

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 363

April 29, 2002

NEWS

Carpool Cave-in Wins More Grief Than Praise — Big Increase in Traffic at Crossings Last Week —

As single occupancy vehicles flooded the Queensboro Bridge and Queens-Midtown and Lincoln Tunnels Monday, *Newsday* sharply criticizing the city for ending the carpool rule for midtown crossings. Calling the **city's decision a "big disappointment,"** the paper urged the Bloomberg administration to seek power from Albany for a permanent carpool rule. The piece opened: "Show us someone who'd argue that Manhattan needs more car traffic, and we'll show you a parking-garage owner." Or, we might add, politicians from central and eastern Queens.

"The lone-driver ban is environmentally smart. It has reduced peak rush-hour congestion, with traffic shifting to before and after," wrote the paper. "And, despite what some opponents think, trains, subways and buses in the region are pretty good options."

"...there's no concrete, objective evidence that the 7-month-old emergency carpool requirement for Manhattan-bound morning commuters has had a deleterious effect on the borough's overall economy... **The city should be working mightily to discourage car traffic** in maddeningly clogged Manhattan - even if that means appealing to Albany for the authority to control access."

City transportation commissioner Iris Weinshall made the standard plea to would-be drivers to continue carpooling, riding transit, walking or cycling. Not surprisingly, with the rules gone, thousands ignored her and drove their cars into Manhattan. **Rush hour traffic** in the Lincoln Tunnel Monday morning was **up about 17%** — around 3,000 more cars than the average when the carpool rule was in force. Growth was likely greater at the free Queensboro Bridge and at the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, which does not feature the Lincoln's anti-congestion peak-hour toll system. The Port Authority said it expected increases to be greater on subsequent days.

Does Pataki Support NY DOT's Huge Long Island Road Plan?

Consultants to the NY State Dept. of Transportation told attendees of two Long Island "info-mercial" sessions presenting the LITP 2000 scheme that the Governor would review the plan before it is adopted.

LITP 2000 is the state DOT's attempt to develop a long range transportation blueprint for Long Island. After years of work, an elaborate public relations effort and big consultant contracts, it has come up with stuff the DOT could have decided on its own — a network of new HOV lanes and a big batch of standard highway widenings and extensions.

The plan would build 65 miles of new HOV lanes, add another 105 miles of lanes to major highways and lengthen existing highways by 20 miles. It would be the **biggest road plan in NY State** since the days of master highwayman and architect of sprawl **Robert Moses**, a point that seems astonishing given the pro-environment image the Pataki Administration has strongly cultivated over the past eight years.

Officials at the LITP info-mercial meetings said the plan was being changed to incorporate emphasis on the need for full funding for **existing bus systems** in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. That is likely an answer to some of the pressure that the plan is under, but it does not change its roadway emphasis.

It is unclear what officials at the meetings meant when they said the Governor would review the plan. He has made no public statement about it. He can certainly expect to be asked more questions about the plan as he campaigns over the summer, however. Over 75 Long Island and regional groups recently signed a call to **"Rethink LITP"** organized by the Long Island Progressive Coalition. Endorsers include civic and homeowner groups, the Long Island Council of Churches, and the Pine Barrens Society.

NJ Reverses: Buses Will Use Low-Sulfur Diesel

Environmental wisdom seems to have prevailed over other considerations within the McGreevey Administration over **NJ Transit's choice of bus fuel**. New Jersey transportation commissioner James Fox and Environmental protection commissioner Bradley Campbell announced last Thursday that ultra low-sulfur fuel will be purchased for the state's diesel bus fleet, reversing New

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Jersey Transit's Feb. announcement to the contrary.

When it decided to **forego alternative fuel buses** during a massive purchase in 2000, NJ Transit said it would switch to low-sulfur diesel. Two months ago, however, NJ Transit reneged, saying it would not purchase low-sulfur fuel or particulate filters after all, in order to save \$16.2 million and \$12 million, respectively (*MTR #356*).

It is not clear where the decision to again change course and go ahead low-sulfur fuel originated. It appears to have come from high up — NJ Transit director George Warrington apparently had no role in the announcement. Environmental groups have been advocating for low-sulfur fuel with the Dept. of Environmental Protection, rather than Transit.

According to the commissioners' press release, low-sulfur fuel use will result in a 90 percent reduction in sulfur emissions, 75 percent reduction in total hydrocarbons, 30 percent reduction in carbon monoxide and approximately 25 percent reduction in total particulate matter. According to NJ Transit, the agency **will not proceed to install filters** that further reduce emission of fine particulates — which have been linked to asthma and lung cancer — when it implements low-sulfur fuel. A spokesman for NJ Transit told the *Star-Ledger* that it hopes to purchase the filters by next year.

The bidding process for low sulfur fuel, which was originally completed in November, will now reopen, with a decision expected at the agency's May Board meeting. The low-sulfur fuel will then go into use in July as originally planned.

CT Bike, Walk Advocates Close in on Goal

According to the CT Bicycle Coalition, an amendment to one of the state legislature's general transportation budget bills may provide funding for pedestrian and bicycle safety projects. Under the amendment, federal "hazard elimination" funds, which are eligible for cycling and walking-related projects, would be used by the state for bike and pedestrian projects or granted to municipalities that propose such projects. The amendment would also provide federal Hazard Elimination Program funds to **create a "Safe Routes to School" program** in Connecticut.

The amendment, originally introduced in the legislature as a separate bill (*MTR #354*), has bi-partisan sponsorship in both houses. It allocates somewhat **more money** than the original bill, presumably to accommodate incorporation of the safe routes to school provision. That provision also promotes grants to municipalities under a program ConnDOT would establish and administer. A vote on the bill is expected by the middle of this week.

Bloomberg Contingency Budget Reflects Little Imagination on Transport

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's executive budget, first proposed in February, now includes specific "contingency cuts" which may be implemented if the city does not receive assistance from state and federal governments and a give-back agreement from city unions regarding worker benefits. The mayor's budget plan for 2003 includes assistance totaling \$800 million from the state and federal governments and \$500 million in benefit reductions.

The plan **emphasizes mass transit cuts**. It doesn't appear that the city has done any thinking whatsoever about how it **might derive more revenue** from simple transportation enforcement activities.

If the state and federal aid and worker give-backs do not materialize, city Department of Transportation cuts worth \$27 million could be implemented. 75% of them affect transit service and fares. Bus service would be hit with cuts totaling \$17.5 million, with another \$2.5 million chopped from Staten Island ferry operations. The contingency cuts include:

- Increasing fares on city-subsidized express buses from \$3 to \$4 million (\$8 million).
- 50% reduction of weekend express bus service (\$2 million).
- Elimination of all express bus weekend service (\$2 million).
- Additional reduction in bus funding — likely cuts to local city-supported routes (\$5 million).
- Reduction of rush hour and night time Staten Island Ferry service (\$2.5 million).

Although none of these measures is part of the main 2003 executive budget, city officials indicate that the contingency plan may need to be utilized. City Comptroller William Thompson Jr. seems to believe a shortfall is a strong possibility.

The cuts to Staten Island ferry service would be slap to Staten Island officials, who have been pushing the city to provide half-hourly service around the clock. The contingency plan would be a marked step in the other direction. Night ferries currently run only once an hour, and the cuts could extend the interval to an hour and a half or two hours. At the same time, the city has been seeking funding for other ferry services. The city's core budget also discusses **"privatizing" late night ferry operation**.

The city does not appear to have considered ways to derive more revenue from transportation in the short run. One possibility would be to **aggressively attack the city's red light-running epidemic**. Former City Comptroller Alan Hevesi estimated last year that drivers violate red lights over 1 million times per day

from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays (*MTR* #319). Can't the city net an extra \$27 million a year from a potential revenue source this gargantuan in scale?

Another potential is to **heavily fine the utility companies that chop up city streets** and do a slovenly repair job. These companies cost motorists untold amounts in damages, contribute to crashes and make a mockery of the city DOT's supposed core competence of maintaining NYC streets.

If the budget contingency plan does not go into effect, DOT will see about a \$12 million reduction in city funds, down 4% from 2002 levels. The mayor's out-year budget still contains revenue from East River Bridge tolls, but city government has taken no apparent action to begin figuring out how to implement the tolls, and last week demonstrated a waning interest in traffic management in the manner in which it repealed part of the Manhattan carpool rule.

Attack on U.S. Environmental Law Underway

Last Wednesday, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure approved an airport "streamlining" bill sponsored by committee chair Don Young of Alaska. The bill, the Airport Streamlining Approval Process Act (ASAP) would severely weaken the environmental review process for airport infrastructure projects (*MTR* #357).

Proponents of "environmental streamlining" have blamed environmental opposition for the slow pace of infrastructure projects. Now, bill sponsors are also using passenger delays seen recently at U.S. airports – after security was drastically beefed up – as an excuse to rush airport expansion projects through the review processes.

The airport bill may be just the tip of a streamlining iceberg. Rep. Young has drafted a bill that would similarly reduce environmental and historical impact reviews for all surface transportation projects, which may be introduced next month. Bills to curtail input and discussion for construction on military bases and energy delivery infrastructure, such as pipelines and transmission lines, are also in the works.

Seven environmental and transportation groups, including the Campaign, wrote to Rep. Young and Senate Transportation Chair James Oberstar last Tuesday, opposing the airport bill. "[The bill] greatly undermines the ability of state, regional or local authorities and affected communities to cooperate in designing projects that balance the interests of all parties and incorporate appropriate mitigation strategies. ASAP hands over this decision making process to federal transportation bureaucrats...We strenuously oppose attempts to expedite airport expansion by limiting or eliminating environmental safeguards or the public review process," said the letter.

Downtown Forum on NYC Bridge Tolls

Lower Manhattan City Council member **Alan Gerson** told citizens at a Manhattan community board #2 forum that he **supports East River Bridge tolls**, and is pushing to include a consultant to study the details of the idea in this year's Council budget.

That is welcome news, since **the city appears to be making no move** to follow up on inclusion of East River toll revenue in Mayor Bloomberg's out-year budget (*MTR* #353).

State Senator Tom Duane also said he supports East River tolls, but spent most of his remarks raising objections to them. Participants at the forum overwhelmingly backed implementation of tolls.

Traffic Calming Not in the Mix for Queens Boulevard

The New York City DOT and consultants presented plans for a second phase of their Queens Boulevard Safety Study to citizens last week. It will make recommendations to improve pedestrian safety on two segments of Queens Boulevard – from Van Dam Street to the LIE and a shorter segment on the eastern end from Union Turnpike to Hillside Avenue. DOT says the project will complement improvements made on Queens Boulevard from LIE to Union Turnpike.

Measures will emphasize improvements such as mid-block signals, longer crossing times, slightly wider medians and fencing to keep pedestrians from crossing mid-block. The city says that since safety measures began to go in in 1999, **fatalities** along the boulevard have **decreased by half**. During the past two and a half years, annual deaths have averaged 4.8, compared with 9.8 crash-related fatalities per year in 1993-99. Crashes involving pedestrians declined from a peak of 154 in 1995 to 69 in 2000. It's unclear whether pedestrian restrictions or the modest pedestrian amenities are producing the results.

However, DOT appears unwilling to answer critics' main complaint – that the road has been changed over time from a "boulevard" into an urban highway. No plans exist to redesign Queens Boulevard to **reduce vehicle volumes** and enhance the quality of life for surrounding communities. The city in fact appears **more conservative on traffic calming issues** now than at any time since it established its pedestrian office during the Dinkins Administration.

Trenton: Sprawl Legislation Developing

Central New Jersey State Senator Peter Inverso is sponsoring three bills that seek to address development and sprawl-related problems.

One bill (S.634) would require developers to complete **traffic impact studies** for new developments. For any development generating 200 or more peak

hour trips at the site, a traffic impact study of state highways would need to be submitted to the Department of Transportation. The agency may then **require the developer to pay** for mitigation projects. Developers would also pay for changes in road width, signage and traffic lights – even on adjoining roads – that are necessitated by the development.

A second bill (S.645) seeks to increase planning coordination between bordering municipalities. It would require municipalities to notify neighboring towns about development within 1000 feet of their borders. The **adjoining municipality would review the plan** and become involved if it perceives possible impacts, including traffic-related problems. The bill is poised for committee review, with a hearing in mid-May. An identical bill has been introduced in the Assembly by Assemblyman Thomas Keen

The third, S.634, would authorize municipalities to implement moratoriums or delays to ensure growth complies with a long-term master plan – known as **“timed growth.”** Supporters say it allows municipalities to coordinate growth with provision of infrastructure. Critics of timed-growth say it does not influence the character of growth, only its schedule. Another bill has been introduced that would provide for timed-growth development in the NJ Pinelands.

Bronx River Greenway Extended

The newest link in the Bronx River Greenway opened this past weekend. The new part of the greenway extends from the Bruckner Boulevard to Westchester Avenue and runs between the Bronx River and the Sheridan Expressway.

The path improves flow between neighborhoods. However, the groups that have been working to decommission the **Sheridan Expressway** point out that the highway **still blocks access from the west**. The state’s plan to reconstruct the Sheridan’s interchange with the Bruckner Expressway would overshadow the greenway with three levels of elevated highway.

“We’re happy that the State DOT worked with us so that the Parks Department could open this path,” said Majora Carter, executive director of Sustainable South Bronx. “But we are really hoping that they will build the interchange at Leggett Avenue so that the Sheridan can be torn up and a sizeable park established along the river.”

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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Calendar

April 29, 8pm Transit Committee of Bergen County meeting with candidates for Congress and County Executive. Leonia Borough Hall Annex, 305 Beachwood Place, Leonia, NJ. 201-871-1218 or wantsrail@juno.com

April 30, 2-4pm Congestion Buster Task Force public meeting. NJTPA Offices, One Newark Center, 17th Floor, Newark, NJ. 609-530-2038 or cbtf@dot.state.nj.us

April 30, 6-9pm Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study public meeting. Marine Park Intermediate School Cafeteria, 1925 Stuart Street, Brooklyn. 212-799-8803x22 or SouthernBrooklynTIS@zetlin.com

May 1, 6-9pm Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study public meeting. High School of Telecommunications, Art & Technology, 350 67th Street, Brooklyn. 212-799-8803x22 or SouthernBrooklynTIS@zetlin.com

May 6, 11:45am Transportation Research Forum, "Rail Freight in New York City: A Global View" with Henry Posner III, Railroad Development Corporation. Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington Street, Manhattan. 212-435-4226 or pguessner@panynj.gov

May 7, 8am-2:30pm Annual NY/NJ Regional Aviation Symposium "Rebuilding Air Travel Post September 11 Through the Integration of Security and Service." CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan. 212-998-7545 or mah306@nyu.edu

May 8, 6:30pm "Bogota: Radical Urban Design" Conversation with Enrique Peñalosa, former Mayor of Bogota, Colombia on how development of new parks, hundreds of miles of sidewalks and bicycle paths and implementation of citywide car free days. National Design Museum, 2 East 91st Street, Manhattan. 212-629-8001

May 14, 8-10am Regional Business Partnership's Annual Transportation Award, presented to Dr. Saul Fenster, New Jersey Institute of Technology President. 973-242-4219 or rbp@rbp.org

more calendar entries at www.tstc.org