

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Pols Fail Suffolk Bus Riders

Fares to Go Up Despite Offer of State Aid

Suffolk County Executive **Robert Gaffney** stubbornly refused to avert a fare hike for Suffolk bus riders, despite an offer of emergency funding from State Senator **Cesar Trunzo**. As a result, bus fares will increase from \$1.50 to \$1.75 on Monday, Feb. 11, giving Suffolk bus riders the highest local fares in the state.

Senator Trunzo, State Senate Transportation Committee chair, offered the County \$250,000 in state funds, which he said would hold fares stable through April. Governor Pataki's proposed budget also contains significant increases in funding to non-MTA transit operators, including a \$4 million increase for Suffolk Transit. The County turned down the offer, however, reiterating earlier statements to press that they do not place much weight on the state budget process (*MTR #350*).

As a result, the Campaign and other Long Island community groups have urged Governor Pataki to provide enough emergency funds so that, in addition to what Senator Trunzo has offered, Suffolk County will be safe from a fare hike through August.

There was no affirmative response to the Campaign's and other groups' outreach to the Governor and John Cahill, his senior policy advisor, to avert the fare hike. An aide told Tri-State that Suffolk County indicated it would reverse the fare hike if the money materialized later in the year, but the groups said that was not acceptable.

Bus ridership in Suffolk County has steadily risen since the mid-1990s. Sprawl, traffic congestion and lack of readily available transit are becoming hot button issues in Suffolk County, where citizens have supported more investment in mass transit. To threaten these gains with an unattractive fare hike is bad for Long Island and New York.

According to Senator Trunzo, the fare increase will raise \$225,000 — which is less than the \$250,000 he offered Suffolk County in aid. "I don't know what I can say to commuters in Suffolk," Senator Trunzo told *Newsday*. "I don't know why they have to go through a 25-cent fare increase when we've offered the county a solution."

Carpool Rule Set Until May

Refusing to bend to criticism from the parking lot industry, Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall told the *New York Times* that the Manhattan carpool rule will **stay in effect until May**. Commissioner Weinshall stressed that the rule is necessary at least until the Brooklyn Battery tunnel is fully reopened, at which point the agency may decide to support a **permanent carpool rule**.

If DOT determines that the carpool rule is benefiting New York City by reducing congestion and improving quality of life by other measures, the Commissioner said, the agency may advocate for a long-term rule. DOT is waiting to review a study of the carpool rule's effects, which should be completed within a few weeks (*MTR #351*).

Transportation policy groups have already made a strong case that the carpool rule benefits truckers, delivery-dependent businesses, bus and taxi passengers, and those who carpooled before September (*MTR #345*). A permanent carpool rule, which requires approval of the State Legislature, could bring New Yorkers reduced congestion, better air quality and fewer traffic problems within Manhattan.

Bloomberg Takes on Gov't Car Culture

Reaffirming his willingness to tackle government car culture, NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced last week that he will significantly decrease the number of city-issued parking permits. In a speech to the Association for a Better New York, Mayor Bloomberg called transportation a top priority, and said the administration is concerned with getting as many **cars off the streets** as possible, starting with city vehicles.

"Effective March 1, I have ordered city agencies to **reduce the number of parking permits they hold by 30%** and to cut the time to permit expiration in half," Mayor Bloomberg remarked in the address.

NYC DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall told the *New York Post* that this reduction should go hand-in-hand with a **trimming of official agency fleets**. "If they don't have the permits, are they going to need the cars?" she said. "We've got a mayor now who uses mass transportation."

Transportation issues were also prominent in Mayor Bloomberg's first weekly WABC radio call-in show, which aired February 1. In addition to discussing his plan to reduce city parking permits, the Mayor said the city needs greater **investment in transit**, calling the subway the best way to get around NYC. He also highlighted improving safety for pedestrians and cyclists and reducing traffic in Manhattan as priorities.

Ozone Causes Asthma: Not Just Attacks

On February 2nd, the British medical journal *The Lancet* published a study that found that high concentrations of one-hour ground-level ozone, a pollutant mostly created by cars, buses and trucks, cause children **to develop asthma**. While past research has documented a correlation between ground-level ozone and the onset of asthma attacks, this study was the first to indicate a relationship to development of asthma.

The study, conducted by the University of California and funded by the California Air Resources Board, tracked children in Southern California who had never had a diagnosed asthma attack. It compared the number of children who developed asthma and lived in neighborhoods with high one-hour concentrations to the number who developed asthma and lived in neighborhoods with low concentrations over a five-year period. It further looked at the effect of playing sports to determine if the greater intake of air increased risk of developing the disease.

The researchers found that children who played no sports developed asthma at approximately the same rate regardless of where they lived. But children who played three or more sports were 3.3 times more likely to develop asthma if they lived in neighborhoods with high concentrations of one-hour **ground-level ozone**.

Significantly, the study found no correlation between high levels of NO₂, PM₁₀ or PM_{2.5} and developing asthma. The researchers also found that children living in neighborhoods with high 24-hour ozone counts did not develop asthma at higher rates than those living in places with low 24-hour counts. It seemed that only places with high one-hour ozone pollution were a significant cause of asthma.

The research underscores the need to decrease one-hour ozone concentrations in areas where children are likely to be exercising. Two transportation policies logically follow: first, **decrease peak hour traffic** to decrease the output of pollutants that contribute to peak-hour ozone and second, **avoid locating highways** or other major thoroughfares next to parks and schools where children are exercising.

Transport Spared in CT Budget Cuts

Facing a projected \$650 million budget shortfall in 2002-03, Connecticut Governor John Rowland proposed a \$200 million reduction in the state budget last week. According to the Hartford *Courant*, the remainder will be made up by raising the cigarette tax and with funds from non-transportation agencies.

While addressing the General Assembly in his State of the State speech, Governor Rowland said the proposal did not entail real spending cuts, rather reductions in the rate of budget growth.

"Millions more have been spent and will be spent improving our transportation system and protecting our environment," said Governor Rowland in the address to the General Assembly.

The Dept of Transportation budget actually increased under the Governor's proposal by \$2.7 million, almost all of which was for aid to local governments. On the capital program side, the budget detailed reconstruction of several highways, including I-95 in Bridgeport and Branford, I-84 in Waterbury and along US 7, the details of which are not yet known. Spending on transit included expanded rail parking in Stamford and construction of Shore Line East rail station facilities in Guilford, Madison, Clinton and Westbrook.

NYC City Council Passes Sidewalk Bill

The New York City Council unanimously passed a law that requires builders to put sidewalks in new developments and build streets that are the same width as other city streets. The law will mostly affect developments on Staten Island and in Queens (*MTR* #347).

Sidewalks encourage walking by making routes more attractive and improving pedestrian safety and encourage the use of public transit. It is an encouraging sign that the new City Council understands and is making an effort to support these issues.

Lower Manhattan Forum

Calls Transport Hub High Priority

More than 600 people from the NY-based, RPA-led Civic Alliance met last week to discuss the rebuilding of lower Manhattan. The group rated construction of a transportation hub and integration of ferries, subways, pedestrian ways and other transportation methods as its second highest priority.

Although participants felt that construction of a transportation hub was likely to happen, significant hurdles still exist. A station that allows easy transfers between subways and the PATH has yet to be designed. Furthermore, there are not yet permanent bus lanes or good bus-ferry-subway connections in much of the New York metropolitan area.

2001 Pedestrian Deaths:

Slightly Lower in NJ, No Improvement in NY

Pedestrian death rates in New York and New Jersey – which have the two highest rates of pedestrian fatalities in the nation – did not improve much in 2001 over recent years.

T.A. Gives Cycling Improvements "A" Grade

In the winter edition of Transportation Alternatives magazine, T.A. released "Making the Grade in 2001," its fifth annual report on bicycling in NYC. The report gives an unprecedented A grade for improvements in cycling conditions and an A- to government efforts in that category. Last year's marks were B and B-, respectively.

The report praises the City for completing two major projects last year: opening the Manhattan Bridge bicycle and pedestrian path and finishing the Hudson River Greenway. T.A. also credits Dept. of Transportation Commissioner **Iris Weinshall's** interest in cycling and the DOT Bike Program's renewed energy for the high marks.

Grades in other most categories were up slightly as well. The City's overall cycling environment improved last year when, for the first time in over forty years, all of the East River Bridges were open to cyclists and pedestrians. However, T.A. says the government should do more to **address widespread conditions** that discourage bicycling, such as "dangerous motorist behavior, ...atrocious street conditions and sub-standard bike lanes."

T.A. also praises the DOT for installing five new bike lanes around the city and Larry Reuter, head of MTA NYC Transit, for maintaining bike access to subways despite soaring ridership this fall.

Lower grades were given to government efforts in three categories this year: parking, bicycle lanes and greenways. "Sparse secure bicycle parking remains the biggest obstacle to would-be commuters and utilitarian cyclists," wrote T.A., saying a DOT bicycle parking encouragement officer is needed to create more bike parking. Other areas in need of improvement are improving bike access with wider, clearly marked lanes, instituting a safety education program for motorists and installing ramps on the Williamsburg and Manhattan bridges, according to T.A. Transportation Alternatives: www.transact.org

New Jersey pedestrian fatalities are slightly lower than in past years, according to preliminary data from the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety. In 2001, 126 pedestrians, or 17% of the 734 total traffic fatalities, were killed as the result of automobile crashes, down from 145 the year before. Pedestrian fatalities from 1989-2000 ranged from 144 to 217 deaths in a year.

The drop, however, brings New Jersey only slightly closer to Governor Whitman's 1998 challenge to halve pedestrian deaths within ten years. In that year, the state had 217 pedestrian deaths, or 24% of the 891 traffic fatalities.

Although New York City auto crashes dropped by 7% from 2000 to 2001, pedestrian deaths remained level, according to NYPD statistics published in the *Daily News*. The drop in city traffic after September 11, when driving restrictions were put into place, seems to have reduced accidents but did not create safer conditions for pedestrians.

In 2001, 244,515 crashes resulted in 385 fatalities, which included 183 pedestrians and 14 cyclists. Although this was a **drop of over 20,000 accidents** from the last year, the number of fatalities remained about the same.

The fact that pedestrian fatalities remained level despite such a significant reduction in the number of crashes indicates that 2001 saw **deadlier crashes** than previous years. Traffic speeds may have increased in the last quarter of the year owing to less congested roads and less stringent enforcement of speed limits. According to the *Daily News*, moving violations dropped 11.6% in 2001, partly because officers were redeployed after September.

As a result of these conditions, Transportation Alternatives has called for an **increase in fines** for moving violations such as speeding.

Amtrak Threatens Service Cutbacks

Last week Amtrak announced that it will eliminate 18 long-distance train routes in October if Congress doesn't allocate \$1.2 billion to the railroad next year. The cutbacks in service will be the result of the railroad's inability to meet a 1997 Congressional mandate that required Amtrak to be operationally self-sufficient by December 2002. In November, the Amtrak Reform Council announced that the railroad could not meet the deadline and recommended that the company draw up a liquidation plan (MTR 342).

Additionally, George Warrington, the president of Amtrak announced that the railroad will cut its 2002 budget by \$285 million. The cuts include \$175 million in capital improvements – 23% of the program – and \$110 million in operational cutbacks. Ac-

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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cording to Warrington, the Reform Council announcement in November prevented the railroad from being able to raise \$52 million in financing, additionally the railroad took in \$120 million less than it expected last year.

The Bush Administration budget proposal before Congress would grant \$520 million to Amtrak for FY 2003. But Warrington says the railroad needs \$840 million for capital projects, \$160 million for excess railroad retirement taxes and \$200 million for operation subsidies for lines that don't break even. Although, ridership on Amtrak has increased 19% and revenue 38% over the past five years, of the railroad's 40 routes, only the Metroliner between D.C. and Boston turned a profit last year.

Rte. 347 Widening Progresses to EIS

According to *Newsday*, the New York Dept. of Transportation plan to widen Rte 347 will progress to the Environmental Impact Statement stage, despite **strong opposition from residents, business and civic groups**. The newest version in a string of ten plans — which NYS DOT calls the "Community Sensitive Alternative" — would widen Rte. 347 in Brookhaven and Smithtown.

The Campaign and several community groups have opposed the widening plan since it was made public in the spring of 2000. Although NYS DOT calls this plan a compromise, critics see changes, such as landscaping and wider shoulders, as window dressing for a **wasteful and ineffective plan**.

During a public meeting in May, 2000 several citizens pointed to the **seven minute or fewer time savings** DOT projects for the wider road, and said it was not worth the construction delays and the **\$150-200 million cost**. A Campaign response to the plan referred to the Surface Transportation Policy Project 1999 study that found motorists can lose more time in **road construction delays** than they will save in years of driving on the "improved" road (*MTR* #269).

The Campaign and other groups still support the "Five-point Plan for a Better Route 347 Project," which civic leaders presented to the DOT as an alternative to the widening plan (*MTR* #278).

The Five-Point Plan urges DOT to stop relying on road widening as a singular solution to congestion. It calls on DOT to instead combine transportation and land use planning and to employ non-paving methods, such as employer-based strategies like reducing free parking to curb solo car commuting.

Calendar

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.

February 22 University Transportation Research Center Seminar. "Modern Ferry Transportation in New York" - Arthur Imperatore, Jr. NYC Technical College Kiltgord Auditorium, 285 Jay St., Brooklyn. 212-650-8050

February 26, 6-8pm Auto-Free NY meeting. "Beyond Petroleum - A New Vision for Transportation", Ashok Gupta, National Resources Defense Council. 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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