

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Keeping the Carpool Rule

As the Manhattan parking industry lobbied for its removal (see *MTR* #345), a *Daily News* editorial last week made the case for keeping the Manhattan carpool rule. The requirement says cars using bridges and tunnels that enter Manhattan below 62nd Street from 6 to 10 a.m. on weekdays must have two or more occupants. It was imposed by the mayor to reclaim highways and streets **when widespread gridlock developed in late September**, as the city and region tried to get back to work after the Sept. attack.

In its piece, the *News* argued that city and regional drivers have coped with the regulation, and that Lower Manhattan especially cannot live with **the extra traffic lifting the rule could cause**. It also said that, “with the recession, [parking garages] cannot blame car-pooling alone for their weakening balance sheets.” The *News* cited city data that the rule has reduced traffic entering Manhattan by 15%.

The argument continued the strong editorial support the carpool regulation has enjoyed since Mayor Giuliani implemented it in late September. The *News* and the *New York Times* urged **more permanent reform** of how cars enter Manhattan. The *Times* noted that “Limiting car traffic into Manhattan is **a good thing in itself** for a city plagued by the automobile-related problems of congestion and pollution.”

Last week’s *News* editorial called for the **MTA** to adopt **time-of-day pricing** at its toll bridges and tunnels as part of a longer-term system to manage traffic demand at crossings into Manhattan. It went on to explain the carpool rule’s three months of success: “the city has learned that commuter habits can be changed. Commuters themselves have learned to adjust. It would be a shame to revert to old ways — and traffic-jammed streets — just when **actual and long-lasting benefits are being realized**.”

The paper also urged the city to wait for completion of its study of the carpool rule’s economic impacts before taking any action. The study, commissioned by the NYC Dept. of Transportation, should be finished in about a month.

About 5% of weekday commuting trips destined for the central business district — Manhattan south of 60th Street — are single-occupant cars.

NJ Transit Pushes Lame Duck Fare Hike

New Jersey Transit announced plans last Wednesday for its **first fare hike in ten years**. The agency, whose fiscal problems have been becoming increasingly apparent during the past year, has proposed a 10% fare increase on its commuter rail, bus and Newark subway lines that would take effect in April. The plan would also impose **annual follow-on fare increases** indexed to inflation for each of the next five years. No public hearings or formal input would be triggered by the indexed fare hikes.

New Jersey does not index any other public fee or payment to inflation. New Jersey’s state gas tax is among the lowest in the country.

McGreevey Ducks, But a Fare Hike is a Tax Hike

NJ Transit’s proposal comes just one month before Governor-elect Jim McGreevey takes office. McGreevey would not comment to reporters, but has likely **signed off on its contents and agreed to its timing** in order to deal with a troublesome revenue issue without taking the brunt of public blame.

The public hearing schedule for the fare hike seems designed to suppress visibility and dissent. **Hearings will take place January 2**, the day after a holiday weekend, well before McGreevey takes office.

New Jersey commuters, who already complained of crowded and inadequate service before the events of September 11 added many more riders to the NJ Transit system, currently contribute 43% of NJ Transit operating expenses. The new fare package is a revenue measure only. **No service enhancements are planned**, and some cuts may in fact be imposed. Many riders told newspapers they oppose a fare hike that is not accompanied by service improvements.

In addition to the overall percentage fare increased and the later “indexed” hikes, NJ Transit proposes the following increases to specific fares:

- Elimination of weekday round-trip “excursion” off-peak fares.
- Hiking one way tickets between NY and Newark Penn Stations from \$2.50 to \$3.30.
- Hiking the on-board ticket purchase premium from \$3 to \$5.
- Trimming senior and disabled discounts.

After NJ Transit's announcement, the Tri-State Campaign issued a statement of opposition to the fare hike. The Campaign said the hike was unfair because it asked more from transit riders without offering any relief from crowding or other service problems. The statement also said any fare increase should be part of a more **comprehensive revenue package** to stabilize the fiscal picture for all modes of transportation. A piecemeal approach that hits transit riders the hardest will work against the goals of containing sprawl and reducing roadway congestion.

Even with the proposed fare hike, NJ Transit will need other revenue measures to keep buses and trains rolling and system expansion plans on track. Martin Robins, who authored a Rutgers University report on Transit's structural deficit that was released last month (*MTR 343*), told the *Star-Ledger* that a **fare hike alone cannot resolve NJ Transit's budget issues**. "It's helpful, but it does not solve the problem

Pataki Pledges No NYC Fare Hike in 2002

Governor Pataki announced Thursday that MTA transit fares and bridge tolls will not be raised in 2002, even though the September attacks have added \$531 million to the \$265 million budget gap that the MTA had predicted for next year. The governor's initiative makes good on earlier MTA statements about fares during 2002.

The governor's office told reporters that fare hikes would discourage trips to downtown New York and **pledged financial assistance to the MTA**. The MTA told the *Daily News* that it plans to reduce the gap by \$350 million with insurance payments and cost-cutting measures such as a hiring freeze.

Transit advocates hailed the governor's announcement, but had not seen details of the financing plan or the governor's press release as of Friday. It is unclear whether there is any piece of the package for **smaller transit systems** around the state, many of which are on the verge of cutting service or increasing fares because of state budget shortfalls. New stories did not mention whether the no fare hike policy applied to Nassau County's **Long Island Bus**, for instance, which is nominally an MTA agency but whose financing is handled independently.

New York State **Comptroller H. Carl McCall** released a report in early December indicating that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority may have to **increase NYC subway and bus fares by 50 cents in 2003**. The unusual statement by an official running for the governor's seat underscored the scale and immediacy of the MTA's fiscal plight.

Tom Kelly of the MTA told reporters McCall's statements were premature given the uncertain economic climate, but did not rule out future hikes.

by any stretch of the imagination," he said.

NJ Transit told reporters that the proposed fare increases would raise \$44 million of a \$200 million deficit expected for FY03. Although recent events have led to higher ridership and a need for increased security, NJ Transit's 2003 budget deficit was projected at \$83 million even before Sept. NJ Transit has recently used capital funding for operations.

NJ Transit's **public hearings** on the fare proposal are scheduled for **8 p.m. on January 2** at six locations: the auditorium of the Atlantic County Office Building in Atlantic City, the council room of Freehold Borough Hall in Freehold, the multipurpose room at the Department of Transportation's headquarters in Trenton, the board room at the New Jersey Transit headquarters in Newark, Paramus High School in Paramus, and the lobby of the Walter Rand Transportation Center Terminal in Camden. NJ Transit is accepting written testimony via the internet at transitfares@njtransit.com. Call **973-491-7022** for info on the hearings.

Port Authority Announces PATH Plan

The Port Authority, with Governors Pataki and DiFrancesco, announced last week that it aimed to open a **temporary PATH station** at the World Trade Center site within 24 months. The PA also said it expected to re-open the Exchange Place PATH station, an important transit portal to the Jersey City waterfront office district, within 18 months.

The PA board will also authorize \$10 million to plan a permanent downtown PATH station, and an additional \$10 million to plan World Trade Center site development options. A press release issued by Governor Pataki said the PA board was committed to integrating new PATH facilities with New York City subways, buses and ferry infrastructure. Some planners looking at the reconstruction of lower Manhattan have called for two downtown PATH stations, one serving the World Trade Center/World Financial Center area and one further east, near Wall Street and the Fulton Street subway.

Goethals Twin Project Postponed

Funding shortfalls in the wake of September 11th have led the Port Authority to **postpone construction of the Goethals Bridge twin** and other large capital projects. According to the *Star-Ledger*, although PA operating revenues are at expected levels, the agency's **security costs have doubled** at bridges, tunnels, marine terminals and airports.

The Goethals twin project — the proposed construction of a second highway bridge alongside the I-278 Goethals Bridge — has been an unpopular component of successive Port Authority capital programs. It was included in the five-year, \$9.5 billion spending plan approved last year along with PA

bridge and tunnel toll and PATH fare increases.

The PA's announcement is not a big surprise, since the agency recently announced it would begin **redecking the existing Goethals**. The Port Authority had hoped to postpone the disruptive deck work until the twin was in place. Staten Islanders and some in the Elizabeth area have viewed the project as part of an overall widening plan for I-278 that would bring more cars and trucks through that corridor.

Jeffords Says "TEA-3" Hearings to Begin Soon

Senator James Jeffords of Vermont, chair of the U.S. Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee, announced he would **convene hearings** — perhaps beginning in January — on **successor legislation to the Transportation Equity Act**, or TEA-21.

TEA-21 became law in 1998 and expires in September, 2003. It succeeded 1991's Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which emphasizing flexibility across transportation modes in giving federal transportation aid to states.

Jeffords may be acting early because TEA-21 emerged only after a **nearly two year battle** between different groups of states over how federal transportation spending would be divided. If the economy and tax receipts are weak when new legislation is needed, satisfying states and various transportation industry and policy interests could be very difficult.

Jeffords delivered his statement at a Washington event organized by the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) to mark **ISTEA's 10th anniversary**. The event honored former NY Senator Daniel Moynihan and featured remarks by U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, NY Senator Hillary Clinton, New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial and others.

At the event, STPP released a new book, *10 Years of Progress*, that spotlights transportation policy advances and innovative projects since the passage of ISTEA. Examples cited from our region include congestion pricing systems established by the NJ Turnpike and Port Authority of NY/NJ, the "sustainable development" land use/transportation strategies" being implemented by NY agencies working directly with municipalities, and New Jersey's use of state funds to complement federal spending for bicycle and pedestrian projects. *10 Years of Progress* and information on reauthorizing TEA-21 is available on the internet at www.transact.org.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

NY Seeks Clean Air/Transportation Waiver

NY State is seeking federal legislation waiving the need to demonstrate **conformity** between **transportation projects and clean air plan** from now to 2005. The reasons for the request are destruction of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council's (NYMTC) office on Sept. 11, and the need to expedite reconstruction in lower Manhattan. NYMTC is an inter-agency group that compiles downstate NY's list of transportation projects and publishes its long-range transportation plan, as required by federal law.

The Clean Air Act and federal transportation law require the plan of a polluted region like NYC to demonstrate it will improve, not worsen, air quality.

The waiver the state is seeking would permit **new projects** not presently in the region's approved plan or project list — such as new highway capacity — to move forward without analysis of their regional air pollution impacts. It would also suspend requirements that the region move ahead with **projects designed to offset increasing vehicle-produced air pollution**.

Last week, Environmental Defense, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Tri-State Campaign wrote to NY Senators Schumer and Clinton, urging them to **consider less sweeping measures**. The letter argued that a comprehensive four-year waiver would make it harder for NY State to demonstrate clean air/transportation conformity in 2005, and that the trend in the region toward increasing transportation emissions requires the region and the state to remain vigilant on clean air policy.

The groups suggested NYMTC extend its current project list and transportation plan for two years, and that projects in the plan be **accelerated or delayed** as needed to address transportation needs and continue with emission-offsetting projects. They also urged that construction equipment used on projects during the period of a waiver be as low-emissions as possible, that agencies in the region be required to accelerate purchase of clean fuel buses and trucks after any waiver's expiration and that NYMTC be granted emergency funds to get its clean air modeling and planning capacity up to full speed.

"Rethink LITP 2000" Challenges Big Long Island Road Plan

As the NY State DOT claims high levels of public support for its **Long Island Transportation Plan 2000**, critics have organized "Rethink LITP 2000," a diverse coalition of over 50 civic, religious and environmental groups calling for the plan to be reworked.

LITP 2000 is the DOT's 20-year plan to fight traffic congestion in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. It calls for the addition of 60 miles of new carpool lanes and 130 miles of general highway lanes along Long

Island highways. It is the **largest road building program in New York since the time of Robert Moses** and will significantly worsen sprawl and gridlock on Long Island if it is carried through.

DOT materials claim a huge outreach effort around the plan, but imply universal acceptance of its recommendations and that input falling outside the Department's orthodoxy has been accorded meaningful consideration. In fact, environmental groups universally rejected the plan last year (*MTR #272*), and have unsuccessfully tried to have the DOT consider land use policy innovations that could reduce traffic growth far more sustainably than highway expansion.

Members of the study's technical advisory committee charged two years ago that the process was rigged to promote a prior agenda. One member wrote to the *NY Times* that "'When the time came for suggestions, the Department's observers (they were not members of the committees) would propose their favorite solutions, like widening roads and building more HOV lanes. Their suggestions would be included in the summary, giving them the appearance of having been endorsed by the committee.'"

The growing list of groups endorsing the "Rethink LITP" call now includes the Long Island Council of Churches, the National Council on the Aging and the Joint Civics of the South Shore. It has been organized by the **Long Island Progressive Coalition**. On the internet, visit www.rethinkLITP2000.com.

City Bus Critics Hope for Competitive Bids
Riders of seven privately operated bus services contracted by the NYC DOT for routes in Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx are hopeful that the new City Council will **open their routes to competitive bid**. The franchised services, which complement NYC Transit routes, were supposed to be offered for competitive bid years ago under a requirement in the City Charter. But, a variety of political interests, impasses and excuses have kept city government from honoring this mandate.

Officials told the *Daily News* that they expect the process to move ahead after most City Council seats turn over in January. Riders, who say the city franchised buses offer more erratic service and dirtier buses than NYC Transit, hope a competitive process can improve their transit-riding lot.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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Changing Faces at the Region's Agencies

- At the Port Authority, former NJ State Senator Jack Sinagra is the new board chair. He succeeds Lewis Eisenberg, who is taking a seat on the board of the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Authority. Eisenberg remains on the PA board as well.
- Joseph J. Seymour will succeed Neil D. Levin, who died on September 11, as executive director of the Port Authority. Mr. Seymour is the chairman and chief executive of the NY Power Authority.
- Marc Shaw, executive director of the MTA, was chosen by NYC Mayor-elect Bloomberg to be deputy mayor for operations.
- Long Island Railroad president Kenneth J. Bauer, who has won high marks from Long Island elected officials and LIRR observers, is widely discussed as a likely replacement for Shaw at the MTA's headquarters. If so, LIRR would have to fill its top job.
- Tom Schulze has been named executive director of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council after serving as acting director for over a year.

Calendar

December 18, 9:30am MTA board meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 5th Floor. 212-878-7440

December 18, 6pm Auto-Free NY meeting: "New regional rail lines to Lower Manhattan," George Haikalis. 30 W. 22nd Street, Manhattan. 212-475-3394

December 19, 7:30pm Connecticut Commuter Rail Council monthly meeting. At offices of SACIA, One Landmark Square, Stamford. Trains@camcomm.com, www.trainweb.org/ct

December 20, Noon NYC Transit Riders Council meeting. 347 Madison Ave, Manhattan. 5th Floor. 212-878-7087

January 2, 8 pm Public hearings on NJ Transit's fare increase proposal. Locations in Atlantic City, Camden, Freehold, Newark, Paramus, Trenton. See www.njtransit.com for details, or story on page 2. Written comments to transitfares@njtransit.com. Call 973-491-7022 for info.

January 7, 8pm South Western Regional Planning Agency meeting. 888 Washington Blvd, 3rd floor, Stamford. 203-316-5190, www.swrpa.org