

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Manhattan Carpool Rule Still Working for NYC

Cited in a Hudson Valley *Journal News* story, a New York City transportation officials said the city is reviewing the emergency rule that requires two or more occupants in cars crossing the East and Hudson Rivers south of 62nd Street from 6-10 a.m. But he affirmed that **the rule will remain in place “for the foreseeable future.”**

The statement was in response to complaints from a group of Manhattan parking industry figures, who blame the carpool rule for lost business. They want Mayor Bloomberg to lift the rule, at least for Midtown crossings.

A NYC DOT study on the carpool rule’s effects — which Mayor Bloomberg requested — will be available in a few weeks, according to DOT spokesman Tom Cocola. “Obviously, we’re aware that the parking garage industry isn’t happy... We understand and respect that,” Cocola told the *Journal News*. “(Rescinding it) is a very important decision. We want the opportunity to give Mayor Bloomberg as much information as possible.”

The parking industry **seeks to lay the entire impact of recession**, lost jobs due to the World Trade Center’s destruction and relocation of downtown work sites, and suburban concerns over terrorism in NYC **at the feet of the carpool rule**.

Transportation policy groups have made a strong case that the rule benefits far more people and delivery-dependent businesses than the few car commuters and garage owners it impacts (*MTR* #336). New York City should not bend over backward for one small business group. An objective look may indeed find that NYC’s traffic flow, environment and quality of life have an inverse relationship to the health of the Manhattan parking industry.

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### Inside

- **Groups laud MetroCard Mayor**
- **CT Strategy Board Looks Ahead to More Transit**
- **NJ Transit’s Fare Follies**

### Bloomberg says #7 Subway Extension is Top City Top Transit Project

According to the *Daily News*, NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg said he considers a westward extension of the #7 train a priority over other transit system expansion projects. The #7 terminates at Times Square, under 7th Avenue. The area of Midtown west of 8th Avenue is now widely viewed as an area ready for massive residential and commercial development, if supportive infrastructure can be created. The mayor told the state legislature that he would put the project **ahead of Second Ave. subway construction**.

A #7 extension would likely link Times Square with the Javitz Convention Center and the Penn Station development in the Farley Post Office building. The far West Side area is also prominent in the proposals developed by advocates of bringing the **2012 Olympics** to NYC, an endeavor the mayor supports.

One big problem of putting the Second Avenue line off into the distant future is the transit disaster that will occur on the East Side if the **Long Island Railroad** arrives as planned at **Grand Central Terminal** in 2010 or 2011, with only the Lexington line to carry the additional passengers into Manhattan .

But the declaration of priorities seems especially curious for a new government whose foremost task is **rebuilding lower Manhattan** and its business climate. The start of work on the Second Avenue subway would be a strong vote of confidence in downtown’s future. On the other hand, breaking ground on the #7 extension — essentially the **foundation for a new business district** west of Times Square — while projects to better link the East Side and Long Island to lower Manhattan languish — carries the risk of setting off a true downtown corporate exodus.

### McGreevey Issues Executive Order on Sprawl

One week after shocking anti-sprawl organizations by laying off the entire staff at New Jersey’s Office of State Planning, Governor James McGreevey issued an executive order that gave advocates most of what they asked for during the campaign, including the creation of a Smart Growth Policy Council inside the Governor’s office chaired by one of his staff.

In a “whereas” clause, the Order states: “the princi-

ples of smart growth would focus new growth into redevelopment of our older urban and suburban areas, protect existing open space, conserve natural resources, increase transportation options and transit availability and **reduce automobile traffic and dependency**, stabilize property taxes and provide affordable housing...”

The Policy Council would be required to “ensure that State transportation and infrastructure spending and regulation are consistent with the principles of smart growth and the State Plan.”

Governor McGreevey also:

- Gave the Attorney General power to defend municipalities, counties or regional planning entities from lawsuits in cases of statewide significance where the local entities are sued by developers for actions relating to municipal adoption of smart growth/State Plan-conforming local plans;
- Required agencies to include smart growth impact statements for all regulations;
- Required agencies to review and report on whether **spending programs** are consistent with the principles of smart growth and the State Plan.

The Smart Growth Policy Council consists of the commissioners of the departments of agriculture, community affairs, education, environmental protection, and transportation, the executive directors of NJTransit, the Economic Development Authority, Commerce and Growth Commission, and president of the Board of Public Utilities, the Treasurer, and the chief of the Authorities unit.

The council will meet at least bimonthly, and is supposed to ensure that intra- and inter-departmental procedures, plans and programs are consistent with the State Plan and smart growth principles. It will also recommend administrative and legislative changes to advance the principles of smart growth.

The State Plan, which calls for development in areas with mature infrastructures, has been ineffectual due to a lack of support from state agencies, such as the NJ Dept. of Transportation, and benign neglect from many municipalities and some counties. Most observers applauded the governor’s action, while developers complained that the State Plan provides too few places to build. The director of the League of Municipalities reiterated its position that the State Plan should not be mandatory for municipalities.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

### Buses Funds Bloom in Pataki Budget

As we reported last week, Governor Pataki’s proposed 2002-2003 NY State budget would largely continue transportation spending at last year’s levels, with the signal exception of **significantly higher state aid for mass transit operations**.

The transit aid is meant to head off any potential fare hikes or service cuts this year. News reports said NYC Transit and the suburban commuter railroads would receive some \$450 million more than last year.

Our reading of the budget indicates that suburban bus systems will also see significant increases in operating assistance from the state over last year if the proposed levels are approved:

- Westchester: 11.5% increase
- Suffolk: 24% increase
- Nassau: 27% increase

We have not yet confirmed these numbers with the

### CT Strategy Board Looks Ahead to More Balanced Transport System

The Connecticut Transportation Strategy Board, formed in the summer of 2000 to provide guidance for state transportation spending and to chart a course away from gridlock, presented its initial transportation strategy and cost projections to the State Legislature on January 15.

The strategy detailed a plan to achieve five goals:

- Improve personal mobility;
- Improve goods movement;
- Integrate transportation and economic, land use, environment and quality of life issues;
- Develop policies and procedures to better integrate the state economy with regional, national and global economies, and;
- Identify policies and sources that provide an adequate and reliable flow of funding necessary for a quality multi-modal transportation system.

For each of the goals, the Board detailed specific projects it wants to pursue, greatly expanding the list of 22 projects it endorsed last November. Among the new projects are **improvements to commuter rail stations** in Madison, Clinton, Westbrook, Guilford and other sites, a new tax credit program for freight rail improvements, investment in statewide greenway, recreational trail and open space programs, continued participation in multi-state projects such as the **Cross Harbor Tunnel Study** in New York, and active involvement in TEA-21 reauthorization coalitions.

The Board’s plan was broad in defining funding options. It says it will detail them more specifically in a final report due out in one year. The current paper said the board would recommend leasing land or

selling advertising rights on DOT-owned properties, submitting maintenance and other services to competitive bidding, or issuing special transportation bonds. **Despite criticism from the press**, the board also said it would continue to investigate more traditional funding from federal and state sources, “direct” user fees like **tolls**, and “indirect” user fees like **gasoline taxes** and license and registration fees.

The report was based in part on five reports submitted by committees from a variety of geographic “Transportation Investment Areas” (TIAs). Each of the regional reports stressed highway congestion and lack of mass transit and rail freight alternatives as central problems in the state’s transportation net-

### Fare Hike or Fare Collection?

Unless it gets its fare collection act together, NJ Transit will be on shaky ground going back to riders next year for one of the **inflation-indexed fare increases** the agency says it wants.

Riders on NJ Transit trains are getting a significant number of free rides because fares aren’t collected, according to *Star-Ledger* reporting during January. While NJ Transit said it does not have data on fare collection, staff members told the *Ledger* that the problem of uncollected fares is growing.

Citizens already raised the issue of uncollected fares during public meetings on the fare hikes in early January, saying NJ Transit should remedy their collection problems before raising fares.

NJ Transit’s April fare increase is now definite, but consistent fare collection may raise more than the agency would get from an indexed increase next year. Although NJ Transit rescinded its initial plan for automatic yearly hikes, it will may still consider such an increase and subject it to public hearings and the governor’s approval.

NJ Transit vice president for rail operations William Knapp told the *Star-Ledger* that fare collection has been a challenge on peak trains since September, when ridership on New York lines soared. However, fare collection is even more crucial on off-peak trains because there are fewer regular passengers with pre-paid monthly passes. According to the *Ledger*, Knapp addressed this issue in a recent letter to conductors, saying, “Numerous passengers have reported that, very often, no attempt is made to collect tickets even on off-peak and weekend trains.”

Passengers told the *Star Ledger* that fares regularly go uncollected on off-peak trains, estimating free rides on 30-70% of trains. Others said they have saved money by **switching from a monthly pass to a ten-pass booklet** due to sporadic ticket collection. NJ Transit is now using a spotter system to monitor the conductors to determine the extent of their losses.

work. The I-84 Corridor report declared that CT is in the midst of a transportation crisis.

“The I-84 TIA Board believes that the crisis is a transportation system that is overburdened and unbalanced to the point where it threatens both the economic health and the quality of life of the state’s residents,” the report reads. “**Over dependence on highways** has created a level of traffic congestion that is a barrier to the movement of goods and people, and that precludes adequate connection to the regional and the global economies.”

Recommendations of the TIAs include extended inter-Connecticut as well as regional commuter rail lines, investment in high speed Long Island Sound ferries, development of New Haven and Bridgeport ports, integration of rail, bus and rapid transit systems in and around New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, a Hudson river rail freight crossing an development of local and regional bus systems along I-95.

### Groups Laud MetroCard Mayor

In a letter released last week, thirty environmental and civic groups congratulated NYC Mayor Mike Bloomberg for his daily use of the subway. The letter, organized by the Straphangers Campaign, was endorsed by neighborhood and environmental groups, labor unions and transportation reformers.

“You should be proud to have quickly earned the nickname ‘MetroCard Mayor,’” the groups wrote. “The pictures of you on the Lexington Avenue line **send an important message to New Yorkers**: taking public transportation is a fast and effective way of getting around town. That’s particularly critical at a time when traffic congestion is hurting our business climate and fouling the air we breathe.”

The groups also urged the mayor to press commissioners and top staff to follow his transit-riding example. “**There’s no reason for them to be car potatoes.** We also urge you to reduce the use of city cars and cut back on unnecessary parking permits that are issued to city employees. Those steps could take thousands of cars out of traffic,” the letter said.

Although Mayor Bloomberg is considering cutting the official city car fleet from 70 to 50 (*MTR* #348), parking permits are still issued for 110,000 city workers’ private cars.

Mayor Ken Livingstone of London axed company cars for London Transport managers last year, saying they would work harder to improve service if they experienced travel the way most other Londoner do.

Many top city and MTA officials travel primarily by car or taxi. A spokesperson for NYC Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall told the *NY Post* she used transit once a week but used her car trips to observe conditions on city streets.

## Rail Tunnel Hearings Complete

Compared to buzz surrounding hearings for other major transportation capital projects, NYC EDC's series of scoping hearings for the cross-Harbor freight tunnel was a sleeper. New Jersey hearings drew five commentators, Brooklyn a half dozen, three in the Bronx and two in Queens.

In Jersey City, the city's planning staff urged consideration of environmental justice impacts of the Jersey City-Brooklyn alignment, spotlighting sites that noise and diesel exhaust from locomotive engines are likely to impact. In Elizabeth, Union County staff testified that the County was generally supportive of the project. It has been pursuing rejuvenation of rail lines for short-haul freight movement for some time.

Among the handful who testified in NYC were representatives of the Bronx and Brooklyn Borough Presidents, Adolfo Carrion, Jr. and Marty Markowitz. **Both BP's were enthusiastic about increasing freight transport by rail.** They referred to reduction of truck dependence as "vital" to the environmental and economic health of NYC, though they raised some concerns about the project.

Markowitz called for close examination of **truck impacts** in neighborhoods that will host rail yards including Sunset Park, Greenpoint and Maspeth. He stressed this point as it relates to waste handling. Carrion stressed improvement of clearances between Selkirk and the Bronx as well as along the Bay Ridge and Montauk lines. He suggested electrifying freight lines to reduce pollution, and wants the study to look at cumulative and local impacts of the project. Most testimony by individuals in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx echoed these sentiments.

Negative criticism at Staten Island (see *MTR* #349) and Elizabeth hearings focused on the **Staten Island-Brooklyn alignment**. Union County noted that if it were chosen, it would have **severe traffic impacts** because trains would traverse seven grade crossings between Linden and Cranford Jct. A spokesperson for Waterwatch urged greater attention to several habitat, species and other environmental studies. That, plus community opposition to double-stack trains along Staten Island's north shore of (see *MTR*# 350) may tip the balance toward the Jersey City alignment.

Although the generally positive comments may indicate general support, some watchdogs wonder if lack of strong public awareness will be a problem when the project competes for funding. New Jersey views its top tunnel priority as a second passenger rail tunnel to Manhattan. The study for the passenger tunnel dismissed the freight option as not viable years ago.

## Calendar

**February 5, 10:30am** Long Island Sound Ferry Coalition meeting. Location TBA. 718.472.3177 or atyrell@gw.dot.state.ny.us

**February 7, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum Meeting, "The Role of Cost in Port Selection," Dr. John Ricklefs, Moffatt & Nichol Engineers. Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St. 212-435-4226, pgressner@panynj.gov

**February 7, 6-8pm** NYC Waste Prevention Coalition Meeting. NYEJA, 115 West 30th St., Room 709. srobishaw@mindspring.com

**February 12, 5:30-7:30pm** MTA Metro-North Railroad President's Forum with Peter Cannito. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Fl Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087

**February 12, 6pm** Nassau HUB Citizens Advisory Committee meeting with Richard Hall, transportation engineer. Hofstra University Club. 516-541-4321

**February 13, 8:30am-4pm** NYC Metropolitan Transportation Council Freight Forum. City College, Manhattan. 718-472-3046

**February 14, noon** Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council meeting 10th Floor Conference Room 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087

**February 14** Conference: "Market-based solutions to NYC's traffic woes." Manhattan Institute. 1 W. 54th Street. 212-599-7000 x412, www.manhattan-institute.org

**February 21, 5:30-7:30pm** MTA NYC Transit President's Forum with Lawrence Reuter. 347 Madison Ave., 5th Fl Board Room, Manhattan. mail@pcac.org, 212-878-7087.

**February 22, 9am** Central Jersey Transportation Forum. Sarnoff Corporation 201 Washington Road, Princeton, NJ. 215-238-2872 lhaskins@dvrpc.org.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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