

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### NYC Cracks Gridlock With Solo Driving Ban

NYC Mayor Rudolph Giuliani announced yesterday that last week's rules restricting single-occupant motor vehicles from crossing bridges and tunnels into the Manhattan central business district would remain in place for "the foreseeable future." The mayor indicated this direction at a press conference late Friday, saying, "[The restriction] appears as if it had a **significant impact on traffic on Queens Boulevard and other places.**" He apparently based his decision on aerial reconnaissance of Manhattan and borough traffic by staff and on vehicle crossing counts. The solo

driver prohibition applies to the Brooklyn, Manhattan, Williamsburg, and Queensboro (59th Street) Bridges, the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, and the Lincoln Tunnel between 6 a.m. and noon on weekdays.

Mayor Giuliani told the *NY Post* that there were **38% fewer trips across the Queensboro Bridge** on Friday morning than on mornings prior to the single driver ban, resulting in a much shorter crossing delay and less traffic disruption in Queens. The **Manhattan Bridge also saw 30% fewer trips.** Observers reported cars and trucks backed up on Queens Boulevard and Flatbush Ave. in Brooklyn for 3-4 miles leading up to the two bridges on both Monday and Tuesday last week. According to the Port Authority, Lincoln Tunnel trips between 6-10 a.m. Friday were down about 40% below normal, and 50% lower than volumes last Monday and Tuesday.

Some suggest that reduced traffic was a result of car commuters staying home on Friday, extending the Yom Kippur holiday due to widespread publicity about the ban. Today is therefore likely to be viewed as yet another test of the carpool rule.

NYPD traffic patrols estimate that **only 4%** of Manhattan-bound cars **were turned away** for violating the carpool requirement, meaning the vast majority of drivers adhered. Also, while new park & ride lots at Shea Stadium, Giants Stadium, the Vince Lombardi rest stop and the PNC Arts Center had space to spare, transit — especially PATH and NJ-Transit trains — saw a substantial jump in passengers, exacerbating already difficult crowding.

Recently, Mayor Giuliani pushed back the projected duration of the World Trade Center site clean-up and recovery effort from 6 months to 1 year. That could continue to impact access to the the Brooklyn-Battery and Holland tunnels, and significant highway and street capacity in Manhattan is likely to be out of action for a lengthy period as well (the Holland Tunnel opened to New Jersey-bound non-commercial traffic on Friday afternoon). New York City and New Jersey officials say they will closely monitor the effects of the carpooling requirement next week and beyond, predicting that commuting patterns will continue to shift as drivers adjust



#### World War II Poster Promoting Carpooling

In the early 1940s, the goal was fuel and materials conservation for the war effort. Today, the scarce resource is Manhattan street space.

## Manhattan Carpool Rule Benefits Many, Inconveniences Few

News coverage of Mayor Giuliani's emergency ban on single-occupant vehicles continued to bewail the plight of the small minority of solo drivers, without acknowledging **the benefit to the far larger pool** who are enjoying improved traffic flow.

Excluding vehicles with commercial plates, fewer than 100,000 solo car drivers ordinarily commute into Manhattan on the eight affected crossings during 6 a.m. - 12 noon, according to estimates of pre-Sept. 11 travel patterns by transportation analyst Charles Komanoff. That's **only 1% of all commuting in the region**, and a mere 5% of CBD-bound travelers. Yet many news reports implicitly treat discommoded solo drivers as a sizeable group, **or even the mainstream** of New York commuters.

Even excluding rail transit, single-occupant cars move fewer than a third of highway commuters, but they fill up more than half of Manhattan-bound morning traffic. In other words, a solo-driving minority is taking up a majority of road space.

Writing in today's (Oct. 1) *Newsday*, Komanoff noted that "The resulting congestion ensnares everyone from car-poolers and bus riders to the solo drivers themselves. Vans carrying tradespeople and trucks with goods the city needs to keep its economy going have been especially hard hit," he noted.

"Think of all eight crossings into Manhattan as a 20-lane highway," Komanoff wrote. "Single-occupant vehicles, accounting for 53 percent of traffic, occupy 11 lanes but they deliver only 30 percent of commuters — just six lanes' worth."

The five wasted lanes are the equivalent of closing both the Queens Midtown Tunnel and the Brooklyn Bridge. Radio traffic reports call it "congestion," Komanoff noted, but it's really just inefficiency.

Komanoff's piece called on Giuliani — and the next mayor — to keep the SOV ban while expanding off-peak transit service, providing computer-assisted carpooling, and building new strategic rail lines and connectors such as the Second Avenue Subway and an East-Side terminal for the Long Island Rail Road. He also urged the next mayor to start the transition to variable, non-stop tolling on all city bridges, tunnels and highways.

and new options are made available.

## Driver, Trucking and Transit Groups Support Manhattan Carpools

After Mayor Giuliani announced he was considering the imposition of a ban on solo drivers on crossings into lower Manhattan early last week, a wide variety of groups and individuals rapidly lined up behind the proposal. On Wednesday, **five former NYC Transportation Commissioners** and the Regional Plan Association, Transportation Alternatives, Straphangers Campaign and the Tri-State Campaign released a joint statement strongly supporting the carpooling requirements.

The statement read in part, "We need to keep our city moving in this time of crisis. New York simply cannot afford the massive gridlock that has been plaguing our area...Fewer cars attempting to enter the city means less delay for everyone."

"Many thousands of metropolitan-area motorists have put flags on their cars to show their concern for the future of our city and nation. Now they must **do their part by putting passengers in their cars** as a way to reduce traffic, enhance our safety and support our economic stability."

Because of paralyzing gridlock, "we have no choice" but to adopt measures like the Manhattan carpool rule, Lee Sander told assembled reporters. Sander was city transportation commissioner early in Mayor Giuliani's administration.

Motorist advocates, including the NJ AAA and the New York Motorist Association, also agree that a temporary ban as an appropriate response to the traffic crisis facing New York City. Both the New Jersey and New York Motor Truck Association have indicated their belief that NYC's new traffic policy should aid their members in making more timely deliveries in and around Manhattan.

## Editorial Boards Back Driving Limits

Last week the *Daily News* editorial page intoned that, "Tough times demand tough measures," adding that "anyone who can train, bus, or ferry their way into town" should "consider it your civic duty to do so." A *NY Times* editorial agreed, stating, "The need to scrutinize all trucks coming into New York must take precedence over drivers' convenience" and that "New Yorkers should be willing to endure the ban on lone-rider cars for the foreseeable future."

Both newspapers urged consideration of more permanent reform of how cars enter Manhattan. The *New York Times* noted, "**Limiting car traffic into Manhattan is a good thing in itself** for a city plagued by the automobile-related problems of congestion and pollution."

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

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

- Links to disaster-related transportation information, plans and opinions.
- Transportation platforms of NYC mayoral candidates.

The *Daily News* has raised the issue of **East River bridge tolls** twice in recent days. "Other ideas previously off the table are back on — most notably the possibility of tolling the four East River bridges. This would reduce city traffic and generate some of the funding for the improved transportation infrastructure that New York needs," said the paper.

### **Downtown Rebuild Will Factor in Transit Plans**

Proposals to better connect lower Manhattan to the region's mass transit system are already being discussed by real estate interests and others concerned with how downtown should be rebuilt. World Financial Center owners told the *NY Post* last week they are interested in seeing the downtown PATH terminal rebuilt under their property. They also talked of "**depressing**" the **West Side Highway** to extend the Winter Garden to the east, with pedestrian areas linking the World Financial Center, Battery Park City and development on the WTC site.

It's possible some versions of the MTA's look at downtown commuter rail access will be revived. The MTA's "**Lower Manhattan Access Study's**" purpose was to evaluate the potential for downtown commuter rail through-service, upgraded subways or shuttles between commuter terminals (including Brooklyn's Flatbush LIRR station) and downtown.

However, that work has been somewhat eclipsed by public and official interest in building a **Second Avenue subway**, largely because a 2nd Ave. line would relieve crowding on the Lexington line and provide an alternative route from the Grand Central area to lower Manhattan. It would help link downtown to the broader region even better if the project includes a new tunnel between lower Manhattan and Brooklyn, as envisioned in the Regional Plan Association's 1998 "Metrolink" plan (MTR #206).

Additionally, some have mentioned an **expanded downtown PATH service** which would include one stop near the World Trade Center site, with the line continuing east to a terminal linked with the Fulton Street subway complex.

### **Contacting Transportation Agencies**

#### **Port Authority of New York & New Jersey**

Public/Media Inquiries: 201-216-2025

Traffic: 800-221-9903

Customer Service: 201-239-0070

#### **TransitCenter**

E-mail is the most effective means of reaching TransitCenter staff. For now, phone inquiries can be directed to the *TransitChek* service line: 1-800-945-CHEK (2435)

#### **New York Metropolitan Transportation Council**

NYMTC is in temporary space in Long Island City. Callers can leave messages at 718-482-4559.

#### **NYC Department of Transportation**

Much of the NYC DOT staff has relocated to Long Island City. In some cases, old numbers have been re-routed.

### **Rail Funding Bills Proliferate in D.C.**

Amtrak is requesting **\$3.2 billion in emergency funding** to allow it to handle an influx of riders since September 11, boost its ability to provide alternatives to air travel in the Northeast Corridor and increase security. Amtrak ridership is still above normal levels in the aftermath of the attacks and the closure of Washington's National Airport.

Amtrak says it would use the package to fix evacuation and ventilation deficiencies in its **New York City tunnels**, and to upgrade antiquated tunnels near Baltimore and other Northeast Corridor infrastructure problems that slow passenger trains. Funds would also be spent for additional rolling stock, operating costs and policing.

As we reported last week, Washington is also stirring with new **long-term Amtrak financing plans**. Last Friday, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair Don Young formally introduced his "Ride-21" plan as HR 2950. Young's proposal, also sponsored by Rep. Jack Quinn of western NY State, would provide over \$70 billion in loan guarantees and tax exempt bonding authority to states and freight railroads for creation of high-speed passenger rail lines. Democrats in Congress are generally backing HR 2329/S250, the "High Speed Rail Investment Act," which would provide \$12 billion in federal funding to Amtrak. **Senator Harry Reid**, a senior Democrat on the Environment and Public Works Committee, is said to be readying another proposal worth \$37 billion.

Greatly increased support for passenger rail outside of Congress is evident. In two days last week, the *NY Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Washington Post* editorialized on the need for the country to treat rail travel more seriously.

The *Times* said, "For three decades, [Congress] has grudgingly subsidized Amtrak, spending enough money to keep it alive but never enough to build an attractive service...**Congress should create a dedicated rail trust fund** for Amtrak like the funds that pay for highway and aviation infrastructure."

The *Inquirer* wrote, "Policy wonks, Amtrak's faithful riders and millions of Europeans have known something for years: A sound national transportation system has to support passenger rail — just as it supports the car and the airplane...A visionless Congress has been starving this struggling rail service for years. Conservatives have been stuck on the theory that Amtrak - unlike highway travel - should be self-sufficient by 2002."

"Flights that took three hours or less — and that now may take four to five hours with security checks — become less attractive when trains can make the trips in roughly the same amount of time." noted the *Post*.

## Trade Center Debris Removal, Long-Term Waste Plan Could Follow Parallel Tracks

As the NYC Department of Sanitation faces the unprecedented challenge of moving, sorting, and disposing of at least 1 million tons of concrete, metal, and ash from the site of the former World Trade Center towers, **NYC's long-term residential waste export plan shows signs of unraveling.**

Approved by the NYC Council last December, the residential waste plan depends almost entirely on the construction of an enclosed barge unloading facility and rail-transfer station by Browning Ferris Industries (BFI) in Linden in Union County, NJ (*MTR* #296). Under the plan, every borough except for the Bronx, where trash will be transferred directly to rail, would barge waste — up to 10,000 tons per day — from marine transfer sites to the Linden facility.

As of mid-August, the Union County Freeholders had for the second time approved the inclusion of the Linden waste transfer project in the County's solid waste plan, keeping the facility on track to open by 2003. But late last month, the NJ DEP announced it would suspend all consideration of the transfer facility for addition to the County plan and other permits until the NJ Attorney General's office had completed its **grand jury investigation of Linden Mayor John Gregorio** for fraud during negotiations over the station's siting. The Linden City Council could also renegotiate the terms of the community host agreement for the site in light of the Attorney General's findings. Gregorio has been accused of promoting the current lease agreement between BFI and Tremley Point LLC, a company in which his son-in-law is a partner.

These developments increase the likelihood of continued city dependence on trash export trucks unless alternatives to the BFI facility are developed. Under the City's "interim" export arrangements, in full effect since the Fresh Kills landfill closed in March, over 12,000 tons of residential garbage are transported out of the City by trucks every day, requiring 264,000 additional truck trips annually over the region's clogged bridges, tunnels, and roadways (*MTR* #310).

NYC's new need to remove debris from lower Manhattan may spur a partial solution. Every day,

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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the former Fresh Kills landfill receives approximately 10,000 tons of World Trade Center debris. More than 9,000 truck trips via the Brooklyn-Battery and Holland Tunnels and supplementary barges have already delivered over 130,000 tons, but there are perhaps as much as 3 million tons still to remove. The Dept. of Sanitation plans to bury much of the wreckage at Fresh Kills following the Federal investigation, but recyclable metal will be exported.

To avoid a further flood of trucks at this later date, New York and New Jersey officials could work with the Port Authority to construct additional barge-to-rail transfer stations. The Port Authority's quick completion of the **rail-link** between the **Staten Island Arthur Kill lift-bridge** and the **Chemical Coast line** should also become a top priority. Meanwhile, marine transfer stations throughout the city should be retrofit with the capability to containerize garbage, so that NYC has greater flexibility and can utilize an expanded barge-rail network for residential waste export.

## CALENDAR

**October 3** time tba. Public hearing on Garden State Parkway toll changes. PNC Bank Arts Center, Parkway exit 116. NJ Highway Authority, 732-442-8600.

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

**October 11, Noon** Long Island Railroad Commuters Council, monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 10th floor. 212-878-7087.

**October 16** Environmental Justice and Alternative Fuels Summit. City College, Manhattan. 303-275-4321, [www.ccities.doe.gov/EJ\\_AltFuel.html](http://www.ccities.doe.gov/EJ_AltFuel.html)

**October 16, 6-8pm** Auto-Free NY meeting. "Rebuilding NY: Fewer Cars - a More Liveable City." Open forum on AFNY plan. At the Van Alen Inst., 30 W. 22nd St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394.

**October 25-26** Project for Public Spaces Training Session, "How to Turn a Place Around", Manhattan. 212-620-5660

**October 27, 9 a.m.-3:30 pm** "Taming Growth to Save New Jersey." 2001 NJ Environmental Congress. Robeson Campus Center, Rutgers U., 350 Martin Luther King Blvd., Newark. \$ 973-539-7547. [www.anjec.org](http://www.anjec.org)

Check [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org) for more calendar items