

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

MetroCard Coming to Westchester Buses?

Westchester County is studying the possibility of installing MetroCard readers on its Bee-Line buses, according to Henry Stanton, the county's Deputy Commissioner of Transportation. "We've been looking at electronic fare collection for a while and feel that the way to go in terms of electronic fare collection is MetroCard," Stanton said.

A study is underway to determine the impact of MetroCard on Bee-Line ridership and service. It should be complete in the fall. Findings will be available earlier to the County, however, enabling it to consider the issue as the study progresses. County officials have **discussed MetroCard implementation with the MTA** and with Long Island Bus officials, to gauge that system's MetroCard experience.

"While the County is some ways from making the decision about MetroCard, the current is that we want to get this done," said Stanton.

The County anticipates **free transfers** between NYC buses and subways and MetroCard-equipped buses. According to Westchester, approximately 9,000 passengers transfer from Bee-Line buses to NYC Transit in the Bronx. Other riders take express buses to Manhattan, which run along 5th Ave. and Broadway, and transfer to NYCT service in the city. Bee-Line serves an average of **110,000 weekday passengers** and is the largest non-MTA transit operator in the state.

Adoption of MetroCard would require Bee-Line to use NYC Transit's fare structure. Current one-way fares on Bee-Line are \$1.40 for local and \$5.00 for express service. Unlimited monthly passes are available for intra-Westchester travel for \$50 and for \$160 with express service to Manhattan.

Riders will benefit from free transfers to NYC Transit and the convenience of electronic payment, but those not connecting in NYC may see a fare increase. NYC saw big bus ridership surges after introducing MetroCard free bus-subway transfers in 1997. Several of **Long Island Bus' most heavily used routes** connect to subway terminals in Queens.

According to Mr. Stanton, Westchester County has not seen the same ridership gains Long Island Bus has experienced in recent years. He said it was difficult to speculate about MetroCard's impact on ridership.

McGreevey Has Right Message on Sprawl, Roads — But Does he Control the State DOT ? —

A spokesman for the NJ Dept. of Transportation told the Associated Press Wednesday that the agency and Governor Jim McGreevey will not build several highway expansion projects opposed by the Tri-State Campaign, citizens and environmental groups.

The comments came in response to a release by the Sierra Club that highlighted several projects that will increase traffic congestion, lead to sprawl growth and negatively impact the environment: the proposed expansions of Route 92, Route 55, Route 15, construction of the Hillsborough and Millstone bypasses, and the completed Route 29 extension in Trenton.

The A.P. story said "A spokesman said the administration has **no plans** to enact many of the projects that concerned the Sierra Club." It cites NJ DOT spokesperson Micah Rasmussen stating: "The DOT Commissioner, this governor, and this department are focused on public transportation, curbing sprawl, and fixing existing roads first. **This Department is almost entirely out of the new highway business.**"

However, a review of New Jersey DOT's planning documents reveal it is planning at least 124 new highway lane miles, including several of the projects facing significant opposition. These documents can be amended or changed at the Governor's or Commissioner's direction. Whether or not this is done will reflect the McGreevey administration's seriousness about reining in sprawl-generating road plans.

Governor Whitman, DOT's long range plan, "Transportation Choices 2025," (2001), called for adding 502 lane miles to New Jersey's roadway system. The state highway system consists of 2,300 lane miles. Building 502 lane miles would lead to a 22% increase in the state highway system in 25 years.

An "Examination of Existing Projects Under Development and Proposed for the TIP" was released by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority July 8, and the FY 03 Capital Program Study and Development list was issued April 1. The documents show that in the 13 northern NJ counties alone, DOT is planning 116 new highway capacity projects. Forty-nine of them are "new spot roadway capacity" and another eight are "minor spot capacity improvements." Even some these projects will entail signifi-

cant new roadway capacity.

DOT is also planning **21 projects** that consist of **“new lanes on existing roadways,”** 10 projects that are defined as “roadway/lane/shoulder widening,” five **“new corridors”** projects and nine projects listed as “new roadways.”

The mileposts given in the “new lanes on existing roadways” category indicate that 107.89 new lane miles are planned. That does not account for seven projects for which no mileage number was given.

“New roadways” account for 1.2 new miles, but another 8 projects gave no roadway mileage, which could be significant. They include Long Valley Bypass; Extension of County Rte 522 in Middlesex County; Extension of County Rte 605; Portway; the interchange at Rtes. 46/23/80; Bergen Arches; Rte 4;

Road Bias in North Jersey Model ?

At its July 8th meeting, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, approved documents and strategies intended to produce a viable congestion management system analysis. They are part of the organization’s “corrective actions” in response to federal agencies nearly decertifying it last year.

The strategies consist of 24 measures to reduce trips and VMT or otherwise attend to travel needs. They include major new transit capacity, low-cost bus investments, bicycle and pedestrian projects, congestion pricing, and a number of positive elements. They also include new roads and added lanes.

Unfortunately, the actual strategy analysis as modeled by the consultants and NJTPA staff doesn’t seem to work very well.

In one document, an “Examination of existing projects under development and proposed for the TIP,” dated July 2002, 116 new highway capacity projects are listed for the 13 northern NJ counties alone. The document asks, almost rhetorically, “Does the strategy selected address identified needs?” Every single strategy for the “identified need” falls into the new capacity category, whether “new roadway” or “added lanes” or similar phrases.

When questioned about the results, the consultants said every one of the 116 new capacity projects was tested against the entire list of alternative and demand management strategies, and, miraculously, only new road capacity met the identified need. None of the other strategies worked, even when they were grouped together for synergistic benefit.

The benefits of new road capacity were over-rated and the benefits of travel demand management and alternative strategies was under-estimated. If federal highway officials wanted to create a model for better planning at NJTPA, they have created a monster.

and extension of the Eisenhower Parkway in Essex.

“New corridors” account for another 6.34 miles of new capacity planned in the northern 13 counties (Route 173 in Clinton; Route 35 in Aberdeen; Route 22 and and Route 15 in Sussex County). No mileage is given for an additional new corridor, Route 27, to lie in Franklin Township and New Brunswick.

Finally, 9.38 miles of new capacity is planned in the “roadway lane/shoulder widening” category, although the largest portion of that, on Rt. 70 in Ocean County, is a study at present. But at least seven other projects in this category had no mileage listed, so the figure is probably higher than 9.38 miles (they include Halls Mill Road, School Road, Freehold Roadway, all in Monmouth County, County Roads 605 and 641, and Park Avenue in Flemington).

These four categories of projects, with just the known or listed mileage, amount to a total of 124.81 miles of new roads or added lanes, and probably more, since no information was given about many projects. The DOT documents do not account for construction of Route 92 in Middlesex County, which is part of the Turnpike Authority capital program.

Downtown Concept Will Consider 2nd Ave Subway

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation’s revised “Blueprint for the Future of Lower Manhattan,” released July 8, now lists Second Avenue subway construction as Long Island Railroad East Side Access as projects that factor strongly into Lower Manhattan’s future transportation system.

Although it remains to be seen how the blueprint will translate into action, the inclusion of the projects appears to be a victory for realism in transportation amid the debate over downtown reconstruction.

The Lower Manhattan transportation discussion has been dominated by demands to bring suburban commuter trains downtown. Extending the Long Island Railroad to Lower Manhattan through an existing subway tunnel still occupies a prominent place in the debate, and is mentioned in the blueprint. The blueprint also now includes the speculative idea of extending Metro-North downtown, but with no indication of how that would be accomplished.

The initial blueprint was criticized by the Tri-State Campaign and others for failing to mention the Second Ave. or East Side Access projects — both essential to the region’s transit network and key elements in MTA expansion plans (*MTR #361*).

Hopefully, inclusion of the projects in the blueprint

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

can lead to a more informed debate about Manhattan transportation priorities. For instance, with billions about to be spent on East Side Access, is **another LIRR connection** to Manhattan warranted in the near future? How does the Second Avenue subway compare to downtown commuter rail proposals in terms of easing transit access to Lower Manhattan?

According to the *Villager*, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields pushed for changes in the blueprint. "The Second Avenue subway will do more than any other project

Student Discount Approved for Suffolk Transit

Suffolk legislators passed a bill lowering student bus fares on Suffolk Transit by 50 cents – a measure Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney approved on July 11. The bus fare is currently \$1.50. The discount will not eliminate a transfer fee of 25 cents.

The fare reduction is another welcome step from Suffolk County. Many students depend on public transportation to get to and from school. Suffolk Transit and Gaffney recently rescinded its February fare hike under pressure from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and State Senate Transportation Committee Chair Cesar Trunzo (*MTR* #370).

Suffolk Transit is required to hold public hearings before the discount can go into effect. The hearing will be September 4th at the Suffolk County Offices in Hauppauge from 3:00pm to 7:00pm.

Rally Continues Push for Car-Free Prospect Park

Nearly 120 people gathered Tuesday night for a rally to support the effort to start a three-month car-free trial in Prospect Park. Transportation Alternatives, which has been advocating for the trail for the past several years, led residents to shut the gates that keep vehicles off park streets during summer car-free night hours of seven to nine.

The Councilmembers who support a car-free trial for Prospect Park – Bill deBlasio, Yvette Clarke, James Davis, Angel Rodriguez and David Yassky – are meeting with New York City Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall Monday to discuss the creation of a car-free trial period. However, Transportation Alternatives has not been invited to the meeting, despite its years of advocacy on the issue.

Commissioner Weinshall and the city DOT has opposed the trial due to fears that it will add traffic to streets surrounding the park. However, traffic counts conducted by the agency have shown that potential traffic diversion from a car-free Prospect Park would have little effect on surrounding streets.

For more information, see www.transalt.org.

to boost transit capacity and economic development in Lower Manhattan," Maloney said.

A detailed transportation concept, still being developed by LMDC, is expected in a few weeks. LMDC's Transportation and Commuters Advisory Council will not be able to comment on the plan before its release. The Council requested to see the plan at its meeting last week, but the request was denied.

NYC Trash Plan to Reduce Truck Traffic?

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced a trash plan Wednesday that may reduce truck trips in the city and surrounding areas. Under the plan, trash will be containerized at waterfront stations in each borough and transferred to barges.

However, the plan is still vague about how trash will be shipped to its final destination. It says long-haul containerized trash shipping will take place by truck, rail or ship. But no final destinations or transfer points for moving containers from barges to trucks, rail or ships were specified in the plan.

Presumably, the city will seek **alternatives to trucks**, since the **cost of truck export** was the driving force behind the mayor's attention to the issue.

The mayor drew attention to the environmental and public health benefits of reducing truck dependence during his announcement. "We are not going to continue to give our kids lung diseases no matter what the cost is," he said. "That's the bottom line." The **NYC Environmental Justice Alliance**, which advocates for neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by waste facilities and transport, praised the plan's main points.

The plan relies on revamping eight waterfront containerizing facilities that were used to load trash on barges for shipment to Staten Island's Fresh Kills dump. There are three stations in Manhattan, three in Brooklyn, one on Queens' north shore and one in the South Bronx. A new containerizing station for Staten Island trash is also proposed for the Fresh Kills area.

Although the Mayor could not give a cost for the plan, he speculated that the facilities and new containers would cost several hundred million dollars.

Since the city began shutting down Fresh Kills in 1997, however, the cost of exporting residential trash has increased to \$263 per ton from \$179 per ton. The current system uses 16 land transfer stations.

Bloomberg said the new system could be in place within two years. Environmental impact studies for the containerization/berge facilities will analyze the levels of particulate matter they will generate.

He indicated that contracts for barge to rail or other transfer facilities will go out for bid next year.

Mayor Bloomberg made negative statements about barge-to-rail facilities in Linden, because of political

and legal complications, and Howland Hook, which relies on the completion of a rail project that has been much discussed but never completed. “[Bloomberg] was emphatic about saying ‘**You guys don’t have any rail,**’” City Council member James Oddo told the Staten Island *Advance*, referring to a meeting between himself, fellow Council member Michael McMahon and the mayor. Both Linden and interests in Howland Hook will be able to bid on the project.

Officials predicted earlier this summer that Staten Island would see an operating rail link to New Jersey restored by early 2004 (*MTR* #368).

Staten Island Borough President Guy Molinaro indicated to the press that he would be supportive of a plan to use Howland Hook as a rail transfer station because of economic benefits. A major emphasis now should be on **readying the city’s rail options** for trash shipping.

New Websites Invite Public Comment on Transportation Planning

The **Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown NY** has launched an interactive online dialogue for the public to comment on its rebuilding plans. The site, **www.listeningtothecity.org**, opened on July 29 and will be open for participation for two weeks, during which time polls will be conducted on key rebuilding issues. A report of the discussions will be compiled and presented to key officials and decision-makers.

To participate in the online discussion, one must register and will be assigned to a group of 30 people. Participants can only post messages in their own group, but anyone can read all postings. As of July 31, there were over 600 registered participants.



U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta announced last Wednesday that a new website is available for individuals and groups to comment on the pending **reauthorization of TEA-21**, the federal government’s transportation funding legislation. This is the first time that the U.S. DOT has solicited public comment over the internet.

The legislation was enacted in June 1998 and expires Sept. 30, 2003.

After registering, comments may be submitted in ten categories, which include public transportation, freight issues, environment, safety and finance. Individuals may comment on more than one topic.

The website for submitting comments, which also contains information on the reauthorization process, is: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reauthorization.

Calendar

August 8, 4-6pm Long Island Railroad Com-muter’s Council. 10th Floor Conference Room, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-708 or www.pcac.org

August 13, noon New York City Transit Riders Council. 5th Floor Board Room, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087 or www.pcac.org

August 23, 7-10am Join Transportation Alternatives to document the number of bicyclists crossing Manhattan’s East River Bridges. 212-629-8080 or www.transalt.org

August 27, 6-8pm Auto-Free New York Meeting, “Lower Manhattan Rebuilding - Putting Pedestrians First,” George Haikalas, Transportation Planner. 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394 or www.auto-free.org

September 12, 5pm Voorhees Transportation Center Speaker Series, “Making National Transportation Policy: The Next Surface Transportation Act,” Emil Frankel, U.S. DOT Asst. Secretary for Policy. Bloustein School, 33 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick. 732-932-6812 or cdanku@rci.rutgers.edu

September 12 - 14 Planning Outside the Box: Connecting Plans and People, American Planning Association Region I Fall Conference Providence, RI mlevine@nyplanning.org

September 24, 6-8pm Auto-Free New York Meeting, “Transportation: the Architecture of Place,” Alex Marshall, journalist and urban scholar. 212-475-3394 or www.auto-free.org

October 18, 8:30- 4:30pm Assoc. of NJ Environmental Commissions. “What’s Ailing Us? The Sprawl- Health Connection.” Busch Campus, Rutgers University, Piscataway. 609-278-5088 or www.anjec.org

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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