security and an improved quality of life for workers in the district.

Port Authority Reaffirms Capital Program

At their first board meeting since the Sept. 11th attacks left their headquarters in ruin, Port Authority commissioners approved a resolution recommitting the agency to its 5 year, \$9.5 billion capital investment slate, **directing staff to resume work** delivering components of the program as quickly as possible. However, in comments to the *Star-Ledger*, PA chief planner Chris Ward admitted the attacks could not help but impact implementation of the program. But he suggested the slowing economy would hold more significant sway over PA projects.

A report prepared for Congress described by the *NY Times* tallies the total cost of the damage to the agency's transportation systems in repair cost and lost revenue at \$1.3 billion, with \$850 million of this for reconstruction of the PATH station. Lost revenue from Hudson River crossing closures, the PA bus terminal, PATH, and ports in the days after the attack was set at roughly \$125 million, with more lost from the continuing Holland Tunnel closure. The cost of better security at Newark, LaGuardia, and JFK airports, the NYC Harbor ports, and the Hudson River crossings is estimated at \$1.1 billion.

The **Port Authority is unlikely to bear the majority of these costs.** The agency reports a \$1.5 billion insurance policy against lost revenue and a \$650 million liability policy for non-airport incidents. The feds are expected to allot some of the recent \$20 billion appropriation to the PA.

Contacting Transportation Agencies

Displaced agencies have relocated and are back to work.

Port Authority of New York & New Jersey

A new personnel telephone directory is in development.
Public/Media Inquiries: 201-795-2197, 2241, or 2506
Traffic-related Inquiries: 800-221-9903
Customer Service: 201-239-0070

TransitCenter

E-mail is the most effective means of reaching TransitCenter staff. A replacement central business number is expected soon. In the meantime, inquiries can be directed to the *TransitChek service line:* 1-800-945-CHEK (2435)

New York Metropolitan Transportation Council

NYMTC is securing temporary space in Long Island City, Queens. Callers can leave messages for staff at a *temporary number at the NYS DOT office:* 718-482-4559

New York City Department of Transportation

Although structurally sound, 40 Worth Street stands in the Secured Area. Much of the NYC DOT staff has relocated to Long Island City. In some cases, old numbers have been re-routed.

Hudson-Bergen Light Rail In New Role

Beyond changes in available transport services and infrastructure, regional commuting patterns themselves are also shifting as corporations that lost office space sign leases in New Jersey or relocate within New York City. Their employees will test the resources of the reverse commute, from Manhattan to the boroughs and NYC to the suburbs.

Nowhere is this new reality more clear than on the nearly two-year-old Hudson-Bergen Light Rail. HBLR daily ridership, which hovered at or above 10,000 last month, **has jumped to 20,000 riders** over the last twelve days. NJTransit personnel speculate the increase can be attributed to new passengers from Manhattan or Hoboken transferring at the Pavonia/Newport PATH station to the light rail, **bound for Exchange Place** and other stops.

The spike in passengers was so sharp and sudden that NJTransit had difficulty providing enough ticket machines and staff for efficient purchase and collection of the \$1.50 fare. **Fares were waived** during rush hours frequently last week.

CALENDAR

September 25, 6-8pm Auto-Free New York meeting: **CANCELLED**; look for future meetings in a new location, 212-475-3394.

September 26, 1-4; 7-10pm Garden State Parkway Public Hearing on the widening and rehabilitation of the Driscoll Bridge over the Raritan River, 1001 Fire Academy Drive, Sayreville, NJ, 732-442-8600, x 6500

October 3 10am. Garden State Parkway Public Hearing on discount for E-ZPass, elimination of tokens, congestion pricing; Reception Center near PNC Bank Arts Center, exit 116. NJ Highway Authority, 732-442-8600, x 6500

October 7-10 Planning and Zoning Conference, Saratoga Springs. NY Planning Federation. \$ 800-366-6973.

October 12-14 2001 Northeast Regional Conservation Committee Conservation Summit, workshops on sprawl, transportation, and energy, Fairview Lake YMCA Camps, Newton, NJ ?'s Emma McGregor-Mento, 212-791-9707

October 16 Environmental Justice and Alternative Fuels Summit. City College, Manhattan. 303-275-4321, www.ccities.doe.gov/EJ_AltFuel.html

Find additional calendar items at www.tstc.org