

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Is Suffolk Needlessly Hiking Bus Fares ?

County Executive Robert Gaffney and the Suffolk County legislature have approved an increase in Suffolk bus fares from \$1.50 to \$1.75. The hike, pending a public hearing scheduled for January 22, is in response to budget shortfalls that are due, at least in part, to a loss of state aid stemming from the State Legislature's "bare bones" strategy.

The Tri-State Campaign has urged Suffolk to seek another way to meet bus costs (*MTR* #344), and to try to take advantage of the presence in Suffolk of **State Senator Cesar Trunzo**, the Senate's transportation committee chair. Shortly after the Campaign wrote to County Executive Gaffney, Governor Pataki announced that his budget proposal for 2002 would try to **hold transit fares stable**. The press reported the announcement as pertaining to MTA fares. So far, it is unclear whether the Governor will also try to aid smaller transit systems around the state.

The Campaign and five other organizations have again written to Gaffney, urging him to learn whether the Governor's policy on fares will apply to Suffolk County. Keeping fares whole at the smaller agencies would cost only a fraction of what Pataki will have to allocate to stave off an MTA fare hike — several hundred million dollars, according to new accounts.

It would be unconscionable for Suffolk to raise fares if state funding to fill the gap is available. The big question will be **how soon such funding might reach the county**. The Governor's plan may require action through the usual state budget process, but last year, Albany's fiscal politics and delay reached new lows. A public hearing will be held Jan. 22.

Fare Hikes Spread Across NY State

As predicted by NY State transit watchers, formal **fare increase proceedings** are now underway in Buffalo, Utica and Suffolk County, and may begin soon in Albany and Syracuse.

Transit aid increases in last year's executive budget fell victim to the state legislature's "**bare bones**" **budget** maneuver. Riders across the state are about to pay the price, in the midst of recession. If Governor Pataki makes another attempt to help smaller transit systems, it will be up to the legislature to pass a budget in timely enough manner to make a difference.

NJ Fare Increase: Public Process Survives

Advocates and riders have staved off the worst elements of NJ Transit's fare policy change. The measure approved by Transit's board last Monday preserves basic aspects of public process — public hearings and approval by the Governor — for further fare increases. **The agency had sought the power to unilaterally raise fares** at the rate of inflation for the next five years, and to classify weekly and monthly pass discounts as "promotions" that could be rescinded at any time.

Unfortunately, NJ Transit did not agree to withhold the large percentage increase it pushed for Newark-NYC fares until after the lower Manhattan PATH line is restored. The hike will likely push even more riders into the **jammed 33rd St. PATH line**.

An NJT release said, "The top three issues raised by our riders - retaining the round-trip excursion fare for off peak travel, retaining a 55% discount for senior citizens and people with disabilities and holding additional public hearings for possible inflationary fare increases over the next five years - have all been satisfied in the final version of the ... initiative."

The following will be implemented April 1, 2002:

- 10% fare hike on buses, trains and the Newark subway, but not the Hudson Bergen Light Rail line;
- A 25% discount for excursion rail tickets will remain in effect, but riders will be barred from using the ticket during peak hours, when presumably, the \$5.00 surcharge will be in effect;
- The surcharge for buying a rail ticket with cash on board the train will jump to \$5.00, but the effect of this punitive charge will be considered after 1 year;
- Unused monthly, weekly and ten trip rail tickets will still be refunded if unused, but other tickets will not be refunded past a standard expiry period.
- NJT is authorized to set fares for new services (such as Montclair-Midtown, South Jersey Light Rail line, etc.) and to include them in the five year fare plan;
- The #126 Hoboken-New York City bus fare will be restored to standard interstate rate;
- A one-way ticket between Newark and NYC Penn rises to \$3.30 to match the Broad St Newark price. The round trip price for both locations will be \$5.00.

The fine print in the board's approval stated that: "Any and all services operated or acquired by NJ-Transit will be subject to average annual or cumulative fare increases from FY 2003-FY 2007, consistent with the Zone of Rate Freedom (ZORF)." The Resolution that the Board passed also stated that the "a five year FY 2003-FY2007 fare increase policy is adopted. Average fare increases over this period, calculated before rounding of specific fares, will be authorized consistent with the ZORF index."

Despite repeated requests, **transit advocates have not been given the cryptic ZORF index**, and do not know who keeps it, makes it, or the basis for it. The ZORF was reportedly created when private bus carriers were deregulated to allow them to charge whatever the market would bear. It is reportedly administered by the NJ Div. of Motor Vehicles. But public hearings would be held before any ZORF-related fare increase is put into effect.

What will not be implemented as part of the original NJTransit fare plan:

- Senior citizens and disabled people will retain their 55% discount.
- One- and two-fare bus zones will remain and will not be combined into a single zone; The Board asked NJT staff to continue studying this proposal and report back in Jan. 2003.
- One-way fares were not formalized as the established fare on all routes, discounted fares remain in effect and are not considered promotional or subject to change.

Bloomberg to Reduce City Hall Cars

The *Daily News* reported Friday that Mayor Bloomberg is considering a reduction in the number of **official cars assigned to City Hall** from 70 to 50. The report also said that most staffers assigned a car would have to settle for a sedan rather than a souped-up sport utility vehicle.

Bloomberg has commuted by subway each day of his administration, keeping a **campaign pledge to use transit or public taxis** at least once per day. Observers have wondered whether the mayor would seek to extend his example to top aides and city commissioners. A Bloomberg spokesperson told reporters: "The mayor believes that you set an example at the top. If he can do with less, everybody else can."

However, the report said the cars that go unused by City Hall will be **returned to the general city motor pool** managed by the Dept. of Administrative Services. It is unclear whether the mayor will seek to reduce the absolute number of official cars owned and operated by city government.

Smart Move for PATH

Closing in on an improvement long sought by transit advocates, the Port Authority is developing a fare collection system to accommodate **MTA MetroCards and new "smart card" technology**. After two years, the Port Authority board approved the new \$51 million fare system in mid-December.

When the project is complete, MetroCard holders will be able to add PATH trains to the list of transit systems that accept their cards. Currently, MetroCards are accepted on NYC franchise buses and some private buses on Staten Island. The Port Authority estimates that 20% of regular PATH customers also use New York City subways and buses.

According to the Port Authority, long-term uses of the new "smart card" could include **other regional transit rail and bus systems** as well as highway tolls and other transactions such as pay phones.

The smart card will use the same new technology being implemented at transit systems in Washington D.C. and Chicago. Like the E-Z Pass system, users will be able to link accounts to a credit or bank account, or send payments by check. New turnstiles on the PATH system will have MetroCard swipe readers as well as new scanners for smart cards, which can be read through a wallet.

Still, the *Daily News* criticized the Port Authority for taking so long to add MetroCard capabilities to PATH and for pursuing a complicated project that will postpone implementation. The **dual-compatible turnstiles will take two years** to put in place. The *News* urged the agency add a few MetroCard turnstiles at PATH stations in the meantime, which it said would be quick, cheap, and more convenient.

In a release, Acting NJ Governor DiFrancesco said the PA's smart card would be a "first stage in the creation of an integrated fare collection system that has the potential to revolutionize mass transit in the New Jersey and New York region."

Separately, the MTA announced that the success of the TransitChek "**premium MetroCard**" would lead it to offer the package to private employers. The premium card is good for an entire year, and has been available to city government employees participating in the TransitChek federal transit commuting tax benefit program. A rider with a premium card could ride subways and buses for 12 months without visiting a token booth or MetroCard machine.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

2000 Census: Car Owners Still Minority In New York City

Newly released U.S. Census data show that **54% of New York City households do not own or lease a motor vehicle** (down only 3% from 1990). Manhattanites are the most car-free; 78% of households there do not have a vehicle. The car-free share of Bronx households is 60%, and in Brooklyn, 54%. Only in Queens and Staten Island are car-free households minorities: 34% and 20%, respectively.

The data was compiled from 2000 census supplementary survey findings by Right of Way, the NYC pedestrian rights group.

“It’s astounding how much of our municipal resources are dedicated to automobile travel, when car owners are a minority. It’s really a theft of public space,” said Right of Way member Michael Smith. “All New Yorkers suffer from car pollution, noise and especially the real danger of just trying to cross the street — witness the carnage in Herald Square last month — so that a privileged few can gain some questionable convenience. It’s not just a quality of life issue — it’s a matter of equity.”

A report released last summer by Schaller Consulting found that growth in car ownership outpaced transit use in NYC from the 1950s through the 1980s, but that the **trend was reversed** in the 1990s. The study found that subway ridership climbed 34% in the 90s, while NYC car ownership was up only 6%. The report attributed the change to a significant shift in public investment from roads to transit, specifically transit infrastructure programs and the incentive fare policies that started in 1997 (*MTR #329*).

Last July, **then-candidate Michael Bloomberg singled out automobiles as the least deserving** mode of transportation, stating: “Our priorities? In order: Police vehicles, fire trucks and ambulances have to be better able to respond.... Walking must be made safer, easier and faster as it’s a part of every single trip.... Mass transit has to be made an increasingly attractive alternative to private cars. Commercial deliveries... must be made more efficient. And for those who insist on driving, to the extent possible, the traffic must flow.”

Right of Way member Charles Komanoff, a transportation economist, called on Mayor Bloomberg to build on the success of former Mayor Giuliani’s rush hour ban on single-occupant vehicles in Manhattan. “East River bridge tolls would help. Vigilant enforcement of traffic laws is absolutely essential.”

Right of Way’s 1999 *Killed by Automobile* report showed that most pedestrian fatalities are the fault of drivers, most often from failing to yield right of way in crosswalks. www.rightofway.org

Transitions

- News reports said **Katherine Lapp**, a top NY State criminal justice official, was MTA Chair Peter Kalikow’s top pick to become **MTA executive director**. The job opened when Marc Shaw left to become Mayor Bloomberg’s deputy mayor of operations.
- A replacement for **ConnDOT Commissioner** James Sullivan, who retires Feb. 1, will likely be named soon. Rumored candidates include NJ transportation commissioner James Weinstein, Michael Meotti, president of the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council, State Senator William Nickerson, former Delaware transportation secretary Ann Canby, James Smith, chief executive officer of Webster Bank, and Michael Critelli, chief executive officer of Pitney Bowes.
- Despite filling out most major appointments for his incoming administration, Governor-elect Jim McGreevey has yet to name his choices for **NJ DOT Commissioner** and **NJ Transit director**.
- **Craig Siracusa**, the Long Island regional director of the **NY State Dept. of Transportation**, announced his retirement after 33 years with the agency. The search for a successor is in its preliminary stages.

Catholics Against Sprawl

In Connecticut, the Catholic Church has initiated a project to fight sprawl, defining the problem as a social justice issue. The “**CentreEdge Project**” aims to educate officials and the public about the disparities inherent in Connecticut’s current pattern of development, which it says **impoverishes cities while consuming rural land**.

The CentreEdge Project hopes to use the influence of the Catholic Church in the State — 41% of the population is Catholic — to organize a coalition.

The project will combine a diverse group of business, civil and environmental organizations including the MetroHartford Economic Growth Council, the Capital Region Council of Governments and the CT Civil Liberties Union. The main focus of the project is to use a series of maps to demonstrate the effects of the steady shift of jobs and population from urban centers to suburban fringes.

The *Hartford Courant* reported that a new study by the Brookings Institute shows that urban areas in Connecticut are simply spreading out without adding residents. In Hartford, for example, the amount of urbanized land increased 20% while population density dropped 11% between 1982 and 1997.

The CentreEdge Project is concerned about the affects of this pattern on the health, money, quality of life, and access to opportunity of Connecticut residents. They point to air pollution, increased travel time and destruction of open land as consequences of spreading development. The say residents of urban

areas cannot find good affordable housing, suffer from sub-standard schools for their children, and cannot access jobs – many of which are in suburban areas – because there is not sufficient mass transit.

“When (developing suburbs) **start asking for infrastructure**, sewers and those things, **who pays** for that? It’s the state, and it seems to me resources could be better used in Hartford, New Haven or Bridgeport, rather than out there,” Bishop Peter A. Rossaza, honorary chairman of the CentreEdge Project, told the *Hartford Courant*.

Pols Want Better Service: Show Us the Money, Says Agency

State legislators from Greenwich rapped ConnDOT for doing too little to improve mass transit in CT’s coastal corridor last week. The lawmakers said they wanted more train and bus service, nicer, cleaner vehicles to ride on and fares priced to attract more customers.

“We are a nation of one car, one driver, and we’ve got to do something about that in Connecticut,” said state rep. Lile Gibbons, a member of the General Assembly’s transportation committee.

ConnDOT retorted that it is refurbishing most of the New Haven line’s rail cars, and that it has made significant improvements with the available funding.

“If the legislature gives us more money, I’m fully prepared to spend it,” ConnDOT mass transit chief Harry Harris told the *Stamford Advocate*.

Clarification

Last week, in our story about the NYC EDC’s proceedings to evict the Cross-Harbor Railroad from its First Avenue Yard and other Brooklyn facilities, we said “the New York City Economic Development Council wants to shut down the New York Cross Harbor Railroad.”

The EDC asked us to clarify that, while it is pursuing the evictions and an “adverse possession” action at the U.S. Surface Transportation Board, it does not aim to put the company out of business. EDC said it will offer Cross-Harbor the opportunity to bring barges into the float bridge facilities at the 65th St. Yard, operated by Canadian Pacific and NY & Atlantic Railroads. Cross-Harbor Railroad also has warehousing operations.

EDC’s scoping hearings for its cross-harbor rail freight environmental impact study begin this week.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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Calendar

January 15, 11am - 3pm Public scoping meeting for NYC Cross-Harbor Freight Project environmental impact statement. NYC Economic Development Corp. 110 William Street, 4th floor. Manhattan. 877-942-7347, crossharbor@stvinc.com. Public scoping document available at www.crossharborstudy.org.

Jan. 16, 7pm CT Rail Commuter Council mtg. ConnDOT office, New Haven Railroad Station. www.trainweb.org/ct or 203-655-0138.

January 17, Noon Metro-North Commuter Council monthly meeting. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 10th floor. 212-878-7087.

January 17, 5-8pm Public scoping meeting for NYC Cross-Harbor Freight Project environmental impact statement. Snug Harbor Manor, 1000 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island. NYC Economic Development Corp. 877-942-7347

Jan. 17, 7:30pm Middlesex Greenway group monthly meeting, Clara Barton Library, Edison. www.edisongreenways.org, 732-985-7071

January 22, 5-8pm Public scoping meeting for NYC Cross-Harbor Freight Project environmental impact statement. Hostos College, East 149th Street/Walton Ave., Bronx. NYC Economic Development Corp. 877-942-7347

Jan. 22, 6-8pm Auto-Free NY mtg. “The New Urbanism: can smart growth reduce traffic?” Larry Gould, Congress for New Urbanism. 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394

January 23 5-8pm Public scoping meeting for NYC Cross-Harbor Freight Project environmental impact statement. PS 1, 309 47th St. (3rd-4th Aves), Brooklyn. NYC EDC. 877-942-7347, crossharbor@stvinc.com.

January 23, 7pm Special Meeting on Bicycling and Walking. SWRPA. Stamford Government Center. 888 Washington Blvd., 3rd Floor. 203-316-5190, prosi@swrpa.org

January 29, 5-8pm Public scoping meeting for NYC Cross-Harbor Freight Project environmental impact statement. LaGuardia College, 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Queens. NYC Economic Development Corp. 877-942-7347

[more calendar entries at www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)