

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 358

March 25, 2002

## NEWS

### LIRR Third Track Project On Hold?

Observers detect very little momentum behind the Long Island Railroad's project to develop a **third mainline track** between Jamaica and Hicksville. The project would ease constraints on the number of rush hour trains to Manhattan, especially for intra-Island and reverse-commute services, which are inadequately provided now. Additional LIRR capacity will be especially important once the railroad is able to serve Grand Central Terminal.

Transit officials said last summer that the initial study of the project was set to begin, but nothing has been heard since. It was included in the 2000-2004 MTA capital program, but apparently in a **"reserve" project category**. Given the defeat of NY's 2000 transportation bond act and other financial pressures on the MTA capital budget, the third track may be at risk of going by the wayside. The Campaign is attempting to reach state lawmakers from Nassau County to clarify the project's funding situation.

### Mixed Signals from Rowland

Governor John Rowland announced \$12 million in funding for Connecticut anti-congestion measures Friday. They include funding for studies of New Haven to Springfield commuter rail and widening I-95 in the eastern part of the state.

Rowland also released funds for 20 new buses for Fairfield County and the Hartford area, although he recently made budget cuts that triggered urban **bus service reductions**.

Rowland also recently **reduced the budget** of the **Transportation Strategy Board** the state established last year. The cut will likely force the board to rely more heavily on state agencies rather than hiring its own independent consultants. Observers worry that Rowland may be trying to **put the board out to pasture**. The board's initial report carried tough, politically inconvenient messages about the state's **underinvestment** in transportation and the need to find new revenue sources to rescue the state from growing gridlock.

### Gowanus HOV Rules Upgraded to 3 or More — Express Bus Riders the Big Winners —

New York City Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall announced last Thursday that vehicles using the Gowanus Expressway HOV lane would be required to carry **three or more people** starting in April, when officials plan to re-open the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel to more traffic.

Starting April 1, the tunnel will be subject to the same carpool rule that affects other crossings into the Manhattan central business district — cars must have two or more occupants to use the bridges and tunnels between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.

The Gowanus HOV lane runs from the Verrazano Bridge to the Brooklyn Battery tunnel. A NY State DOT study from 1998 showed that **80% of people traveling** in the lane were **express bus riders**. Express bus ridership has increased since then, so the figure is likely higher now. The study and a great deal of anecdotal evidence showed that increasing car use of the HOV lane had slowed it nearly to the speed of the Gowanus' chronically clogged general lanes.

In response, the Campaign and others have agitated for stronger access standards to the HOV lane. Campaign staff were joined by members of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 726, representing S.I. bus workers, and the United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park at a 1999 press conference (*MTR* #234). The groups called on the NY State DOT to make the Gowanus HOV a bus-only lane during rush hour.

The effort to win bus-only or HOV-3 status for the Gowanus lane was supported by State Senators Vincent Gentile and Martin Connor, Assemblywoman Joan Millman, the Straphangers Campaign and Transportation Alternatives.

The Campaign later chronicled the near-**doubling of express bus ridership** in the city from 1998-2001 (*MTR* #'s 226, 331), and released materials showing that HOV lane thresholds used by officials in California and Texas would lead to HOV-3 or bus-only status on the Gowanus HOV lane long ago (*MTR* #303).

The NY State DOT was studying the issue, but apparently, it took the post-September 11 experience, when the Gowanus HOV lane was made a bus-only route, and the increasing policy making role of the

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New York City DOT to produce a real change.

“**HOV-3 will give express buses quick accessibility** to the lower Manhattan area, thus enhancing mass transit,” Commissioner Weinshall said in a release.

The NY State DOT was reportedly studying whether a system of new park and ride lots could be developed along with a stronger Gowanus HOV access standard. It’s unclear when or whether such facilities may be implemented — the state has not issued a statement about the policy change.

In any case, **express bus riders** from Staten Island and southern Brooklyn should see faster commutes. A better trip may in turn fuel further growth in the city’s express bus market.

“City DOT’s decision is a smart move for New York. Bus riders are over 80% of the people using the Gowanus HOV lane, and **until now** they have had slower commutes because **the express lane acted more like a local,**” the Campaign said in a statement released late Thursday.

### NYC Traffic Law Enforcement Still Hobbled by State Assembly

New York City DOT is installing 200 fake red light cameras at intersections to help reduce epidemic red light running in the city. The dummies will look just like the 50 real cameras that photograph the license plates of cars blasting through red signals, and will act as a deterrent. City officials will move both the real and the dummy cameras around to keep hardcore scofflaws from beating the system.

The city must resort to the dummies because the NY State Assembly, led by the Lower East Side’s **Sheldon Silver**, imposes a low cap on the number of cameras allowed. Our leaders in Albany are apparently more concerned for the “privacy” of willfully dangerous drivers than about safety on the streets. Transportation Alternatives reports that a recent AAA survey found that **89% of NY Auto Club** members supported the city’s camera program.

Research by the NYC Comptroller’s office last year indicated that many city drivers view stopping on red as optional — the report concluded that drivers citywide run more than 1 million lights during a typical 7am-7pm workday (*MTR* #319).

The city’s existing red light camera program shows strong promise to reduce this epidemic — 1998 data showed a 30% reduction in red light running in intersections where the cameras had been deployed (*MTR* #158)

City DOT is to be commended for doing its best to cope with the incomprehensible strictures the State Assembly forces it to labor under. The city is now seeking to increase the allowed number of cameras from 50 to 75.

### Extension of Staten Island Expressway Bus Lane Under Development

The Gowanus HOV-3 lane is matched on the western side of the Verrazano Bridge by a mile-long bus-only lane along the Staten Island Expressway. The lane was developed as an “early action” component of the NY State Dept. of Transportation’s long-range look at the future of the expressway.

The Department is currently designing a **further segment of the bus lane** that will extend it roughly half-way across Staten Island. The extension should be ready for buses in 2005. It will represent a piece of a rapid bus route that will run from mid-Staten Island to the Brooklyn-Battery tunnel. However, there are no bus-only or bus-priority lanes on the **Verrazano Bridge**. In response to calls for Verrazano bus lanes, the MTA has said that congestion on the bridge itself does not warrant them.

The Department’s long-term recommendations for the S. I. Expressway have not yet been finalized.

### NJ Should Consult E-ZPass Success Stories

Last week’s State Assembly hearing on New Jersey’s E-ZPass debacle seemed to only scratch the surface of the problems troubling electronic toll collection on the NJ Turnpike and Garden State Parkway.

Lawmakers did establish that the state’s contract with its E-ZPass operator, WorldCom, did contain a “perverse incentive” that paid the company **extra fees to fix mistakes** the E-ZPass system causes. WorldCom officials also said there are problems with a significant amount of hardware in use, either with in-vehicle tags or the E-ZPass reader antennae mounted at toll plazas, though they blamed Mark IV, the hardware provider. Mark IV says its equipment is working fine in other states.

Some legislators said they wanted more hearings. If they happen, an interesting approach might be to invite officials from regional agencies who appear to have **gotten E-ZPass right** — testimony from toll officials at the Port Authority, MTA and NY Thruway Authority might show New Jersey a way out of the finger-pointing, money-hemorrhaging and ongoing technical problems.

### ConnDOT: Snafu in Stratford

The Connecticut Dept. of Transportation has told the town of Stratford it will have to allow a local road to be widened to a **four lane thoroughfare**, or pay up to \$1 million in penalties. According to the *New Haven Register*, after 500 Stratford residents expressed opposition to the plan at a recent Town Council meeting, the Council decided to temporarily suspend the plan and consider modifications.

The problem is an object lesson in the need for a

more transparent, higher profile planning process with outreach that goes beyond the letter of the law. It also adds another to a set of countless examples suggesting that state DOTs would benefit by adopting a **wider range of policy responses** to congestion and safety issues.

According to Stratford Town Council Chairman Robert Calzone, ConnDOT's public hearings for the project drew little opposition, as did the Town Council meeting where the project was approved. The fact that strong opposition – including a petition signed by 2,000 residents – has surfaced weeks before the project's April 1 start date indicates **few knew what was going on** with the road plan. In a motion to suspend the widening, Town Councilman Robert David said that many affected by the widening were not aware of the project or its scope.

ConnDOT has responded to the suspension by threatening to slap Stratford with up to \$1 million in penalties. According to town officials, they would constitute \$100,000 in state design costs, \$250,000 in contractor costs to date, and up to \$500,000 in lost profits for the contractor. Widening the one and a half mile stretch of Broadbridge Avenue would be

#### CT Coastal Cities Duel for Barge Port

As the Connecticut Department of Transportation moves forward with a plan to expand coastal barge service to **reduce truck traffic on I-95**, the two coastal cities vying for port development await a decision. According to the *New Haven Register*, **planners favor Bridgeport** over New Haven because it has more space for the expansion. Attention also focused on Bridgeport when port expansion was first considered by the interim Transportation Strategy Board in 2000.

Both towns – which submitted proposals and funding requests to the Transportation Strategy Board in January – have elements to make port expansion attractive. New Haven's major advantage is its location near the **junction of I-95 and I-91**. Containers barged there would avoid the entire stretch of I-95 between New Haven and NYC or Newark/Elizabeth.

However, New Haven has less space and – unlike Bridgeport – lacks an already **established port authority** to oversee development. New Haven has submitted a request to establish a port authority but the state's decision is still pending.

The Transportation Strategy Board, which was established in the summer of 2001 to recommend new approaches in state transportation planning, is awaiting ConnDOT analysis of the two towns' proposals and will begin reviewing them later this month. The Board will then make a recommendation to Acting DOT Commissioner James Byrnes.

paid for with \$2.8 million in state and federal funds.

In response to citizen opposition, the Town Council has scheduled a special meeting Monday to decide the future of Broadbridge Avenue. Area residents and Town Councilman Robert David told the *Register* that they still intend to fight the widening project.

#### Cross-Bronx Plan Emerging

The NY State DOT is developing concrete plans in its long-range look at the future of the Cross-Bronx and Major Deegan Expressways. The DOT explained them at the next-to-last meeting of the "Bronx Arterial Needs Major Investment Study" last week.

Many of the options under consideration are non-traditional. These include a **bus rapid transit** line along continuous Cross-Bronx Expressway service roads with connections to north-south bus and subway lines, **decks** for parkland **over the Cross-Bronx' sunken sections** and possibilities for enhanced bus, subway and commuter rail services. How an inter-agency agreement to undertake such measures instead of widening the highways is unclear, and a drawback of this type of planning effort.

Other options are several interchange improvements and the lengthening of on-off ramps on the Major Deegan. One of these would run more than a mile to Yankee Stadium — effectively **widening the Deegan**. Instituting value pricing at existing toll barriers affecting the Bronx arterials was an option not included in any of the packages.

The apparent centerpiece of the emerging plan is a major auto capacity enhancement — construction of a continuous service road along the Cross-Bronx Expressway and reopening **tunnels under Manhattan** from the Cross Bronx Expressway to the George Washington Bridge.

The DOT grouped the 22 remaining components (whittled down from 250) for analysis in the study's next phase. The groupings make the study's emphasis on car capacity more clear. In addition to the "no-build" scenario and one with minor improvements, there were two build scenarios proposed. Both included new service roads paralleling the Cross Bronx Expressway from Grant Circle to Highbridge. In both groupings the service road is envisioned as having a bus rapid transit lane and a general purpose lane. Yet, the service roads could, as many at the meeting said, have been developed as bus-only facilities.

When asked if one of the scenarios could be limited to those options that don't increase auto capacity, a spokesman for the State DOT said, "we can't assume the package constructs in that way." A representative of the Bronx Borough President's Office replied, "creating space for more cars and trucks will lead to the same problems we have today."

## Car Sharing, NY-Style

**Zipcar**, a car-sharing company that fills the gap between owning and renting vehicles, arrived in NYC last month. The company rents cars, on an hourly or daily basis, to individuals who **join the program** as members. Cars are located in a parking garage — a smart card system allows a member to unlock the car and start it during a pre-reserved time. Zipcar is already operating in Boston and Washington, D.C.

The cars are less expensive than renting if used for less than a day, ideal for a shopping trip, a once-a-week class or a trip to a beach. A spokeswoman from the company said that when used most efficiently, two or three different members use a car in a single day. The ratio of members to cars is generally 25-1.

In our region, Zipcar has already placed cars in the West Village and the Upper East and West Sides in Manhattan, and in Hoboken. More sites and cars are added as the company builds membership.

The company estimates that for every Zipcar in Boston, 8-10 private cars and 7 parking spaces are eliminated. When the company polled its Boston membership, 10% had **given up a car** and 30% had foregone buying a car. As a consequence, six Boston City Council members have proposed legislation to require car-share spots in all new housing and commercial developments in Boston.

**Low car ownership** rates in NYC might make auto reduction rates here less impressive. However, if existing parking requirements for new developments could be reduced, car-sharing could positively impact car ownership rates. And if the company targets areas of the city with higher rates of multiple cars per household, such as eastern Queens, southeastern Brooklyn or Staten Island it might eliminate some households' perceived **need for a second car**.

Zipcar has 2,250 members: 1,800 in Boston, 300 in Washington D.C. and 150 in NYC. The company is also interested in providing cars to the luxury apartment market, medium size fleet operators, and workplaces where cars are only occasionally needed. In the U.S., there is one other for-profit car-sharing company on the west coast and a number of non-profits. Car-sharing companies are well-established and significantly larger in Western Europe.

### TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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## Calendar

**March 25, 8am-2pm** "Bus Rapid Transit in the Route 1 Corridor," Central Jersey Transp. Forum. Sarnoff Corporation, 201 Washington Rd., Princeton. [Imcneffer@dvrpc.org](mailto:Imcneffer@dvrpc.org), 215-238-2872

**March 26th** "Meet The Commuter Day" aboard train #1629 (New Haven to GCT) departing 6:49 am and arriving at 8:45 am. Reps of the Commuter Council, ConnDOT and MNRR will be in the bar car answering commuters' questions, [trains@camcomm.com](mailto:trains@camcomm.com), 203-655-0138.

**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 11, 11am-7:30pm** National Alternative Fuels Day & Environmental Summit, Hostos Community College, 149th & Grand Concourse, Building C, Bronx. 303-275-4321 or [megan\\_maguire@nrel.gov](mailto:megan_maguire@nrel.gov)

**April 11, 11:45am** Transportation Research Forum, "The Rise and Fall of Local Suburban Transportation in Northern New Jersey," William Fahey, Esq. New York School Bus Contractors Association. 212-435-4226 or [pgessner@panynj.gov](mailto:pgessner@panynj.gov)

**April 15, 16 & 17** TransAction 2002, 26th Annual NJ State Transportation Conference, Tropicana Resort Hotel, Casino and Conference Center - Atlantic City, 908-903-1077

**April 19, 10am-noon** University Transportation Research Center Visiting Scholars Seminar. "Transportation Reform at the Crossroads: TEA 21" - David Burwell, Surface Transportation Policy Project. NYC Technical College of Klitgord Auditorium, 285 Jay St., Brooklyn 212-650-8050

**April 19, noon** City Club of New York Luncheon Forum. "Service Under Stress." Explores how 9-11 has impacted Port Authority's services. 212-207-3676 or [cityclubofny@nycmail.com](mailto:cityclubofny@nycmail.com)

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