

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

With State Budget Nearing, Suffolk Bus Riders Can Look for Fare Hike Roll-Back

With NY legislative leaders and Gov. George Pataki nearing a budget agreement, Suffolk bus riders can hope for financial aid and consequential lower fares. In response to complaints from Suffolk bus riders, Suffolk Cty. Exec. Robert Gaffney — who turned down State Sen. Cesar Trunzo's offer of immediate emergency state aid — said he would **rescind the April fare hike** if the additional operating assistance in Gov. Pataki's proposed budget materialized.

According to the *New York Times*, a tentative budget deal was agreed upon Thursday, though there are still some outstanding disagreements. Still, it appears that a budget will pass sooner than in past years — good news for Suffolk's bus riders, if the extra aid in the Governor's proposal is part of the deal.

Poll: Public Opposes Looser Environmental Standards for Gov't Agencies

Another "environmental streamlining" bill has made it out of a House committee, following last week's airport capacity project streamlining bill. HR 4546 amends the **Endangered Species Act**, preventing the Sec'y of Interior from making designation of critical habitat on military bases where an "integrated natural resources management plan" is in place. The bill also amends the **Migratory Bird Treaty Act** to allow the federal Fish and Wildlife Service to issue permits for the accidental taking of migratory birds.

Yet according to a Zogby America poll, **85% of registered voters** think that all government agencies should have to follow existing environmental laws. Even when put directly against military readiness, **79% of voters favored environmental protection**. The DOD has other requests before Congress asking for exemptions from major environmental laws.

That voters oppose loosening environmental restrictions for military bases should send a strong message to streamlining proponents in Washington.

If voters oppose a law that allows environmental streamlining even in the context of military readiness, it is likely that other streamlining legislation— such as U.S. Rep. Don Young's **surface transportation streamlining bill** — will face strong opposition.

10 Year Study Concludes: More Traffic For Staten Island Despite Busway

The New York State DOT will propose, as an outcome of the Staten Island Expressway Major Investment Study, construction of "special use" **bus/HOV lanes in the median of the SIE** (which might also be used by trucks off-peak), along with other related construction projects, costing approximately \$500 million over a multi-year period. The HOV lanes would function as **express bus lanes** (one in each direction) along the SIE, with "drop ramps" in the center for access (like the Shirley Highway in northern VA) and a handful of stations with locations to be determined. Possibilities include Manor Rd., Renwick Ave., Hylan Blvd., and Staten Island Railway. Despite these construction projects, however, **vehicle miles of travel will increase 23%** on the SIE itself, by 2020, compared to the no-build alternative.

The DOT's plans were revealed at the agency's final public and technical advisory committee meetings for the SIE MIS last week. The study was mostly **received poorly by the public**, who pointed out that the plan does nothing to solve Clove Road back-ups, numerous other pinch points, and that access to the bus/HOV lanes, if by car, would result in overflow parking on side streets in neighborhoods. Few park-n-ride lots are planned due to limited space.

The study's authors pointed out that between now and 2020, traffic on the SIE was predicted to grow just 6%, but that traffic levels of other SI highways would grow 30%, resulting in **significant personal and vehicular delays**. The DOT's goal was to move as much of the existing and projected traffic from other Staten Island highways onto the SIE as possible. Yet the end result is that total VMT on all SI highways is predicted to decrease only slightly from a projected Island-wide increase of 42% by 2020. Pollution levels would not change either.

In addition to the bus/HOV lane, DOT will complete service roads throughout most of the corridor, expand service road intersections to handle additional traffic attracted to the SIE, use shoulders eastbound in the AM peak and westbound in the PM peak. All options include ramp metering the flow of cars onto the SIE, which is probably the only way the already-

crowded SIE could handle an influx of more vehicles. The study assumes the **Goethals Bridge twin** is constructed with an HOV lane.

Population and job growth in SI is projected to occur mostly in the southern and western portions, with some pockets along the eastern shore. Yet the bus/HOV lane does not begin until the SIE's interchange with the West Shore Expressway. Since the focus of the study (the SIE) does little to bring more transit to western and southern sections of the borough, as an alternate way to reduce the **projected 30% growth in traffic on other SI highways**, the project is flawed from the outset. With a bigger-picture look at modes across agencies, the \$500 million might be better spent.

The SIE bus/HOV lane would permit 2-person carpools, a policy that has caused slow travel on the related Gowanus Expressway in Brooklyn. The study's project manager noted that the HOV-2 assumption was made for modeling purposes before the Gowanus changed to a 3-plus rule, and before the Sept. 11th-related Manhattan carpool rule. He said it was an operational matter that could be changed.

One SI resident pointed out, in response to DOT's proposal that Staten Island have a transportation management association to **facilitate carpooling** and other employer-based demand management measures, that changes to the V-N Bridge existing toll collection system would improve carpooling rates. Now, carpool commuters must write away for tickets, receive them in the mail, which takes a few weeks (while hoping the request isn't lost), put a sticker on their car, and then sit in the cash-pay lanes to use the tickets to get the discount. A full report with technical documents will be released soon.

Longer Commutes Plague Jersey Bus Riders

A New Jersey bus rider contacted the Campaign last week, writing, "I have been e-mailing the Port Authority and Mayor Bloomberg daily to tell them that **my commute has gone from 25 to 60 minutes** on NJT line 168 [from the Paramus/Hackensack area through the Lincoln Tunnel] since they stupidly lifted the SOV ban at the Lincoln tunnel. What else can I do? This is just ridiculous!!!" More **bus-only or HOV capacity** in the tunnel, which the Port Authority is considering (*MTR #347*), would help alleviate slow bus speeds.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

Region High on Smog List

The metropolitan region encompassing New York, New Jersey and Connecticut is among the Country's worst for ground-level ozone pollution, commonly known as smog, according to a report released by the American Lung Association. The **New York City** metropolitan region ranked as the 20th worst nationwide for ozone pollution, which is produced from hydrocarbon and nitrogen oxide emissions and contributes to **respiratory health problems**.

All counties monitored in **New Jersey and Connecticut received an F grade** from ALA for having a high number of days during which ozone pollution was at dangerous levels. In New York, 14 of the monitored counties, including Manhattan, Queens, Bronx, Suffolk and Westchester, received an F grade.

According to ALA's report, ozone has particularly adverse effects for those suffering from the 260,564 cases of pediatric asthma, 1,112,663 cases of adult asthma, 692,219 cases of chronic bronchitis and 227,969 cases of emphysema in the New York City area. Short-term effects of the pollution – seen in people without respiratory disease – include shortness of breath, coughing and painful breathing.

The report, which examined ozone levels between 1998 and 2000, found that 75% of people living in counties with ozone monitors – a total 142 million nationwide – breath air with dangerous ozone levels. The ALA blamed lax enforcement of existing air pollution standards and threats to Clean Air Act protections for the high numbers. In addition, the ALA urged commuters and employers to **take steps to reduce congestion**, which is a major contributor to ozone pollution. For full report: www.lungusa.org.

Call for End to Pollution at Bay Head Rail Yard

During a public hearing Wednesday, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign with other transportation advocates, environmental groups and Bay Head residents, urged NJ Transit to issue a full environmental impact statement before building a \$16 million expanded **refueling and maintenance yard** at the Coast Line Bay Head rail terminus, and specifically, to consider electrifying the Coast line to do away with diesel engines, soot and pollution.

The existing rail yard has been in use since the 19th century and has caused polluted groundwater and other environmental destruction. NJ Transit proposes a clean-up of the site and will stop refueling the diesel locomotives by using two single-walled tanker cars dating to 1928. The current plan also calls for upgrading the diesel storage and adding leak capture drains, spill detection systems as well as a maintenance shed and brake inspection bay. The plan,

however, **fails to clean up all the diesel fuel spilled.**

Residents voiced concern that the improvements will not significantly reduce harm to the community. The Campaign's Frederick Kaimann urged NJ Transit to study the feasibility of electrification during a **full environmental impact study**, saying the proposal could have positive effects for residents and transit riders and decrease environmental impacts.

"Diesel fueling and maintenance practices at Bay Head have had disastrous environmental consequences for the surrounding area," Mr. Kaimann said. "A North Jersey Coast Line powered entirely by electricity from its northern terminus to Bay Head would **eliminate risks posed by diesel operations.** Furthermore, converting the line to electric south of Long Branch would eliminate the need for commuters to transfer at Long Branch, making the line more convenient and attractive for riders."

A New Jersey Transit spokesman told the *Asbury Park Press* that the agency intends to convert the tracks to electric power at some point, but the agency does not have the money. However, this investment in diesel facilities will likely **lock the Coast Line into diesel use** for decades.

CT Bus Rapid Transit Line Gets Green Light

The Federal Transit Administration has given its go-ahead to the Bus Rapid Transit line that will connect downtown **New Britain to downtown Hartford.** The 9.4 mile corridor will have a dedicated bus lane that follows an abandoned freight rail line on its southern portion and then share right-of-way on an active Amtrak line north of Newington Junction.

The busway will include up to 12 transit stations along the route, including Union Station in downtown Hartford. Express, shuttle, circulator and separate feeder bus service will provide access to the busway and a **multi-use trail** will be constructed next to the busway from downtown New Britain to the Newington Junction Station and in downtown Hartford.

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 (*MTR #356*).

After obtaining state permits, construction on the line will begin. According to ConnDOT, service on the line could start as early as 2005.

New Path Proposed for Jersey Peds, Cyclists

A proposal to correct a 60-year planning mistake and tame one of the **most dangerous bicycle and pedestrian stretches** in New Jersey won an encouraging reception during a walking tour organized by the Campaign, Transportation Alternatives and the New Jersey Bicycle Advisory Council.

The group of nearly 30 regional, state, county and local transportation, park, recreational, environmental, pedestrian, bicycle and fishing officials walked a half mile from the **George Washington Bridge** bicycle and pedestrian path in Fort Lee down Hudson Terrace and Main Street to the entrance to the Palisades Interstate Park at Henry Hudson Drive.

A coalition of cycling, hiking and fishing interests is calling on the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the Palisades Interstate Park to **build a 14-foot path** on the east side of that route to remove non-motorized users from the dangerous and narrow roadway where many crashes occur.

All the land on the route is owned by public authorities. Port Authority officials told the *Star-Ledger* that they would conduct engineering and feasibility studies.

Fort Lee has long recognized the danger of the intersections of Hudson and Main to cars and recently changed Hudson Terrace to a one-way (northbound) only street. This compounds cyclists difficulties, makes **walking that area almost impossible** but does help solve one factor in this crash zone. Fort Lee must continue to work against the dangers of the area by pushing for the off-street bicycle and pedestrian path. The Port Authority and the Palisades Interstate Park have already shown interest in making the world's busiest bridge and one of New Jersey's greatest parks an improved asset for the increasing number of non-motorized users.

The path would be the terminus of the Hudson River Walkway, the greenway that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection is stitching together from the south, starting at the Bayonne Bridge. It would also be the southern terminus for the northern New Jersey bicycling route being planned through to the New York state line.

New Jersey's high number of bicycle commuters has doubled in the past ten years (*MTR #361*). The George Washington Bridge is a cyclist's only Hudson River crossing for 35 miles and the **only way Jersey walkers and cyclists can get into Manhattan.** The other great boon is connecting the long, terrific, hilly cycling in the Palisades Interstate Park with the Hudson River Greenway in Manhattan.

Public Participation Guides Unique Long Island Planning Project

Long Island's Sustainable East End Development Strategies Study (SEEDS) is wrapping up its initial planning phase this month. SEEDS is a **bottom-up regional planning effort** un-matched on Long Island involving five eastern Long Island towns and nine villages. The study, headed up by the East End Supervisors and Mayor's Associations, is attempting

to foster **public participation** in land use and transportation planning in partnership with the East End Transportation Council, New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, the New York State Dept. of Transportation, and Long Island Rail Road.

SEEDS is a positive model of how citizen participation can guide transportation planning. The approach is a **stark contrast to typical transportation planning**, exemplified by LITP2000, NY State Department of Transportation's huge road-widening effort, which the agency has pursued despite public opposition (*MTR* #361).

The SEEDS study process began last August with a series of planning meetings. Feedback gained from these sessions was culminated into a 30-page document, which will be used to model various solutions for transportation and land use problems in eastern Long Island. The models will attempt to reflect the study's goals of preserving open space, improving the major transportation corridors, and developing the region in a way that is sustainable and is in the best interests of all the residents of the region.

During the next phase of planning, to take place over the summer, planners and area residents will create strategies that combine transportation and land use planning. Then, next fall, SEEDS will host a series of streamlined planning workshops based on the models built over the summer.

The last planning workshop for the SEEDS study will be held on Thursday, May 23rd. More information is available at: <http://www.seedsproject.com>

Campaign Staff Notes

Jennifer Jaroski, New Jersey Coordinator for two years, left our staff in March to pursue new opportunities in San Francisco. Jennifer was integral in the Campaign's efforts to advocate for progressive transportation legislation in New Jersey.

Lisa Schreiberman, our New York City Coordinator has left the Campaign to work on capital programming for the New York City Transit Authority. During her four years at the Campaign, Lisa spearheaded a variety of innovative transportation projects. We wish Jennifer and Lisa the best of luck in their new endeavors.

Frederick Kaimann has joined the Campaign staff as our New Jersey Legislative Agent. Previously he was New Jersey Coordinator for Transportation Alternatives, advocating for the state's cyclists and pedestrians. Fred is also a music and art critic.

Calendar

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 pgessner@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 7, 4:30-6:30pm New York City Transit Riders Council's Annual Bus Forum. Concourse House, 2751 Grand Concourse, Bronx. 212-878-7087 or mail@pcac.org

May 7, 6-9pm Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study public meeting. Sheepshead Bay High School, 300 Avenue X, Brooklyn. 212-799-8803x22 or Southern-BrooklynTIS@zetlin.com

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 8, 7pm Bike New Jersey reorganization meeting. Bloustein School of Planning, Rutgers University, New Brunswick. Bikenj@aol.com

May 12-19 Bike Week. Variety of events sponsored by Transportation Alternatives. www.transalt.org

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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