

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Carpool Rule Encourages Transit Use, Reduces Traffic

A report released last week by the Straphangers Campaign and Transportation Alternatives quantified flaws permeating the recent parking industry study of the Manhattan carpool rule (*MTR* #'s 354, 353). The paper, by Schaller Consulting, supports the charge that the parking industry report is misleading and fails to examine any of the carpool rule's benefits.

City officials said last week the carpool rule would **remain in place until June**, when it would be evaluated again. The city's study of the rule has not been released, but comments by officials indicated that it would find that the rule has increased carpooling and transit use without creating the severe economic consequences asserted by the garage owners.

The parking industry report claims that the carpool rule is responsible for 189,687 fewer people entering Manhattan's central business district by auto each weekday. However, analysis of the industry's data shows only **6.7% of the reduction** occurs during the 6-10 a.m. period where the carpool rule is in effect. Nearly all of the drop in auto traffic attributed to the carpool rule by the parking industry was at crossings or times not governed by the rule – 22% from closure of the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel; 32% from decline of people entering the CBD from north of 60th Street; and 39% outside the 6-10 a.m. period.

Schaller's analysis suggests that many drivers have switched to transit, indicating long-term benefits of the carpool rule. Since subway ridership into the Central Business District has fallen less quickly than auto traffic, some auto users may now be taking transit, still bringing business into Manhattan.

Still, the rule is a target for the garage owners and their allies in organized labor and the City Council. Council Member David Weprin (Hollis) introduced a resolution Wednesday **demanding the rule's repeal**.

The Bloomberg administration could do a better job at muting opposition and outer borough antagonism to suggestions of tolling East River bridges by explaining its positions to the Council, borough presidents and other constituencies. City gov't seems to lack a **coordinated game plan** to build support for its anti-congestion and other transportation initiatives.

NJ Capital Program — Deja Vu All Over Again

The New Jersey Dept. of Transportation has released its proposed capital program for FY03, and, as in 2002 and 2001, the plan **does not comply with the fix-it-first mandate** or the 1000-lane mile bicycle path goal of the Transportation Trust Fund law enacted in 2000. NJ DOT proposes to spend just 4% of 2003's Trust Fund dollars on bridge preservation (\$21 million).

In 2000, the Legislature required DOT to reduce the backlog of deficient bridges and road pavement by half in five years, and to construct an additional 1,000 bicycle ways.

But in its December, 2000 Capital Investment Strategy, the DOT used terms like "out of reach" and "well off pace" to describe its efforts to reduce the backlog of structurally deficient bridge projects. Subsequent capital programs showed DOT has **abandoned** the goal of attaining a **state of good repair**.

In 2003, only three bridge projects totaling \$4.23 million (Walt Whitman, Harry's Brook/Route 27 and Rt.13/Inland Waterway) are slated for repair or replacement in the Trust Fund spending plan. The rest of the monies for bridge preservation are "line items" for emergency repairs, orphan bridges over railroads, emergent projects and emergency inspections. Some of these attest to the **lousy state of New Jersey's infrastructure**: "This program will provide for the removal of loose concrete from the underdeck ...for the safety of the public. This is a continuous problem and action shall be taken to remove loose concrete....this is an ongoing effort"

Rail freight is held to the paltry level of \$10 million assigned in several successive annual capital programs. Locally-initiated bicycle and pedestrian grants also receive short shrift. Some lost monies for these areas are replaced by federal air quality (CMAQ) funds, freed up from the failed tailpipe inspection program that has absorbed the entire CMAQ allocation for the past several years. This means even less Trust Fund money will be used to reduce truck trips and make NJ more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly.

General aid to localities gets a bit more money (\$168 million), as does road preservation, at 13% of the Trust Fund pot (\$78 million), although only \$15

million of road preservation money is allocated to northern NJ, where most of the lane miles are, and \$11 million will be spent to correct storm water problems at the Saddle River and Rt. 17. Congestion management projects (some add lane capacity) and "strategic mobility" projects comprise 15% of Trust Fund spending, including the widening of Rt. 31 north of Flemington (\$11 million). Capital program support and delivery (essentially, DOT personnel costs) hauls down a whopping 26% of the Trust Fund, despite Legislature's efforts to limit this category.

Advocates for transportation reform, including Tri-State, are appealing to the Governor, Legislature and new transportation commissioner to come up with a plan that devotes more serious attention to infrastructure maintenance and alternatives to cars and trucks.

One Option for East River Tolls: MTA Control

NYC Deputy Mayor Marc Shaw told the *New York Post* last week that the Bloomberg administration may consider **leasing East River bridges to the MTA** as an option to bring tolls to the free Queensboro, Williamsburg, Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges. The MTA now collects tolls at seven other major bridges and tunnels in New York City.

Any such deal should require the MTA to re-think one of its toll-collection policies. While the E-ZPass technology used around the region can collect tolls from cars traveling at highway speeds, the MTA insists on retaining drop down gates and **imposing a full stop** on all toll-paying vehicles.

The rub is that many advocates of East River tolls believe it will only be possible to sell the policy if it promises **non-stop tolling** and does away with the construction of anything resembling a major toll plaza. Indeed, one of the favorite "flaws" cited by toll opponents is the specter of toll booths and attendant back-ups on Flatbush Avenue, Queens Boulevard and other East River approaches.

Albany Thumbs Up for "2000-04" MTA Plan

New York's MTA capital program review board gave the go-ahead to a major consolidation of MTA debt last week, finally giving an essential nod to the transit umbrella's 2000-2004 capital program. The MTA says the **\$14 billion bond refinancing** will allow it to save \$375 over the next two years due to low interest rates, and constitutes a key piece of the agency's \$17 billion, four-year plan.

While optimists hope that the savings will reduce pressure on service and fares, other observers have been concerned with the **transit system's mounting debt**. They expect that financial pressure will lead to an MTA proposal to raise fares and tolls sometime soon after the race for governor ends in November.

Goethals Twin Deferred in PA Plan

The Port Authority board approved a \$4.5 billion annual budget yesterday. It emphasizes downtown PATH reconstruction, a new PATH fare collection system and ongoing work on the **JFK AirTrain**. The AirTrain is scheduled to open fully from Jamaica to JFK Airport during the **first half of 2003**. Other major elements are re-decking the Outerbridge Crossing, ferry terminal development at Battery Park City, LaGuardia Airport and Hoboken.

The *Star-Ledger* reported Friday that the budget defers the Goethals Bridge "twin" project and expansion of a Newark Airport terminal. The last time the *Ledger* wrote that PA had acknowledged that adding highway capacity at the Goethals was **generally unpopular** and likely to fall below the agency's radar screen in the wake of Sept. 11, the agency responded by claiming that the project "remains a priority" (MTR #349). Elements in the Port Authority are clearly having trouble giving up the Goethals twin, but it appears that, as has been the case for the past eight years, the project will remain in planning limbo.

Downtown LIRR Advocates Take Aim at Subway Tunnel

A downtown real estate company commissioned a study that recommends running Long Island Railroad trains to downtown Manhattan via the Cranberry Street tunnel now used by A and C subways. MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow met with company's representatives but told the *Daily News* that the plan loses its luster when put to paper.

The plan would route C and possibly A trains to the F line, displacing riders who now travel to lower Manhattan, likely overburdening 6th Avenue service.

In technical terms, the plan — which Straphanger's Campaign's Gene Russianoff dubbed "**grand-theft subway**" — would likely attract far too few LIRR riders to justify service disruption for over 110,000 subway riders. In political terms, anyone advancing such a plan would quickly be caught in a huge minefield of city and regional politics. It would be a **subway advocate's field day**, resulting in thousands of outraged calls to the Governor's office, "Save the A" rallies and incredulous editorials.

The idea would also be saddled with overweighting Long Island Railroad projects in the overall regional transit construction program. The MTA is just now at the beginning of spending **over \$4 billion** to bring the **LIRR into Grand Central Terminal**.

Over the long run, a better concept may be to convert the LIRR Atlantic Avenue branch to a subway-like rapid line, running from Jamaica to lower Manhattan. That would win favor rather than

enmity in Brooklyn, and could link to Second Avenue subway development.

Projects and Plans for Lower Manhattan

Mayor Bloomberg announced last week that the city would try to facilitate pedestrian and vehicular circulation downtown with a new footbridge serving Battery Park City at Rector Street and a **temporary surface road** to be built between Vesey and Liberty Streets on West Street. The road will provide access to and from the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel. The Mayor said the projects would be completed in May.

An **oversight** amid these improvements is a provision to **better move buses** in and through Lower Manhattan. Seven local and twenty three express bus routes, three from Brooklyn, three from within Manhattan and seventeen from Staten Island, stopped in Lower Manhattan prior to Sept. 11. Several private bus companies also served lower Manhattan. An additional seven express bus lines used the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel to access points further north.

Even before the September, the longest part of many express bus rides was lower Manhattan. Now, buses emerging from the Battery Tunnel must make a tight loop down Broadway and past the clogged construction site at South Ferry in order to turn north on the FDR Drive or Water St. Immediate and permanent rebuilding of West Street and downtown should include bus lanes or other measures to ease circulation of buses and thousands of passengers.

Last week, Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg also announced support for **burying the West Side Highway** between the World Trade Center site and the World Financial Center/Battery Park City. The highway was damaged during the September 11th attacks. Depressing the roadway would provide easier access between the areas to its west and the rest of lower Manhattan, though engineering issues and costs have yet to be explored in any depth.

Meanwhile, Rebuild Downtown Our Town, a coalition of citizens, business and professional groups and property owners, released a white paper outlining objectives for Lower Manhattan. "**Permanent car-pool rules** should be applied to Lower Manhattan, as its infrastructure and the needs for pedestrian only streets could not absorb peak time automobile traffic in pre-9/11 times. Transportation in the World Trade Center area should be transformed to maximize connections between public transportation systems and minimize auto dependency. Transportation infrastructure should include a multi-modal hub (long distance rail lines, subway, bus, water, transit, connections to airports, commuter service, etc.) that will create locational demand for Lower Manhattan." (see www.architect.org for the full report)

Downtown's Transportation Council

The Transportation Advisory Council for the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Corporation – the agency assigned with oversight of plans for downtown – has been assembled and will have its first meeting soon. The committee includes several policy watchdogs and experts, including Tri-State Transportation Campaign director Janine Bauer, Gene Russianoff of the Straphangers Campaign, Jim Tripp from Environmental Defense, Lee Sander of Empire State Transportation Alliance, Gerry Bogacz of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council and Regional Plan Association's Robert Yaro. Most other members represent financial institutions or businesses.

NYC Looks to New Transit Finance Method

NYC Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff said at a *Crains* event last week that the city would seek to finance **extension of the #7 train** to the far west side of Manhattan with **tax-increment financing**. Doctoroff said the plan would allow the #7 project to proceed without competing for funds with the Second Avenue Subway. He said it would guarantee construction bonds with the increase in tax revenue that the project would help generate. The finance method is untested in New York City.

Groups Call for Demolition of Waterfront Highway in Trenton

The Route 29 tunnel along Trenton's Delaware River waterfront opened Saturday morning without the usual ribbon cutting ceremony, indicating that even state leaders see little to celebrate about.

New Jersey DOT had touted the tunnel as a way to **keep trucks off of local streets** by providing an alternate route, ignoring pleas from Trenton residents to simply ban trucks on Route 29 and divert them to interstate highways. Now, after building a tunnel that cost taxpayers \$100 million and destroyed the last remaining access to the Delaware River waterfront in Trenton, a Route 29 truck ban has finally been put in place – **making the tunnel useless**.

In response, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign has written to NJ Governor James McGreevey and DOT Commissioner James Fox, calling for deconstruction of the Route 29 tunnel. Trenton should follow the lead of other cities that have torn down unneeded highways to provide space for recreation and economic development, the letter said. Cases where cities have removed unwanted highways include:

- Portland, Oregon: The state and city tore up the Harbor Drive highway in 1974 to build a 37-acre waterfront park along the Willamette River.

- San Francisco: After an earthquake destroyed some of the elevated Embarcadero Freeway, the state and city removed the remainder and created a surface promenade.
- Milwaukee: In 1991, officials agreed on a plan to remove a portion of never-completed Park East Freeway. The freeway deconstruction will take place this spring (2002) and the corridor will then be used for mixed-use development.

“The Delaware River was an important part of the South Trenton community and was enjoyed by the community as a whole. The only way to restore the River to the community and the **tremendous ecological damage done by Route 29** is to tear it down,” said Delaware Riverkeeper Maya van Rossum.

Trash Trucking for the Long Haul

As the one-year anniversary of closing Fresh Kills landfill nears, the long-term waste export plan created by the Giuliani administration has almost completely unraveled. What is emerging is the realization – as feared by Tri-State and others – that the “temporary” plan to dramatically increase truck hauling has become a permanent feature of NYC’s waste system.

When Fresh Kills closed last March, the Campaign estimated that the truck-based interim plan had added **264,000 outbound truck trips** annually to already clogged city streets. In addition to increasing congestion, increased truck use affects air quality all over the region. Because trucks use so much fuel – three times more than trains to haul the same cargo, according to the EPA – the interim plan adds nearly 12,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions in New York and New Jersey daily. Add to these figures the additional cost of hauling garbage by truck – 50% more than dumping at Fresh Kills, according to the city’s Independent Budget Office – and truck hauling is the worst of all worlds.

NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg is trying to reduce some of these costs, in part by trucking some Queens trash to railyards in the Bronx. But New Yorkers may be waiting some time for workable plans to containerize garbage for trains or long-distance barges. In the meantime, NYC continues to groan under its nation-beating levels of truck traffic.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

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Calendar

March 4, 6-8pm Second Avenue Subway Public Advisory Committee Meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue. 5th Fl Board Room, Manhattan. 718-694-5164 or secondavenuesubway@nyct.com

March 6, 6pm Public hearing on Proposed Brooklyn Bus Route Changes Public School 257, Auditorium. 60 Cook St. Brooklyn 212-878-7483

March 7, 11:45am-2pm Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA quarterly meeting. MTA Headquarters 5th Floor Board Room. 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 212-878-7087

March 7, 11:45am Transportation Research Forum, "The Future of Amtrak and Amtrak Reform" 212-435-4226 or pgessner@panynj.gov

March 8, 12-2pm City Club of New York luncheon forum with Iris Weinshall, Christopher Boylan and Frank McArdle. "What are the Issues facing the City for the Future?" National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South, Manhattan. 212-207-3673 or cityclubinfo@nycmail.com

March 14 "Unlocking Lower Manhattan: Rebuilding the Transportation System" Citizens Union Program. Sky Club, Met Life Building 200 Park Avenue, Manhattan. 212-227-0342 or citizens@citizensunion.org

March 26, 9:00am MTA board meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 5th floor. 212-878-7440.

March 26, 6-8pm Auto-Free New York meeting. "Transporting NYC's Waste - There's Got to be a Better Way," Benjamin Miller, Author. 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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