

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 337

October 8, 2001

NEWS

Good Marks, New Backing for Manhattan Carpool Rule

Lower vehicle counts on Manhattan-bound bridges and tunnels released by the NYC Dept. of Transportation and Port Authority last week were enough to generate support among city officials and editorial boards for continuing the emergency weekday morning solo-driver ban on crossings south of 63rd Street.

NYC DOT reported that traffic on Monday over the **Queensboro Bridge** between 6am and noon was **34% lower** than an average day prior to September 11th. The agency said traffic was down 27% on the Manhattan Bridge and 12% on the Williamsburg Bridge. Monday traffic was a dramatic 75% lower than normal on the Brooklyn Bridge — a plunge attributed to limited access to and from the span. Morning traffic levels on all affected East River bridges had increased by the week's end, but reductions stemming from the ban remained significant except at the Williamsburg Bridge. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority did not release vehicle numbers for the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, but subjective accounts described lower traffic levels than normal. The *Daily News* said Triborough Bridge delays — where a.m. solo drivers are still allowed — were just 15-20 minutes greater than normal.

The Lincoln Tunnel saw 8,000 fewer vehicles between 6-10am on Monday than on an average weekday — a 42% decrease, equivalent to numbers from the previous Friday. Meanwhile, Manhattan-bound morning traffic at the **George Washington Bridge increased by only 4,000 vehicles**, suggesting that many would-be Lincoln Tunnel drivers got moving earlier, doubled-up, or took transit. In fact, the Port Authority reported 500 more vehicles than usual used the Lincoln Tunnel between 5-6am on Monday and that PATH 33rd St. line morning ridership had jumped by 5,000 riders over the week before. However, park & ride bus commuter lots have not been as popular as expected. NJTransit announced reduced bus service last week from lots off the NJ Turnpike and Garden State Parkway due to lack of demand.

The mayor's office said last week it is evaluating the traffic impact of the carpool requirement on a daily basis, but has set no deadline for lifting it. Through-traveling traffic is still not allowed south of

Canal Street, though much of that area has been opened up to tax and livery drivers as well as to residents with cars and trucks making deliveries.

NJ editorial pages added support to the solo-driver ban last week. In a piece calling for more bi-state transit investment, the *Star Ledger* wrote, "The new [safety] inspections won't end anytime soon, and **lifting the ban** on single-occupancy cars **would make matters worse.**" The *Bergen Record* remarked that the car-pool requirement has "helped to significantly ease traffic tie-ups going into Manhattan in recent days" and urged, "All commuters, whether covered by the mandatory order or not, should do what they can to ease congestion by car-pooling, taking mass transit, or commuting during off hours."

Keeping the Region Moving

Ideas for immediate and medium-term measures to further ease the transportation crunch in the city and the region are being developed from many quarters.

Downtown interests say that it is **absolutely critical to get the downtown PATH tunnel and station operating** as soon as possible. The PATH's existence has forged a symbiotic relationship between residential areas in the northern New Jersey and downtown jobs. Commuters from NJ to lower Manhattan are now facing much longer commutes, even with a very strong performance on the part of ferry operators to fill part of the gap.

NJ Transit trains have seen big ridership increases and severe crowding and parking problems since the disaster and the subsequent implementation of the Manhattan crossings carpool rule. One way to **increase NJ Transit capacity** is to open up more **Penn Station slots** for NJ commuter trains. That might be accomplished by eliminating the lengthy station dwell times typical of many Amtrak trains or by diverting some Long Island Rail Road trains to the Long Island City terminal, where they could be met by ferries destined for lower Manhattan.

Another option is to run additional express bus services from areas near NJ Transit train stations. This might require additional bus-priority or bus-only capacity at the Lincoln Tunnel. North Jersey towns are scrambling for train station parking space and

possibly additional station-jitney services.

To complement the Manhattan carpool rule, NYC and the MTA could increase express bus services

Democratic Run-off:

On Rebuilding New York and Taming Traffic

Vying for the Democratic mayoral nomination over the past two weeks, Mark Green and Fernando Ferrer have articulated views on rebuilding lower Manhattan and addressing new and long-standing deficiencies in the city transportation system.

As mayor, **Mark Green** says he would push for creation of a new state/city emergency reconstruction "super-agency" that would have extraordinary powers and would transcend any turf battles that might impede fast reconstruction in lower Manhattan. Green would attempt to work the Small Business Administration, other federal agencies and state government to get loans and create incentives to keep businesses from moving to the (car-dependent) suburbs. He would designate lower Manhattan as a new type of enterprise or empowerment zone, give businesses staying downtown as-of-right. Green also says the Second Avenue subway and cross-harbor freight tunnel projects should be eligible for additional federal aid as economic stimulus projects.

Green spokespersons told the Tri-State Campaign that Green is interested in evaluating the benefits of the current Manhattan crossings carpool rule, and other anti-congestion measures as part of his near-term transportation priorities. They also said the current situation strongly reinforces the Green campaign's earlier position favoring a reduction in parking permits for city agency employees.

Fernando Ferrer says he will create a "NY Rebuilds Corporation" that will be a "one-stop" source for funding, condemnation authority and land use power. He says such an authority will speed construction downtown. Ferrer has called for the decentralization of finance and related industries, with back office operations distributed to areas like Long Island City, the Bronx' Hub and Staten Island's Stapleton.

Ferrer says some state and federal assistance should be used to improve transit and goods movement. He says the strain on city transportation calls for reimposition of the commuter tax, with revenues dedicated to transit improvements. He also says it is important to keep long-standing capital projects in play, including the Second Ave. subway, the #7 subway extension, possible rail links to lower Manhattan, and the cross-harbor rail freight tunnel. Ferrer thinks some emergency ferry services should be kept in place, and that the city should consider ways to prioritize bus traffic. He says "Making permanent the recent ban on single occupant passenger cars from much of Manhattan should be considered."

from outer boroughs, and move buses through the bridge and tunnel approach traffic with new bus or HOV-3 lanes. The bus lane now operating on the **Gowanus Expressway** and through the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel is a model — Staten Island buses are reaching Manhattan faster than ever. An express rider from Sunnyside called the Campaign this week to say her bus had spent **45 minutes in traffic** trying get on the Queensboro Bridge. Queens crossings like the Midtown Tunnel and the Queensboro would be good bus lane candidates (along with approaches on the L.I.E. and Queens Boulevard) because of significant existing express bus volumes. New services in those corridors could be aimed at reducing bad peak-period crowding on Queens subway lines.

Express buses work best if they are able to move off of arterials and into the core of the central business district without getting bogged down in heavy traffic. Strongly-enforced **Manhattan bus lanes** would assist these movements, help buses bring passengers to and from ferry slips and aid local bus travel.

Additional bus service seems needed to move people in and out of the financial district and for downtown dwellers. The difficult pedestrian environment downtown could be relieved somewhat by opening parking lanes to pedestrians on streets that are still reserved for emergency vehicles only, like Broadway.

Transport Faces Squeeze in Regional Budget Crunch

Dire budgetary predictions emanated from Hartford, Trenton, Albany, and New York City last week, raising concern that **transportation budgets will face tough competition** for funds in coming years. Where surpluses were expected, lowered revenue and higher cost estimates are leading administrations around the region to warn of looming deficits.

The Connecticut Comptroller announced last Monday that the state already faces a projected 2001-2002 deficit of \$91 million. Last week, Governor Rowland put forward a series of spending cuts intended to close the gap. His list includes **shaving \$12 million** from \$49 million **dedicated earlier this year to low-cost transportation projects**. These include construction of additional New Haven Line rail maintenance facilities, more rail station commuter shuttles, and expanded bus routes and service in Fairfield County and the Hartford area. Beyond the creation of a new quasi-governmental forum for long-term transportation planning — the permanent Transportation Strategy Board — the additional funding was the only concrete outcome of a legislative session focused on statewide transportation problems. Almost two-thirds of Rowland's proposed cuts, including the transportation money, would require legislative approval. State Senate Democrat Kevin Sullivan told the *Hartford*

Courant that money for transportation reform should be protected, remarking that “the most important priorities facing the state ought not to be hit first.”

The NJ Office of Legislative Services told the *Trenton Times* last week that revenue projections for the current fiscal year had been reduced by hundreds of millions of dollars before September and were likely to drop even more in coming months. **NJ Transit** released a document prior to the attacks showing the agency would begin **operating at an annual deficit** of \$85 million in fiscal year 2003, growing to \$184 million annually by 2006, and that unmet capital needs over the next five fiscal years for projects already begun equals \$1.3 billion.

New York State Budget Director Carole Stone announced Friday that the state is likely to face a loss of \$1 to \$3 billion in personal and corporate tax revenue over the current fiscal year and as much as twice that in 2002-2003. Warning that state emergency reserve funds stand at just \$2.6 billion, she suggested that there may be **no supplement to the “base-line” budget** approved by the state legislature this summer as a political maneuver. The Legislature is expected to consider additions to the current fiscal budget on October 15th. Such an outcome could be disastrous to the operating budgets of many transit providers across the state (see article at right).

The New York City budget office told the *New York Times* last week that the projected 2003 fiscal year deficit had doubled since the September 11 attacks from \$2 billion to \$4 billion. While the Federal Emergency Management Agency is expected to pay for the more than \$40 billion in property and infrastructure damage and clean-up costs from the events of September 11th, FEMA traditionally does not cover revenue or productivity losses.

**Gulotta Proposes Further L.I. Bus Cuts
— Agency faces double squeeze —**

Nassau county executive Thomas Gulotta’s budget proposal would reduce county support for Long Island Bus operations by **over \$2 million** from last year’s reduced levels. At the same time, the agency is about **\$6 million short in state operating assistance**, due to the elimination of transit funding increases in the “base-line budget” passed earlier this year by the NY State legislature.

A steady stream of county budget cuts has forced Long Island Bus into greater reliance on state funding in recent years. Emergency state funds have been secured by members of Nassau’s delegation in Albany during the past two years, to stave off the **threat of bus service cuts**.

Ironically, throughout the period of county cuts and insecure budgets, the agency has performed remarkably, reaching new ridership peaks each year.

Bleak Season for NY Transit Systems

The “baseline” budget passed by the Legislature eliminated all anticipated additional funding for transit systems in New York State. That budget remains in effect today. If transit systems do not receive any supplemental aid from the Legislature, it could prove catastrophic for the downstate region’s ability to cope with curtailed roadway capacity and huge passenger loads on commuter train, bus and subway systems.

The chart below details **downstate reductions**. Most upstate systems are facing even steeper percentage reductions in operating support.

OPERATING ASSISTANCE	FYE 2001	FYE-Proposed 2002	Baseline Budget	Difference: Baseline vs. Proposed
(thousands)				
MTA	\$990,863	\$1,057,209	\$990,863	-6.28%
MTA Commuter Rail	\$358,872	\$373,529	\$358,872	-3.92%
Rockland County	\$3,181	\$3,000	\$3,181	6.03%
Staten Island Ferry	\$16,154	\$16,154	\$16,154	0.00%
Westchester County	\$25,483	\$23,983	\$23,983	0.00%
Nassau County	\$28,032	\$34,064	\$28,032	-17.71%
Suffolk County	\$7,651	\$10,614	\$7,651	-27.92%
NYCDOT Formula Bus	\$68,314	\$82,849	\$68,314	-17.54%

Source: NY Public Transit Association

Parkway Moves Closer to Variable Tolls

After an uneventful public hearing last week, New Jersey Highway Authority officials said they expected to implement the new **time-varied toll structure** on the Garden State Parkway proposed by Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco. The plan reduces off-peak toll rates for drivers with E-ZPass, and could be in effect by mid-November (see *MTR* #329).

The discounts are intended to motivate more drivers to pay tolls electronically and encourage some already using E-ZPass to drive outside of the rush hour period. E-ZPass users make-up just 48% of all toll payers on the Parkway, while 60% or more drivers on the NJ Turnpike and Port Authority Hudson River crossings pay with E-ZPass. An E-ZPass share of over 60% is seen as the minimum needed to allow the reconfiguration of toll plazas for **high-speed toll collection**, another component of DiFrancesco’s plan.

Under the new structure, tolls for electronic payers would be reduced from 35 cents at each of the Parkway’s 11 barrier toll plazas to 33 cents during

peak traffic hours and 30 cents at other times. To further boost E-ZPass, the Highway Authority would also end the sale of discount tokens on January 1st, though tokens already in circulation would continue to be accepted.

Those testifying at last week's hearing were **unanimously supportive** of the new toll structure and high-speed toll collection. Some, however, raised concerns about the \$12 million revenue loss the discounts will create. The Parkway's maintenance and capital budgets are already under-funded (*MTR* #296). NJ Highway Authority officials continue to look to state legislators and the next Governor to fill this gap, as well as to cover the \$150 million or more cost of the repair and widening of the Driscoll Bridge over the Raritan River.

Big Energy Fight Unlikely This Fall

Member of Congress told news outlets late last week they will prioritize increasing security around energy infrastructure rather than wade through a fractious attempt to pass a comprehensive energy bill.

Some Republican members of Congress have pressed for quick enactment of legislation that would allow more extensive domestic crude oil production. They want to include permission for oil companies to drill in the **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge** in the bill, calling it a **matter of national security** to reduce US dependence on foreign oil production. A bill with these provisions was approved in early August by the House of Representatives (*MTR* #328).

Since the September 11th attack, national environmental groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Friends of the Earth have strengthened calls for **higher fuel efficiency** standards, more investment in public transit and inter-city rail, and support for development patterns that reduce dependence on private cars.

The *NY Times* criticized efforts of pro-drilling advocates to attach the House energy bill to a high priority Defense Dept. authorization last week. "Railroading the idea through without proper hearings defies elementary standards of fairness. There is also **no evidence** that drilling in the [Arctic] refuge will **significantly reduce America's dependence on foreign oil**," said the paper.

Roughly 54% of the almost 20 million barrels of crude oil the United States economy consumes per day is imported. At today's consumption rates, this percentage can only increase because less than 3% of known world reserves are located within U.S. borders. More than 40% of US demand for oil is generated by the need for motor fuel for cars and trucks.

CALENDAR

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.cccities.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 18, Noon Metro-North Commuter Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., 10th floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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

November 1, "Finding safe harbor: Can the Hudson and the port accommodate all the clamor?" NY League of Conservation Voters. Columbia University, Low Library. W. 116 St., Manhattan. 212-361-6350, www.nycef.org

November 29, 8:30-4:30 NY Regional Workshop on Bus Rapid Transit. University Transportation Research Center. City College of NY — Steinman Hall. 140th Street and Convent Ave., Manhattan. 732-932-1700.

Check www.tstc.org for more calendar items

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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The Tri-State Transportation Campaign Web Site

www.tstc.org

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