

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### NYC Transit Won't Admit V-train Mistake

Unhappy subway riders joined the Queens Civic Congress and the Straphangers Campaign to protest unpopular V-train service at the end of June. New York City Transit began running the local V along Queens Boulevard and 53rd Street in Manhattan last December, rerouting the F train to a new connection under 63rd Street. Transit advocates **predicted the V would be underused** and that the remaining Queens Boulevard-53rd Street E express crowd further.

Their fears have been realized. Because many commuters prefer a faster trip to a less crowded one, the V is running at only **49% of capacity** while riders crowd into E-trains. The F, which runs express in Queens but now misses Midtown's East Side business district, has seen a slight dip in ridership.

"The V-train is not really a productive train," commuter Harris Kinloch of Springfield Gardens told *Newsday* during the protest. "You get a seat, but I'd rather get to work faster than get a seat."

"I can't stand it (the V line)," said Wendy Constat, a commuter who gets a ride the 179th Street station on Hillside Avenue. "Before, I used to take the F straight to Lexington, but now sometimes I have to transfer 3-4 times to get where I'm going."

Transit has yet to respond to complaints with more than an ad campaign (*MTR #365*). Straphangers and the Civic Congress asked riders to **call Governor George Pataki**, urging him to intervene.

### Bloomberg Sees Fare Increase Possible in 2003

Asked by reporters last Wednesday about the possibility of a NYC subway and bus fare hike, Mayor Bloomberg said "I don't think there's any question, the MTA, their finances are public, and they're strapped, and the unions that represent their workers are asking for a lot more money."

"I think **in the fall** they're going to have to make some **tough decisions**. Do they raise fees or not?" said the mayor, according to the Associated Press.

A spokesperson for Governor Pataki, who appoints the majority of the MTA board, said the fare had remained stable since 1995, the longest stretch in recent history, and noted that MetroCard discounts had lowered fares for many.

### Bridge Tolls Still on Bloomberg Agenda?

Mayor Bloomberg is still at least somewhat interested in East River bridge tolls, judging by his remarks at a recent reporters' breakfast. The *Downtown Express* reported that the mayor raised the issue, "but seemed to acknowledge that the idea may be hard to approve." Bloomberg mentioned the possibility that the E-ZPass system could be set to allow **free passage for city residents**, but would charge others. He also said electronic toll collection meant that tolls may not have to be collected right on the bridges, apparently a reference to the many complaints that East River bridge tolls would create additional congestion. No analysis has been done to show whether only charging out of town vehicles on the city's East River bridges would have an appreciable **impact on traffic levels** and congestion. City government appears to be doing no work on the issue. "It's very complex whether it's a good or bad idea," the mayor equivocated.

Arguments and materials on the benefits to the city are being compiled on-line at [www.bridgetolls.org](http://www.bridgetolls.org).

### E-ZPass: the Next Generation

Last week, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign released a report outlining recommendations to improve electronic toll collection in New Jersey. It was issued the same day that the New Jersey Dept. of Transportation announced the firing of WorldCom as the state's E-ZPass contractor.

"The E-ZPass financing debacle has drawn negative attention to this major infrastructure improvement," said Frederick Kaimman, author of the paper, "E-ZPass in New Jersey: Faster, Smarter, Better."

"But the **E-ZPass system** must be recognized as a **powerful weapon to fight congestion**. New Jersey motorists expect and deserve a road network that is faster, smarter and better."

The report spotlighted high-speed E-ZPass, already in place at Exits 1 and 6 on the New Jersey Turnpike, and how its proliferation could become a major congestion busting investment. E-ZPass technology is capable of collecting tolls from drivers moving at regular highway speeds. The switch to **high speed collection** can reduce gas consumption

and reduce some vehicle pollution.

The report suggested intensification of **congestion pricing** on New Jersey's toll roads, and better outreach about the rush hour/off-peak price differentials that exist now — for instance, detailed billing statements and prominent signs indicating peak toll times.

Cited in the *Bergen Record*, State Transportation Commissioner Jamie Fox said he welcomed the suggestions. "They were helpful," Fox told the paper. "Their suggestions have been considered and are being considered."

The Campaign has also submitted recommendations as part of the state's official review of E-ZPass. A report by the New Jersey Legislature and recommendations from Commissioner Fox on fixing E-ZPass financing and charting the future of the electronic toll system are expected soon.

### NY Railroad Tax Relief On the Way

In late June, both houses of the New York State Legislature passed a new Rail Infrastructure Investment Act — tax relief for freight railroads. Governor Pataki's proposed 2002-2003 budget contained the measure — which Senate and Assembly leaders said they backed — but it was left out of the final state NY budget, passed in April (*MTR* #368).

This was the second year in a row that the tax relief provision was proposed by the governor but left out of the final budget. Freight railroad operators have pressed Albany for years to adopt the changes, complaining that New York levies higher taxes than other states and that railroads are **taxed at higher rates** than other commercial properties (*MTR* #312). They say the problem has led railroads to abandon or eliminate assets and has retarded investment.

CSX Corp., which has been the most outspoken company urging the changes, also filed a lawsuit in February, 2001 against NYC, NY State and ten other municipal governments (*MTR* #308). In April, CSX said it hoped for a post-budget bill, but would pursue the lawsuits if tax was not adopted (*MTR* #368).

A possible result of the change will be **increased capital investment by the freight railroads**, which could help rail capture more of the freight market.

The act contains funding to help municipalities impacted by the loss of property tax revenues.

The legislation reads, in part, "the attraction of a lower cost transportation alternative is an important factor in retaining and attracting business in the state, ... [It] can also yield many public benefits, including reductions in congestion on the state's highways, increased safety for motorists, reduced state expenditures for additional roadway capacity, and environmental benefits resulting from the increased use of fuel-efficient rail freight transport."

### Downtown Park Advocates Worry Over South Ferry Subway Upgrade

The plan to modernize the South Ferry subway station along with reconstruction of Whitehall ferry terminal and the rebuilding of the lower 1/9 subway tunnel is generating opposition from the Battery Conservancy, which says it is worried that the project will **take land from Battery Park**.

The platforms at South Ferry station are too small for the trains that stop at it today. Consequently, passengers can only disembark from certain cars. That poses problems at a station that is heavily used by tourists interested in lower Manhattan and features like the Statue of Liberty and the Staten Island Ferry.

According to *Crain's*, the Conservancy's board is dominated by figures from the real estate and financial industry. We hope the board will come to see that the **opportunity to modernize South Ferry station** — using federal funds earmarked for reconstruction — is an important one for downtown that **must not be missed**. It should be possible for park advocates and NYC Transit to work out design issues that accommodate park and subway station enhancements.

### City Looks to Privatize Overnight Staten Island Ferry Operation

The Staten Island *Advance* reports that NYC DOT intends to bid out late night Staten Island Ferry operations to a private contractor within six months.

The move would reportedly save the city money. However, the city is also hoping that the contract will direct any new private operator to run smaller boats on a **half-hourly schedule**, dramatically improving late-night frequency of service.

The paper says a power struggle may erupt over the move. If the City Council successfully labels the change a "franchise," it may have jurisdiction. Some Council members, like Staten Island's Michael McMahon, say they oppose privatizing city transportation services on principle, but are attracted to half-hourly service. McMahon recently cited a negative report on private ferry safety standards in a letter to NYC DOT.

If the city administration can keep the change within "contract" status, the Council would have no direct authority over the matter.

NYC DOT says some late night runs carry as few as 25 passengers on boats that can hold 1,200 people. However, some late runs attract hundreds of passengers, so the city would have to **tailor its capacities and schedules** carefully if it moves to smaller boats. The *Advance* reports that the largest private ferries in the NYC region today has capacity for 400 passengers.

Some critics of the idea wonder why the city cannot save costs and improve service by simply buying its own smaller boats.

## For History of Sprawl, Look to Highways

In a recent series, the *Star-Ledger* explored the way that highways pave the way for sprawl development around New Jersey. Using Schley Mountain's experience as a metaphor for what is happening all over the state, the paper wrote, "First came the roads. New interstate highways drew corporations, then new residents...Roads that not long ago offered quick, high-speed commutes breed maddening daily traffic jams."

According to the *Ledger*, **construction of I-78** was the catalyst for development-related change in the character of Bedminster and nearby communities. It was first proposed in the 1950's as an east-west spur of the Turnpike linking NYC to Pennsylvania, and reached I-287 in Bedminster in 1968.

The arrival of the highways made development in the area attractive to business and homebuyers and weakened municipal efforts to control growth. In a 1980's case, a state court threw out a Bedminster zoning law to make way for a large-scale housing development. Judge B. Thomas Leahy said the construction of highways had put the town in the "**path of inevitable** future of residential, commercial and industrial **demand and growth.**"

Traffic in the area has ballooned. According to DOT, traffic on I-78 through Bedminster increased from 13,160 daily vehicles in 1968 to 79,310 in 2000. Office park development has also led to choking congestion in the neighboring 202/206 corridor.

The *Star-Ledger* series spotlighted the need for state leadership in controlling growth. In editorials, the paper urged the **McGreevey administration** to take specific actions to **curb highway development and sprawl**. The paper noted the high cost of new highways, singling out the \$350 million for Route 92.

"The goal must be to transform the state plan from a mere statement of principle to a force for real change," the paper wrote. "The initiative has to come from the top. Governor James E. McGreevey has pledged to help stop sprawl. He has created a 'smart-growth policy council' of state leaders to ensure that the Transportation and Treasury departments and other agencies work in line with the principles of the state plan....These were strong steps forward. Now the Governor must go farther."

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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## Calendar

**July 8, 1pm** North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority meeting. One Newark Center, 17th Floor, Newark. 973-639-8406 or [della@njtpa.org](mailto:della@njtpa.org).

**July 10, 7pm** Rethink LITP2000 Suffolk Citizen's Public Hearing. Longwood Library, 800 Middle Country Road, Middle Island. 516-541-1006 x16 or [lipc@lipc.org](mailto:lipc@lipc.org)

**July 11, noon** Long Island Railroad Commuter Council meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087 or [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**July 17, 3pm** CT Southwest Regional Planning Agency - coastal Transportation Investment Area regular meeting. 10 Middle Street (Governor's office), Bridgeport. 203-316-5190.

**July 18, 12:30pm** Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. 10th Floor Conference Room, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087 or [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**July 20, 9am-4pm** "Listening to the City," 5,000 residents of New York City and the surrounding region to participate in a day-long event devoted to shaping plans for the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan and the creation of a permanent memorial for 9/11. Jacob Javits Center, Manhattan. [www.listeningtothecity.org](http://www.listeningtothecity.org) or 800-862-3154.

**July 15, noon** New York City Transit Riders Council meeting. 5th Floor Board Room, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087 or [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**July 25, 7pm** Rethink LITP2000 Nassau Citizen's Public Hearing. Sacred Heart Church, 730 Merrick Avenue, North Merrick. 516-541-1006 x16 or [lipc@lipc.org](mailto:lipc@lipc.org)

**July 28, 7-10am** Join Transportation Alternatives to help document levels of bicycle transportation in NYC. [bridgecounts@transalt.org](mailto:bridgecounts@transalt.org) or 212-629-8080.

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

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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