

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Carpool Foes' Voodoo Economics

The dire pronouncements of Manhattan carpool rule opponents clashes with a study of NYC's economy six months after Sept. 11 by *Crain's NY Business*.

The argument that the carpool rule has brought **economic calamity** upon the city was repeated last week in a *Daily News* piece by Brian McLaughlin, a State Assembly Member from Queens and head of NYC's Central Labor Council (see also *MTR* # 354). On the other hand, *Crain's* cited data showing a **much stronger picture**. Compare:

McLaughlin: [the carpool rule threatens to] "reduce commuter, visitor and resident spending in the city by more than \$1 billion."

"Job losses will be primarily concentrated among lower-wage workers in industries such as retail, restaurants, entertainment and hotels."

"The result has been far fewer people coming into Manhattan's restaurants, stores, hotels and theaters."

Crain's: "In the week ended February 10, Broadway ticket sales were actually higher than in the comparable week last year."

"The number of tourists in 2002 is expected to be 32.3 million — up from last year's 32 million."

The *Crain's* report also cites non-downtown restaurant owners that are doing better than they did last year, says the Marriot Hotel at the World Financial Center is booked at normal occupancy rates and notes that thousands of construction workers were kept on jobs over the winter due to mild weather.

Car-Freedom in Downtown's Future?

Participants in the first transportation advisory committee meeting of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation said the discussion was remarkable for its consensus on the need to develop easier transit links to the region and restrain traffic to promote pedestrian-friendly streets. Although concrete downtown planning has hardly begun, some observers were heartened by the apparent progress of **transportation reform themes** in the conversation's tone. "The terms of the transportation rebuilding discussion would have been far different if the terrorists had destroyed the World Trade Center in 1993," said Tri-State Campaign director Janine Bauer.

New Jersey Transit's New Boss

George Warrington is jumping from the helm of one ailing railroad — Amtrak — to take charge of New Jersey Transit's **\$3 billion fiscal gap**. In spite of Governor McGreevey's promise to "change the way business is done in Trenton," Warrington's appointment completes a slate of transportation appointments that, on its face, may promise little different in Garden State transportation agencies' mission and focus. Warrington had been at NJTransit for ten years about a decade ago, then served as a deputy commissioner for NJDOT before moving to Amtrak. After Tom Downs, who had been the NJDOT commissioner, left Amtrak, Warrington became its chief executive.

NJ Transit and Amtrak indeed have a revolving door between them. NJDOT's most recent commissioner, James Weinstein, became Amtrak's chief of the Northeast Corridor in January, the post Warrington held before rising to the railroad's top job. Rumors are that Jeff Warsh, the recently deposed NJ-Transit chief, has his eye on the top Amtrak job.

While Warrington was at Amtrak, Congress and its Amtrak Reform Council set increasingly strict and unrealistic goals for the national railroad (to achieve self-sufficiency by December 2002). Warrington initially claimed he would meet these goals, probably extending the showdown on the railroad's future. More recently, Warrington has been more spirited — only a month ago, he claimed that he would lay off 1,000 workers and cut service on 18 lines in October if Congress did not ante up \$1.2 billion, rather than the smaller appropriation in the Bush 2003 budget. Warrington had promised the Amtrak board of directors that he would stay to see through these cutbacks, until the end of 2002. Whether he will take the same layoff-and-service cutback approach to NJTransit's budget problems remains to be seen.

NJ Transit will also have to grapple with Warrington's recent employer over some key issues. Continuation of some sort of east coast inter-city railroad is vital to NJTransit, since Amtrak maintains the Northeast Corridor. NJ Transit has always paid dearly for its commuter trains' heavy use of the line (now, \$31 million annually), and observers say that unsafe overcrowding on trains for the two years preceding September 11 was caused by Amtrak's insistence on

maintaining parking slots for trains that didn't exist during peak periods at New York Penn Station. That deal was negotiated by NJTransit's rail operations chief while he worked at Amtrak. In January, Transit solved much of the peak overcrowding problem by adding more trains, **using up** some of the agency's **future slots** needed to accommodate new service on the Montclair connection and the Penn Station demand the Secaucus Transfer station will bring.

During his first year in office, Warrington should keep this list in mind:

Do's

- Re-examine expansion plans and forego rail projects that make little sense from a land use or ridership standpoint, like extensions or new lines into northwestern NJ and eastern Pennsylvania.
- Finish an EIS for a passenger rail tunnel under the Hudson River, end bickering with the MTA over its terminus, and move to full funding and construction;
- Come to an agreement with the freight railroads about what lines will have passenger service, and include more right-of-way to ensure that the West Shore Line will have passenger service in the future.
- Offer at least as much service to urban stations as suburban stations during peak hours.
- Aggressively market Transitchek to NJ employers.
- With the Governor's Sprawl Council, draft legislation to give residents a tax credit or deduction for living where they work or taking transit to jobs.
- Bid out fuel contracts specifying ultra-low sulfur diesel immediately and switch to a clean non-diesel fuel in the next bus purchase.
- Improve the reliability of bus and rail service, employing pro-consumer measures such as more information about connections, cleaner coaches and bathrooms, feeder shuttles, and station amenities.
- Obtain funds to undertake short-term capacity measures at NY Penn Station, such as lengthening platforms 1-4.
- Come up to speed on ADA repairs.
- De-emphasize construction of expensive parking lots and decks for bus and rail riders and focus on other modes of access to stations and bus stops.

Don'ts

- Try not to strand passengers for hours without lights, information or a way to get off/home.
- Stop using capital funds for operating expenses;
- Don't even think of using the "Zone of Rate Freedom" index to raise fares annually.

We wish him luck. He'll need it.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Amid New Cancer Evidence, NJ Transit Reneges on Public Health Pledge

In late February, the *Star-Ledger* reported that NJ Transit has decided **not to purchase low-sulfur fuel** or install particulate filters on 853 new commuter buses, until at least July 2003. NJ Transit said the move will save \$16.2 million in next year's budget, but the costs of the decision in terms of environmental and health effects will inevitably be much higher.

When deciding to forego alternative fuels like compressed natural gas for a mammoth **bus purchase** in 2000, NJ Transit said it would use low-sulfur fuel.

Low-sulfur fuel reduce three types of diesel air pollution — sulfur oxides (SOx), nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter. In addition to creating toxic by-products, sulfur damages catalyst-based particulate filters and nitrogen oxide absorbers, reducing fuel efficiency and impairing the devices' ability to remove pollutants. Environmental and health problems caused by SOx, NOx and particulate matter include: acid rain, smog, ground-level ozone, reduction in crop yields and deforestation, respiratory irritation, asthma (*MTR* #'s 353, 354) and cancer.

Federal emissions standards that begin to take effect in 2007 will require lower sulfur content in fuel and create new standards for pollution control devices — such as particulate filters and nitrogen oxide absorbers — on all automobiles fueled by diesel.

NJ Transit **fobbed off** the issue and its **earlier promises**, telling the *Ledger* it was complying with the letter of the law. Transit said it was "ahead of schedule in complying with federal emission standards." Its fleet currently has no buses fitted with particulate filters, and its clean fuel fleet remains a handful of express buses forced upon it by Congress.

Particulate filters, when used in conjunction with low-sulfur fuel, have been found to reduce emission of fine particles by 70 to 90%.

— Study Ties Particulates to Lung Cancer Death —

Researchers have concluded that long-term exposure to **particulate matter** from diesel exhaust and coal-burning plants significantly increases the risk of dying from **lung cancer**. The study, published in last week's *Journal of the American Medical Association*, adds lung cancer to the list of ailments caused by exposure to fine particulates (PM2.5). Previous research by Harvard and the American Cancer Society has linked particulate exposure to high mortality rates from cardiopulmonary diseases such as heart attacks, strokes and asthma.

The new research, which tracked a half million adults in all 50 states for 16 years, found that lung cancer deaths increased 8% for each 10 micrograms/cubic meter elevation in fine particulate matter.

Thus, individuals in metropolitan areas with high particulate pollution are at a 16% higher risk of dying from lung cancer than those in less polluted areas.

Cuomo Would Study Sheridan Removal

Andrew Cuomo, former HUD Secretary and a Democratic candidate for governor of New York State, called on the State Department of Transportation to study a community proposal to **remove the Sheridan Expressway** in favor of **riverfront parkland** or another local use and build a new interchange off the Bruckner Expressway at Leggett Avenue.

Cuomo said community-based planning to revitalize neighborhoods is the national norm and that the State DOT should take the proposal seriously. He made the announcement at a press conference Friday on the 174th Street Bridge overlooking the highway.

Bus Rapid Transit: CT Leads NY and NJ

The environmental analysis for Connecticut DOT's plan to develop bus rapid transit service between **New Britain and downtown Hartford** appears to be close to a federal "record of decision." Once the feds give the study the thumbs up, ConnDOT will begin design and service planning for the project, possibly beginning service in 2005.

The roughly 10-mile rapid bus route will use an **abandoned freight rail corridor** on its southern portion. North of Newington Junction, it will share the right-of-way used by Amtrak on its New Haven-Springfield run. The buses will serve platforms at Hartford's Union Station, and will also circulate from the station area to other downtown destinations. Hartford officials are working with bus planners to develop **bus priority traffic signals** and other prioritization measures on those circulation routes. The service plan for the route will also consider shuttle services to the New Britain terminus of the rapid right-of-way, collector services that will serve suburban areas along the route and use the right-of-way starting at intermediate entry points and express services that originate south and west of New Britain.

ConnDOT expects the project to boost daily peak period transit ridership in the corridor nearly 60% over its projected "2020 base case" estimate, from 7,300 to over 11,600. This is a stronger ridership performance than other options studied. The system will increase the corridor's express bus fleet by about 30 buses. Additionally, the Department's analysis found that developing the busway — at about an \$230 million capital cost — will be far **less expensive than adding lanes** to I-84 and also less than several light rail proposals. Overall, the project's bang-for-buck potential looks impressive.

ConnDOT is beginning to consider three other bus rapid transit corridors in the Hartford region.

Suozi Pledges Smart Growth

Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi says the economic development program he is developing will emphasize **brownfield sites**. "This has to be done in the context that we are already overdeveloped and **don't want to continue to add to our traffic**," Suozzi told the *Long Island Business News*. Suozzi has enlisted Peter Sylver, dean at Hofstra University's Business Development Center, to outline an economic plan that will look to high tech industries, tourism, entertainment and sports.

"[Sylver] understands smart growth and sustainable development, and he has a vision for the **development of the hub regions**," Suozzi said.

The development plan will receive more attention after Suozzi releases county budget plans in April.

Toll Road Czar Likely for Jersey

Newly appointed NJ Turnpike Authority director James Lapolla will likely head the Garden State Parkway as well. It appears that former director Lewis Thurston will not be replaced and that Gov. McGreevey will **combine the Turnpike and Parkway agencies**, as has been discussed for years.

Lapolla currently serves as Union County Manager and will take over his new position next week. Lapolla inherits EZ-Pass' mounting financial problems, which Governor-elect James McGreevey cited when calling for previous Turnpike Director Edward Gross' head before taking office. Lapolla will also have to decide how to proceed with the plan to **replace the Parkway's aggravating barrier tolls with high-speed E-ZPass facilities**. The high-speed proposal developed under Acting Governor DiFrancesco is a good one, but has no one driving it at present.

Lapolla declined comment to reporters about Turnpike projects such as expansion of **Route 92** through South Brunswick and Plainsboro. According to the *Star-Ledger*, he led opposition to a road-widening project in Elizabeth while serving as a Union County freeholder in the early 1990's.

Port Authority in New S.I. Rail Study

In February, Governor George Pataki announced plans for a new study of potential commuter rail service on the Staten Island's **North Shore Railroad**. The Port Authority will receive \$300,000 to look at growth patterns along the city-owned track, which has been closed to passenger service since 1953.

Many state and local politicians — including Borough President James Molinaro — say they see the revitalization of passenger rail as a way to alleviate the island's crowded roads. However, the *Staten Island Advance* opined that passenger service on the line "has achieved near-El Dorado status in this borough — always talked about as if it were just

around the corner of the next election, just beyond the next budgetary obstacle." According to the *Advance*, Staten Islanders have endured years of politicians' promises and many feasibility studies of the rail line, but never a real commitment to rebuild the service.

In any case, Staten Island would do well not to put all its transit eggs in the north shore basket. It **may have limited bang for the buck**, given its peripheral location and the fact that its main link would be to the Staten Island Ferry, not a broader rail network. The **bus rapid transit** concepts proliferating nationwide have far greater promise for an area of Staten Island's density and geography, and because it is connected to the rest of the region primarily by highways.

The north shore track is also under consideration by the NYC Economic Development Corporation as a destination point for its **cross-harbor freight tunnel** project. But public hearings in January made clear that freight use of the corridor would probably elicit strong public opposition. (*MTR* #349).

The plan under investigation would restore a 5.2-mile stretch of track from Mariners Harbor to the St. George Ferry terminal, crossing through the neighborhoods of Mariners Harbor, Port Richmond and West Brighton. Molinaro told the *Advance* that passenger rail service would bring more residents to the area.

Lowering the Bridge

In February, the NY State Department of Transportation held "pre-scoping" meetings on its proposals for the Brooklyn-Queens **Kosciuszko Bridge**. State DOT outlined three possible courses of action — rehabilitate the bridge in place, rebuild it and add capacity or replace the bridge altogether, with or without new capacity.

Community members questioned the DOT about additional traffic. They urged the state not to bring more cars to local streets (*MTR* #354)

Almost everyone agreed that bridge's height (125 feet above Newtown Creek) is a main cause of congestion. Combined with curves in its approaches, the **bridge's height cause trucks to slow**. According to the state, a 1997 city study of the bridge determined that the tallest vessels using the waterway are 67 feet. A Coast Guard representative in the meeting said that his agency would agree to a lower bridge, possibly one at 90 feet.

Others discussed pedestrian access. One way to improve local movement across the Newtown Creek would be to build a **bike/pedestrian crossing** — either as part of the Kosciuszko or as a separate structure.

Some residents and Assembly Member Joseph Lentol called on State DOT to provide them with funding for a community engineer. The State DOT did not offer one.

Calendar

March 14, 8-10am "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 14, noon Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council meeting. 10th Floor Conference Room, 347 Madison Ave, Manhattan. 212-878-7087

March 14, 6:30-9:30pm Public meeting and information session on NJDOT's plans for Route 17. Bergen Mall Auditorium (lower level), Route 4 East at Forest Ave., Paramus. 609-530-5001

March 14, 6:30-10:30pm SEEDS Visioning Session, "Thinking Regionally: Planning for the Next Step on the East End." Shelter Island High School Auditorium. 718-482-4536

March 19, 6-8pm Public meeting to present final draft of prioritized project proposals for Transportation Enhancement Program Second Round. NYC Dept. of City Planning. Spector Hall, 22 Reade Street, Manhattan. 718-482-6327

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

April 19, 10am-noon University Transp. Research Center, Visiting Scholars Seminar. "Reauthorization of TEA 21" - David Burwell, Surface Transportation Policy Project. Klitgord Auditorium, 285 Jay St., Brooklyn 212-650-8050

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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