

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Bloomberg: City May Trigger Fare Hike

Mayor Bloomberg moved from warnings about the state of the MTA's finances to an admission that the city may **slash its contribution to NYC Transit's budget** last week. Where the mayor previously had discussed the troubled state of the MTA's budget, he now says New York City cannot afford its share of NYC Transit's operating budget.

The mayor's earlier comments dismayed transit advocates, who were concerned that he was throwing in the towel on a fare increase before debate and negotiation with Albany were even joined, and not sticking up for his bus and subway riding constituents. Transport Workers Union Local 100 President Roger Toussaint wrote in an op-ed piece that the mayor "appears to have dismissed the idea of fighting for the transit funding the city deserves." Toussaint took exception to the mayor's statement that transit union wage and benefit requests may drive an increase. He suggested a real estate capital gains tax dedicated to mass transit to stave off a hike.

"We need mayors to be champions. We like it when mayors try to get the best deal for riders," the Straphangers Campaign's Gene Russianoff told *Newsday*.

But as the week went on, Bloomberg seemed to withdraw even further from that role, saying that the city simply cannot afford to support mass transit.

A statement from the Straphangers Campaign noted that City Hall provides only \$234 million towards the subway and bus systems \$4.8 billion budget this year. "By suggesting that the city's already modest subsidies to transit be cut, Mayor Bloomberg is inviting disinvestment by the state. That's what happened in 1995, when Mayor Guliani cut \$128 million for city transit. That cut was rapidly followed by an equal state cut — and then the largest fare hike in city history and the worst service cuts in a decade, Straphangers said.

Straphangers urged Mayor Bloomberg to fight for city transit's fair share in Albany: "City subways and buses move **84% of the state's transit riders**. But NYC only gets 63% of state aid for transit coming from Albany. That comes to \$325 million a year the city is are shortchanged, about what a 30-cent fare increase would raise."

Poll: Two to One, New Yorkers Prefer East River Tolls Over Fare Increase

When asked what New York City should do to balance its budget, 40 percent of New Yorkers chose placing tolls on the East River crossings, according to a Quinnipiac University poll. **Only 20 percent** of respondents **avored hiking subway and bus fares** to bail the city out of its budget straits.

"When you take the 'cut spending' option away and present voters with some hard choices, **the first choice is to toll the free bridges,**" poll director Maurice Carroll told reporters. "The last choice is a fare hike." Quinnipiac University surveyed 932 registered New York City voters from July 8-15.

In response to the poll's findings, a Thursday *Daily News* editorial called again on city government to formulate a policy for tolling its East River bridges.

New York City Residents in All Boroughs Support East River Tolls Over Fare or Tax Hike

Borough	Increasing Taxes	Increasing Transit Fare	East River Bridge Tolls
All Boroughs	23%	20%	40%
Bronx	17%	22%	37%
Brooklyn	23%	20%	39%
Manhattan	28%	13%	50%
Queens	21%	23%	35%
Staten Island	23%	30%	33%

Responses to question: "To balance the city budget, if you had to choose, which would you prefer — increasing taxes, increasing subway and bus fares, or placing tolls on the free East River Bridges?"

A city administration source told the *NY Post* that Mayor Michael Bloomberg is still interested in tolls for East River bridges. The Mayor floated the idea of placing variable tolls, with higher peak-hour fees, on the bridges in his executive budget (*MTR #353*).

Despite Bloomberg's interest, however, the city has yet to undertake a serious examination of the issue as a revenue generating measure or as a congestion mitigation strategy. Instead, the city only addresses the idea in **haphazard comments by the mayor** — including recent comments that East River tolls may be politically feasible if applied only to non-city

residents.

Out-of-Towners Toll Not Worth Doing

Exempting city drivers would raise little extra revenue and would fail to put a dent in choking rush-hour congestion. According to NYMTC county-to-county travel statistics (1990), **three quarters** of drivers crossing the East River Bridges into Manhattan **originate in Brooklyn or Queens** while only one fourth come from Long Island. According to the NYMTC data, passengers driving into Manhattan for work purposes total 136,961 drivers daily and break down as follows: Suffolk, 9,565 (7%); Nassau, 23,313 (17%), Brooklyn, 42,345 (31%), Queens, 61,738 (45%). Exempting or discounting tolls for three fourths of bridge motorists would clearly **eliminate much of East River bridge tolls' value** as a revenue source or travel demand management tool.

See bridgetolls.org for breaking news on East River toll issues

Transit Study in CT Covers Familiar Ground

A report recently released by a sub-group of Connecticut's **Transportation Strategy Board** largely echoes transit recommendations made by groups in the state in various forms for a number of years.

It may be a welcome development that there is **rough consensus** on short- and medium-term steps for the transit system in the state. However, it also must be asked whether the Strategy Board has been a useful exercise if it is simply repeating what is generally known about Connecticut's commuter rail and bus systems, especially because it has not provided a determined answer about the biggest issue — **how to pay** for the needed improvements.

The Strategy Board's "Movement of People" working group July 9 report recommends immediate purchase of new trainsets for the New Haven Line, more service overall, including better intra-Connecticut scheduling and along the coast line, and institution of commuter rail service between New Haven, Hartford and Bradley Airport. The report offers general support for more "bus rapid transit" applications, more express bus service and better train-bus connectivity.

Many of these steps have been urged before. Business advocates in Fairfield County and the Rail Commuter's Council made most of the points about the New Haven line years ago. The community/environment/labor Transportation Choices Coalition (MTR #309) made many of the same points in early 2001. The big question remains whether Governor Rowland has used the Transportation Strategy Board to **absorb and diffuse** the momentum for transportation reform that emerged in 2000 (MTR #289), or is serious about **acting on his panel's findings**.

Good Step for NY DOT in Brookhaven

The NY State DOT has reportedly agreed to create an alternative within its environmental impact review for **NY Route 25 in Coram/Middle Island** area of Suffolk County, that takes into account community preferences articulated during a design charrette in May (MTR #365). Two DOT alternatives involve **widening the highway**. One would expand it from two lanes to five (with a center turning lane). The second would build two new lanes and add some amenities such as sidewalks and limited medians.

The community alternative has a strong focus on the pedestrian environment, envisioning **new village centers** in Coram and Middle Island and a mixed use sub-center at Artist Lake. Storefronts would be brought up to the sidewalk, and new street links would create **grid systems**. Better street connections give drivers more choices, instead of funneling all of them onto one roadway. Residential development would adjoin neighborhood-scale commercial areas. The charrette was inclusive of many interests in the corridor, and was held with the cooperation of Brookhaven town government. (See middlecountryrdproject.com for community vision details).

The State DOT's willingness to include community preferences in the formal review for Route 25 is a welcome step. We hope that the EIS analysis treats the impacts of land use changes seriously. DOT should now go further in the other corridors it seeks to widen in the area (Route 347, 112 and another segment of 25) **and help communities launch charters** similar to the one established by Middle Island's and Coram's forward-looking civic leaders.

Strong Support for Car-Free Park Test

Five Brooklyn City Councilmembers whose districts border Prospect Park gathered Wednesday to voice support for a **three-month car-free trial** in the park. The Councilmembers spoke to a crowd of over 400 citizens who support closing the park's roads to motor traffic. Car-free hours are in effect during the summer weekends and weekdays 9-5 and 7-9.

In attendance at the event, organized by Transportation Alternatives, were Councilmembers Bill DiBlasio, Yvette Clark, James Davis, Angel Rodriguez and David Yassky. "Gridlock" Sam Schwartz, former NYC DOT Deputy Commissioner, and former Commissioners Lou Riccio and Elliot Sander were also on hand to lend support for the trial. Noticeably absent were New York City Transportation Commissioner **Iris Weinshall**, who opposes the trial, and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, who is in favor of the trial period.

"My constituents will benefit from a car-free

Prospect Park because individuals will be able to enjoy the grounds freely without threat of car interference,” said Councilman Davis. “Park visitors will also be able to breathe cleaner air, as traffic and congestion will be eliminated.”

Supporters of a car-free Prospect Park want the park restored to its role as a refuge from city noise, pollution and speeding cars.

Opponents of an auto-free park policy worry that closing the park to cars will disrupt Brooklyn traffic, despite DOT traffic counts that show that a Prospect Park car-ban would have little effect on surrounding streets. A trial period would allow officials to determine the policy’s impact on surrounding streets.

“I am supporting the trial because it provides an

Staten Island Third Bus Depot: The Enemy is Us?

Though Staten Island officials have clamored for years for construction of a third MTA bus depot, they may now have **themselves to blame** if the issue continues to drag.

The MTA has **begun an environmental review** to build a third Staten Island depot on a 10-acre site in Charleston, an area northeast of the Outerbridge crossing. Beginning an EIS is a step further than other third depot proposals in recent memory have gotten. The site was agreed to by Borough President Molinari, the MTA and the city in 2000.

However, new Borough President Molinaro, South Shore City Councilmember Andrew Lanza and residents now oppose the depot on the site, according to the *Advance*. They are trying to **redirect the MTA’s interest** to a larger site in Rossville, between the West Shore Expressway and the Arthur Kill. However, there are competing plans for that site, and any switch from the EIS process started for the Charleston site will be time-consuming.

The danger for Staten Island in not developing a plan and sticking with it is that the MTA may decide that **the Island doesn’t want the depot that badly**, and prioritize other projects. It is generally recognized that the depot is needed if significant additions to S.I. bus service are to be made. The MTA is already using a hodge-podge of outdoor parking areas to accommodate buses added since the mid-1990s. The South Shore has rightly agitated for more service for several years. Unless its officials get organized on the depot issue, they may give the MTA one more reason to deny additional buses.

opportunity to address a long-standing debate between the park-using community and those concerned with the effect on the surrounding streets,” Councilwoman Clark said.

Statements from an aide to Commissioner Weinsahl indicated that City DOT would like to meet with the elected officials. However, it is not clear if the agency is open to reconsidering its opposition to the trial period, or is simply seeking to blunt the momentum developing around the car-free park movement.

Finally, a Rail Link for Meadowlands Sports Arena?

The Army Corps of Engineers recently released a draft EIS that looked favorably on the Mills Corporation’s plans to fill 206 acres of wetlands in the Meadowlands for a **mega-mall**, entertainment center and office/warehouse complex with massive parking structures. But another New Jersey agency has taken a decidedly different direction. The Sports and Exposition Authority sent out requests for proposals for the Continental Arena site that clearly directed developers to avoid retail or residential development, and said **rail transit** should serve the site.

The Authority’s request-for-proposals said a preferred “build” alternative was emerging from the **West Shore Line** commuter rail study that would provide train service via the Meadowlands sports complex between West Nyack and the Secaucus Rail Transfer station. That may not be true, thanks to competing transit ideas (*MTR #371*), but the desire to serve the site with rail is admirable.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign issued recommendations for would-be developers to consider. They include ensuring that the site feature frequent bus and rail service from residential and other popular origins; requiring that proposals include **specific financing plans** for the construction of a transit station, including state, federal and private funding sources, that the developer’s contribution to operating expenses of the rail line be hefty; that developers include strategies for **reducing parking demand** and that employers not provide free on-site parking, but rather consider options like “cashing out” parking.

The framework for the RFP’s transportation section is muddled. None of the appendices, including NJTransit’s suggestions, are in the RFP document or on the website (meaning only some developers may respond to transportation issues), and no overall transportation analysis was requested from developers. As such, the reviewing panel will have little to go on to judge trip generation, traffic, air quality and mode shares between transit and driving when reviewing proposals. Moreover, the agency seemed to encourage developers to assume **Rt. 120** would be

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

moved from the west to east side of the site, enlarging the site. That expensive project has few transportation benefits.

NJ Adopts Low-Sulfur Bus Fuel, but Other Steps Needed to Clean Fleet

New Jersey Transit's first delivery of low (30-parts per million) sulfur diesel arrived July 1 and the agency's whole fleet was burning low-sulfur diesel fuel by last week. Although the step to low-sulfur diesel is a move toward better air, New Jersey is still missing ripe environmental and public health savings, having already assumed most of the cost of getting it.

Last spring, Transportation Commissioner Jamie Fox and Environmental Protection Commissioner Brad Campbell announced the \$16.2 million step of buying low-sulfur fuel for New Jersey Transit's bus fleet, 4 years ahead of federal mandates (*MTR* #363).

The big pollution reductions from reduced sulfur content are emissions of sulfur oxides and hydrocarbon emissions. However, the missing savings that really matters, particularly in New Jersey's urban areas, is **particulate emissions**. Particulates cause asthma and lung disease, and are only reduced 25% by the switch in fuel.

Fox and Campbell pointed out in April that each year nearly 3,000 people are hospitalized for asthma attacks in Newark, New Brunswick and Trenton. Low-sulfur diesel alone does not do enough to address that problem.

But within grasp is a 90% drop in particulate emissions, which requires the combination of low-sulfur fuel and **exhaust system particulate traps**. Under current plans, NJTransit won't see pollution savings on that order until 2005, when it buys 300 new buses with the filters attached.

The cost to retrofit existing buses with the particulate filters is low. To outfit all the 825 MCI Cruisers, the workhorse of the long-distance express bus fleet, Transit would have to spend about \$8,000 per bus replacing the mufflers with soot filters, or \$6.6 million total — less than the cost of the fuel switch.

Transit's catch is that while the increase in fuel cost came from its operating budget, installing particulate filters requires a financial **commitment from capital expenses**. Last week Transit passed is 2002-2003 annual budget, which robs \$260 million from capital to pay for operations (*MTR* #374). With these financial practices, criticized by NJTransit Director George Warrington, improvements like particulate filters, among others, fall by the wayside.

Calendar

July 25, Noon NYC Transit Riders Council. 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor. 212-878-7087 or mail@pcac.org

July 25, 1:15-3:15pm NYMTC Freight Transportation Working Group meeting. 40 Worth St. atyrell@gw.dot.state.ny.us or 718-472-3177.

July 25, 7pm Rethink LITP2000 — Citizen's Hearing. 730 Merrick Ave., North Merrick. 516-541-1006 x16 or lipc@lipc.org

July 26, 7-9am Bike to Work Event. Old State House, downtown Hartford. Capital Region of County Governments, 860-552-2217 or sfry@crcog.org

July 26, Noon Mothers on the Move: Demonstration to Stop Killer Trucks. On 4th anniversary, where a child was killed by truck crash. Intersection of Spofford, Tiffany and Longwood in Hunt's Point, Bronx. 718-842-2224

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

July 30, 6-8pm Auto-Free NY meeting, "The Politics of Transportation in Berlin," Michael Cramer, Berlin City Council. Conference room, NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394 or www.auto-free.org

July 31, 9am MTA board meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, 5th floor. Manhattan. 212-878-7440.

August 1, 9am Central Jersey Transportation Forum, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. Sarnoff Corp, 201 Washington Rd, Princeton 215-238-2872 or www.dvrpc.org

more calendar entries at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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