

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### No Let-up by MetroCard Mike

A recent *Daily News* editorial applauded NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg for keeping the **Manhattan car-pool rule** in place until at least June. The carpool rule “has so reduced congestion that New York is more drivable, more walkable, more breathable, more livable,” the paper wrote. “If it’s still working, if the streets remain freer of horn-tooting, exhaust-belching vehicles, **keep it in effect even longer.**”

The mayor, who said that increased carpooling has helped decrease traffic without harming economic activity, is now looking to **city hall staffers** to form carpools as well. According to the *NY Post*, the mayor intends to further reduce city hall’s car fleet with more pooling. Until the system is organized, the *Post* said, staffers are expected to follow the mayor’s straphanging example.

### CT Leaders Want Better Transit

Talk of tackling congestion on I-95 dominated a March meeting of Connecticut business leaders and legislators convened by the Southwestern Area Commerce & Industry Association. According to the *Advocate*, over 300 people crowded the meeting to hear legislators discuss salient issues in Connecticut.

Although some questioned why widening or **double-decking I-95** is not under consideration, lawmakers took a pro-transit stance, saying expanding highways would lead to more gridlock.

House Speaker Moira Lyons said the goal is to get people out of their cars, not to provide a mechanism to increase traffic. In the past, she said, transportation decisions had been made in a vacuum – project by project – resulting in more of a patchwork than a seamless transportation system.

No state in America “has ever driven its way out of a transportation problem,” said State Sen. William Nickerson, adding that he hopes to see trains in the state operate **more like a subway system**, with more frequent and regular service.

Connecticut transit riders also expressed the need for better service during a recent meeting with transportation officials and Metro-North management, organized by the Connecticut Commuter Council. Riders complained of long waits between transfers, crowded trains and infrequent bus and rail service.

### Fight to Fix NJ Bridges and Roads Continues

Despite appeals from the Tri-State Campaign and other transportation reformers, the New Jersey Dept. of Transportation did not improve its proposed **2003 capital program** before submitting it to the legislature for approval last week. Like an earlier draft (*MTR #355*), the plan does not comply with the fix-it-first or 1000-lane mile bikeway mandates enacted in the Transportation Trust Fund law of 2000.

At a public hearing held by the State Assembly and Senate Budget and Appropriations Committees, Campaign director Janine Bauer urged the legislature to amend the program to provide an **additional \$20 million each** for bridge and roadway preservation – a measure that is now gaining bi-partisan support in Trenton. Because a shocking 76% of the state funds in the capital program are allocated to “statewide line items” — money that will be spent later **at NJDOT discretion** — more money could be devoted to specific road and bridge repairs without affecting other projects or creating a budget gap. The legislature has one month to reject or amend the capital program.

Although the NJDOT program does not make a break with old spending priorities, DOT has adopted **fix-it-first rhetoric**.

New Jersey Transportation Commissioner James Fox told the *Bergen Record* that, “It’s like turning a battleship. We are committed to moving in a new direction.” Fox told press that the plan cuts the Trust Fund money dedicated to road expansion to 10% — down from 20% last year. According to the *Star-Ledger*, however, DOT officials **could not name any specific widening projects** that were shelved or delayed in order to help “turn the ship.”

The DOT plan invests the smallest amount of Trust Fund money in bridge repair since the fix-it-first mandate was adopted in 2000. Trust Fund spending on bridge repair for 2003 has **been reduced to just 4%**. In 2003, only \$21 million in Trust Fund money will go to bridge repair, down \$1 million from 2002 and less than half of the \$44 million spent in 2001.

Programs to promote alternatives to trucks also received short shrift. Rail freight, for example, is held at the same low level as in previous years, receiving only \$10 million. Road preservation fares

better than bridge funding, receiving \$78 million, or almost 14% of state monies.

This level is still far less than is needed to fix New Jersey's road and bridge network. Currently, 22% of bridges under county and municipal jurisdiction are structurally deficient. Statewide, **over 800 bridges** are in need of repair. Pavement on 17% of state highways is deficient, and the number is higher for county and local roads. Several major freight-hauling interstate highways, including portions of I-295, I-80 and I-78 have extremely serious pavement problems.

While DOT made much of additional federal money that is going to bridge preservation, this money is legally dedicated to bridge repair and therefore does nothing to advance compliance with the state's fix-it-first mandate, which applies to state funds. "By calling other things 'fix-it-first,' DOT attempts to mask the problem," said Bauer. "The federal funds **must be used on bridges**. They're taking credit for something they are required to do."

By providing an additional \$20 million each for roadways and bridges, the legislature can reaffirm its commitment to fix-it-first. This level of funding would at least return preservation spending to level it was at when lawmakers mandated a fix-it-first policy.

### Port Ivory Plan Still Has Potential

In the midst of big trouble for New York City's long-term garbage plan – including problems with the linchpin Linden barge-to-rail facility – a company hoping to develop a state of the art barge/rail station at Staten Island's Port Ivory says it's still in business. Because of its **focus on rail and recycling**, the Port Ivory Recycling & Transfer Alliance proposal presents a chance to reduce dependence on trucks, which has ballooned since Fresh Kills closed.

Despite fervent Staten Island efforts to keep city trash out, the Port Ivory proposal is a far cry from the island's Fresh Kills experience, and the Alliance hopes islanders will view it as more palatable than recent suggestions that Fresh Kills be reopened. The Port Ivory facility would be enclosed in a 2-acre portion of the Proctor & Gamble site, in an industrial area that is a half mile from the nearest residential area, according to the developer (MTR #173).

In order to make the plan even easier for Staten Islanders, the plan calls for at least \$60 million in community development, wetlands restoration and support of recycling-oriented business in the rest of the facility. The plan is one of four finalist proposals.

### New Jersey, New York Leaders in U.S. Bike Commute Boom

Bicycle commuting in New Jersey nearly doubled during the 1990s, according to "journey to work" data from the 2000 Census. Bike commuting's share of the census commuting survey also increased more than 60% in NY State from 1990 to 2000.

The survey indicates that in both New Jersey and New York, bicycling was far and away the **fastest growing commute mode** of the decade. Mass transit's share of survey responses, for instance, increased 29% in New Jersey and 8.29% in New York State. Driving's share fell slightly in both states.

Nationally, bicycling increased its share more than any other mode except "other" — its share of all U.S. responses to the survey increased nearly 9%.

**Connecticut** appears to be **missing out** on the bike boom, showing a cycling share increase of only 1.1%.

Although DOT-type planners frequently lump **bicycling and walking** together, the Census data shows a sharp **divergence** in where the two modes are heading. Nationally, walking declined more than any mode except motorcycling, whose overall numbers barely register. Plummeting rates of U.S. foot commuting are reflected around the region: In New Jer-

Shares of Journey to Work Responses	1990 bike	2000 bike	1990-2000 % change	1990 walk	2000 walk	1990-2000 % change
<b>NJ</b>	.24%	.47%	97%	4.11%	2.67%	-35%
<b>NY</b>	.25%	.40%	62.5%	7%	5.3%	-23.9%
<b>CT</b>	.171%	.172%	1.1%	3.67%	2.63%	-28.5%
<b>U.S.</b>	.41%	.44%	8.98%	3.9%	2.68%	-31.3%

sey, walking's share dropped over 35%; in Connecticut, down over 28%; in New York, down nearly 24%.

While it's difficult to speculate about the genesis of state-wide data like the journey-to-work responses, a variety of factors may be at work. Walking's overall decline likely reflects the continuation of **sprawl development** that is **moving jobs from main streets to office parks**, and street designs that are hostile or dangerous to pedestrians. Increasing trip distances may also have caused transit and cycling to capture some walking trips, although sprawl-related street design is often also unfriendly to cycling.

The survey **undercounts walking** because it asks for one primary commute mode. Walking as a function of transit use does not appear in the picture at all. It also omits occasional bike or foot commuting — someone riding a bus three days a week and walking the other two would appear under "transit."

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

Development of pro-cycling infrastructure and street design with new funding opportunities in ISTEA and TEA-21 apparently is producing a stronger effect on cyclists than on pedestrians. In CT, bike advocates have criticized ConnDOT for favoring a few expensive greenway-type projects over street networks that better accommodate bicycling.

The divergence of bike and walk commute trends may also in some way reflect a bifurcation of the U.S. population in terms of **attitudes toward exercise**. Health consciousness among some segments of society appears to be rising alongside record obesity. The "Generation X" population bulge may also have created a favorable demographic for cycling.

### **Bergen County: Blame the Victim?**

It may be understandable if fewer people are inclined to walk in Bergen County. Pedestrians there are dying at disturbing rates, **approaching last year's pedestrian death toll** in just the first two and a half months of 2002. According to the *Record*, 11 pedestrians have been killed by cars since January. Last year, Bergen's pedestrian fatality toll was 14.

As disturbing as the deaths themselves is the narrow attitude expressed by authorities. Hillsdale Police Chief Frank Mikulski, president of the Bergen County Police Chief Association and a charter member of the county traffic officers association, told the *Record*, "It's like dealing with a child. You have to tell them the same thing over and over again. It's no different with pedestrians."

A more real-world comment from the *Record* underscored the need to increase driver awareness with education and visible crosswalks, and to step up traffic enforcement. The *Record* suggested that **county officials regularly walk local streets**, basing policy decisions on first-hand knowledge of the dangers facing pedestrians, rather than from the lazy windshield perspective of so many policy makers.

### **Stamford: Addressing the Problem**

After a recent rise in traffic deaths, Stamford officials announced that the city will make design changes and step up motorist education and enforcement efforts. According to the *Advocate*, seven crashes have killed eight motorist and pedestrians since December, and many more have been injured.

Police will begin tracking moving violations and injuries to identify problem areas. The city will post **speed monitors** in an attempt to slow cars down, and will try to better enforce crosswalk rules.

The city's traffic advisory chairman, Frank Fedeli, said **traffic calming** measures have been implemented at 23 sites. His office is open to suggestions for future projects, he said

### **Developers Eye Long Island Rail Stations**

In March, the Suffolk County Planning Commission gave the go-ahead to a new, 7.6 acre luxury apartment complex next to the **Ronkonkoma** train station. It will build **66 two-bedroom apartments**, a community center, 136 parking spaces and a sewage plant, according to the *Long Island Business News*.

The developer, Fairfield Properties, says the plan is in keeping with Suffolk County's vision for more high-density development near rail stations. A Suffolk study, based on 1990 census figures, found that people living in multi-unit housing complexes near train stations **used transit at a much higher rate** than people elsewhere in Suffolk. At Fairfield Park apartments near the Babylon station, 77% of respondents said a member of the household had used the station to get to work. In other complexes near the Babylon and Bay Shore stations, an average of 56% of households had a worker who at some point had commuted by train. The study compared this to a countywide average of 6% of households with a rail commuter. More than a quarter of respondents living near railroad stations reported using the railroad for non-work related travel at least a few times a month.

Two recent code changes may help Suffolk develop more properties near rail stations, according to the *Business News*.

One program would help developers meet effluent requirements, which are often a problem on sites close to stations without sewer capacity. It would use health department power to favor to sewer expansion proposals that fulfill a public need – such as affordable housing near a transportation hub. Another **transfer of development rights** program would allow developers to buy development rights in less developed areas and agree not to build there, in exchange for permits near downtowns and transit stations.

The second change will allow wood frame construction of commercial buildings up to four stories instead of two beginning in July. This will mean significant savings for developers and could spur development of multi-family housing.

### **Transit Privatization: the U.K. Debacle**

Representatives of British railroad and subway labor unions related the failure of mass transit privatization in the U.K. at a well-attended March symposium hosted in Manhattan by the International Association of Machinists and TWU Local 100.

The sale of the public British Rail system to a variety of private companies responsible for parts of the country's train operations and infrastructure during the 1990s has largely collapsed. After several high-profile and deadly train collisions, ever-

increasing demand by private operators for subsidies and significant profit-taking at the companies' upper levels, the companies are bankrupt. There appears now to be a strong likelihood of their **returning to public ownership**. The union leaders said public opinion strongly favors such a development.

However, a battle still looms in London over a similar scheme for the Underground. Contracts that would sell off parts of the subway infrastructure are now pending, but the plan is being fought by London city government.

Ironically, the crisis has developed amid surging demand for rail service, both on inter-city trains and in London. While growing ridership would likely have created pressure for rising public expenditure on transit, the union representatives present a strong case that privatization has cost British taxpayers and train riders far more than if the system had remained public. This is largely because the companies boosted profits by "sweating" assets, deferring or neglecting maintenance to dangerous degrees. One major crash occurred due to broken rail on a major trunk line near London, while two deadly collisions involved trains whose warning equipment was malfunctioning or hadn't been installed. The aftermath saw intensive catch-up work which led the companies to call for more subsidies and to diminish service during repairs.

The British speakers also said privatization has devastated bus service in many cities across Britain.

They said one of the few positive aspects of the debacle is that **other western European countries** have slowed or halted privatization processes.

While transit privatization is not a big issue regarding the main systems in our metropolitan region, the British Rail and Underground schemes are conceptually similar to proposals put forward by the **Amtrak Reform Council**. ARC plans would transfer infrastructure and operating responsibilities into separate entities, and attempt to privatize either or both (*MTR* #310). The British unions met in Washington last month with Rep. James Oberstar, ranking Democrat on the House Transportation Committee. The Congressman invited them back for the **Committee's April 11 hearing on passenger rail issues**.

On another issue with an analogy in this region, the British transit unions say are supporting London Mayor Ken Livingstone's "**congestion charging**" plan to levy hefty tolls on motorists entering central London — despite the mayor's refusal to exempt public employees from the tolls. Livingstone plans to direct **toll revenue to public transit improvements**.

## Calendar

**April 11, 8:30am** Manhattan Second Avenue Subway Task Force Meeting, Manhattan Borough President's Office, One Centre Street, 19th Floor South. 212-669-8164 or [rmuller@manhattanbp.org](mailto:rmuller@manhattanbp.org)

**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 11, 12-2pm** Long Island Rail Road Com-muter's Council mtg. 10th Floor Conference Room, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087

**April 15, 6-9pm** Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study public meeting, John Dewey High School. 50 Avenue X. 212-799-8803 x22 or [SouthernBrooklynTIS@zetlin.com](mailto:SouthernBrooklynTIS@zetlin.com)

**April 17, 6-9pm** Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study public meeting, George Wingate High School, 600 Kingston Avenue. 212-799-8803 x22 or [SouthernBrooklynTIS@zetlin.com](mailto:SouthernBrooklynTIS@zetlin.com)

**April 19, 10am-noon** University Transp. Research Center Visiting Scholars Seminar. "Transportation Reform at the Crossroads: TEA 21" - David Burwell, Surface Transportation Policy Project. NYC Tech. College, 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)

**April 19** Earth Day, Trenton Bike to Work Day. Trenton Cycling Revolution. 609-394-8018

**April 23, 8:30am-2pm** Women's City Club of New York Conference. "New York Rebuilds: Are We Getting It Right?" Speakers include City Planning Commission Chair Amanda Burden and Former NYC Comptroller Alan Hevesi. 212-353-8070

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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