

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Buses, But Not Tickets, Flow in HOV-3 Lane

Bus drivers on the Gowanus Expressway report that traffic flow is better since the city changed the lane's minimum vehicle occupancy standard from two to three passengers in April (MTR #358), according to the *State Island Advance*. However, **no official measure of lane performance** by either the city or state DOT seems available.

The Gowanus HOV lane is used intensively by express bus service from Staten Island to Manhattan. Since the HOV-3 rule was instituted, it is the closest thing the city has to a **"bus rapid transit"** facility.

Bus drivers also said they'd like to see the HOV lane "flipped" to provide south-bound access during the evening. Since its inception, the Gowanus HOV lane has only served north-bound traffic. It is restricted to three passengers between 6 and 10 a.m.

"It's a pleasure. I start at 6:40[a.m.] at Nelson Avenue and Hylan Boulevard and by 7:15 I'm in Manhattan dropping off passengers," said driver Vincent Serapoglia. "But they're still **not really enforcing** the three-person law," he said

Several bus drivers told the *Advance* that they see hundreds of driver-only vehicles in the HOV-3 lane each morning. The problem has gotten worse, they say, since a construction barrier was removed last week and replaced with traffic cones, enabling vehicles to slip in from the Gowanus' regular lanes. Drivers also cut into the lane at the Belt Parkway.

John Sassano, Police Department Highway Patrol chief, said that only 400 summonses have been issued since the lane switched to HOV-3. The fine for having less than three people is \$70, which includes a \$30 state surcharge. NYC DOT should consider asking the City Council to make the fines for HOV and bus lane violations **much more prohibitive**, reducing the temptation to gamble in restricted lanes.

Enforcement clearly has to be stepped up if hundreds of solo drivers per day are getting through the lane. That, in conjunction with a barrier to keep drivers from cutting across, could ensure that the HOV-3 lane continues to ease traffic for bus riders and qualifying carpools. Passengers on express buses made up over 80% of HOV lane users before the passenger requirement was increased.

Harbor Freight Tunnel "on Back Burner"

A short item in last week's *Crain's NY Business* cites "City Hall insiders" who say that the cross-harbor rail freight tunnel is a **low priority for the Bloomberg administration**. "The tunnel is on the back burner" and the mayor has higher transportation priorities, one official said. The mayor criticized the project during the election campaign (MTR #342).

The draft environmental impact statement for the tunnel is likely to be completed in the next few months. The project would then need to receive funding to **begin design work**, or languish as a future possibility. The work is being carried out by the New York City Economic Development Corp.

Last week we reported that the city may have missed a chance to purchase a key industrial property in Queens that could be developed into a rail yard — more rail yard space in the city and on Long Island would be essential to the tunnel project.

Despite the mayor's attitude, the tunnel still has strong support from **Congressman Jerrold Nadler**. Nadler is New York's senior Democrat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which will play a leading role in crafting a new five-year federal transportation spending bill in 2003. Nadler's strong ties to New York's Senators and the fact that lower Manhattan rebuilding projects are in his district may yet put him in a strong bargaining position to win progress on the freight tunnel.

Common Sense Prevails in Downtown Transportation Priorities

Federal, state and city officials gathered last Monday to announce that \$4.55 billion has been made available for downtown transportation projects. Although the money comes from the Federal Emergency Management Administration, which is usually restricted to rebuilding what was damaged or destroyed in a catastrophic incident, the city and regional agencies have been given unprecedented flexibility to use the money for a downtown transit hub and other transportation improvements (MTR #345).

The FEMA money complements a \$1.8 billion allocation set aside by Congress for transportation improvements in downtown Manhattan, though the total falls short of the \$7.5 billion wish list put

together by the region's agencies (*MTR #359*).

In general, the announcement by Governor Pataki, Mayor Bloomberg and others appeared to get transportation priorities right.

On the top of the list is the **proposed hub** that would link a rebuilt downtown PATH station to downtown subway lines in a facility far more pleasing and negotiable than today's Fulton Street complex. The hub, including a concourse linking Fulton Street, several other subway stops, the PATH station and the

Bridgeport Casino Traffic Could Chase Businesses

Stamford Mayor Dannel Malloy has been told that several companies would consider leaving the city over traffic concerns if the Golden Hill Paugussett tribe is allowed to build a casino in Bridgeport. According to the *Hartford Courant*, the mayor said the Southwestern Area Commerce & Industry Association of Connecticut (SACIA) and the Stamford Chamber of Commerce have members concerned about the impact of extra traffic on their businesses. The mayor made the remarks during a conference at the Aspen Institute in Colorado this week.

According to the mayor, the businesses are already having trouble attracting employees because of the region's nightmarish traffic congestion. "They say this would be the straw that breaks the camel's back," Malloy said, referring to extra traffic that would be generated from a casino.

Pal Edelberg, chairman of the Stamford Chamber of Commerce, said traffic has been a major reason for companies to stay away from the city. "A casino would exacerbate it tremendously. It would be a nightmare," he said. Edelberg told the *Courant* that he knows of two businesses that decided not to move to the city because of its traffic problems.

Joseph McGee of SACIA said he has heard of several companies that would leave if a casino was built. "Companies have said the issue of congestion has a huge impact of labor force availability," McGee said. "It's not about the 10,000 jobs it would create. It's the 40,000 visitors on weekdays and 70,000 on weekends."

The business community in Stamford, which calls traffic congestion its number one concern, has taken a pro-active role in tackling traffic problems. In March, congestion problems on I-95 dominated a meeting of legislators and business leaders convened by SACIA. At that meeting, legislators focused on expanding transit service (*MTR #360*). The Stamford Chamber of Commerce is also involved in trying to improve traffic conditions. It is working on a pilot program to provide shuttles from the train station to area businesses in order to encourage transit use (*MTR #366*).

World Financial center is estimated to cost \$2 billion. Officials say the hub could be built as early as 2005.

It also makes eminent sense to use the moment to **modernize the South Ferry 1/9 subway station** while the lower end of the line comes in for extensive rebuilding work and the Whitehall Ferry Terminal renovation proceeds. For \$400 million, the city can renovate the station, replacing the antiquated half-length platform with a standard one equipped to handle modern 10-car trains. A **bus terminal** near the World Trade Center site, to rationalize today's haphazard practice of parking down-time buses wherever they can find space, is another excellent priority that seems to have made the short list.

More difficult and potentially controversial issues, such as burying West Street or tunneling commuter trains into Lower Manhattan, appear to be taking a less prominent role in the immediate discussion. Officials said part of the \$2 billion cost of the "full-bury" West Street scenario could be funded in other ways – hopefully meaning it would not compete for resources with pressing projects, and perhaps indicating that it be financed by downtown property owners. Lou Tomson, president of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, also suggested that the West Street project could be scaled down to reduce cost.

The notion of somehow bringing Long Island and/or Metro-North Railroads downtown was relegated to a **\$250 million study**. It's unclear what the study will cover or who will undertake it, because the **MTA made a similar effort** during the late 1990s that was essentially deemed redundant when momentum gathered in favor of the Second Avenue subway. A plan the MTA did not look at was dispossessing a subway line and using its East River tunnel for the LIRR (*MTR #355*). That will likely be included in the new study, but it's hard to imagine that any cost-benefit calculation could favor **diminished subway access** between Brooklyn and Manhattan.

Recently, the Second Avenue subway and LIRR East Side Access projects have received more attention in the reconstruction effort, being added as important transportation components in the the LMDC's development outline (*MTR #377*).

Each project receiving the "flexible" FEMA funding will have to be submitted to FEMA separately for approval. The final decisions are likely to be negotiated out among all the key players making up the LMDC. "I think eventually you're going to see a steering committee made up of the MTA and the Port Authority to make the maximum use of this money," Tomson told *Newsday*. "They are going to have to agree on which money is going to be spent on which project, and then they will apply for it."

Push Starts for Local Veto of LITP 2000

Recent editorials in local Bellmore newspapers charge that the NY State DOT's **LITP 2000** plan, which would widen most major highways on Long Island, is "foolhardy" and the product of an "outmoded mindset that would spell disaster for the South Shore's fragile, ever-diminishing natural environment."

Bellmore is in southern Nassau County, bounded by the Meadowbrook, Southern State and Wantagh Parkways, which would all be widened under the DOT's plan.

The *Bellmore Herald* called on Nassau **County Executive Thomas Suozzi** to give the plan the thumbs down. It notes that Suozzi is a voting member of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council, which must unanimously approve LITP's adoption. The paper urged readers to contact him and ask him to oppose the plan.

The Long Island Progressive Coalition reports that the County Executive's office has begun to hear from citizens concerned about the highway expansions.

Bellmore Life urged more investment in local transit to connect neighborhoods to train stations, in bikeways and in north-south rail connections.

The *Bellmore Herald* recalled the widening of the Southern State in the 1960's: "Making the Southern State bigger back then because a wider road simply **brought more cars** and even greater congestion."

McGreevey: Most DOT Records Open to Public

New Jersey Governor James E. McGreevey backed off his sweeping executive order that would have hidden from easy public view 583 categories of public records covered by NJ's new Open Public Records Act. His July 8 executive order was roundly criticized by the press and good government groups, including the Tri-State Transportation Campaign.

On Tuesday McGreevey revoked 87% of those exemptions, including some of the most ridiculed such as locations of farms and endangered species.

"New Jersey's public records law is a strong law, is a needed law, is a good law," McGreevey said during a Statehouse news conference. "This administration is irrevocably committed to implementing that law."

The initial order would have made secret 55 kinds of records kept by the NJ DOT and related transit and road agencies. They included **bridge surveys**, toll monitoring, some vendor performance ratings and information on **vehicle crash reports**.

Under the revised order, four types of DOT information will remain secret: emergency management plans, pre-settlement contract and lawsuit negotiation notes, cost estimates of right of way before acquisition and structural plans of bridges.

NYC Franchise Bus Problems Far From Resolved

Although franchise buses in Queens are rolling again, the deal worked out two weekends ago is likely only a prelude to a greater reckoning for the bus lines that operate outside the NYC Transit system.

That's because the 27-month contract extension agreed to by striking bus workers is retroactive to early 2001, and will expire again next March.

The contract extension was made possible by a loan from New York City. Under its terms, the private bus companies will seek cost savings to **reduce future city subsidies** to the bus operations. In fact, the deal sounds significantly like severance pay for the 82-route system.

The bus workers' contract will likely expire amid major debate and negotiations over the MTA budget, including fare and toll hikes, a new labor deal between NYC Transit and Transport Workers Union Local 100 and how much New York City will contribute to NYC Transit. Given Mayor Bloomberg's intent to remove the franchise buses from the city's budget rolls, it's likely that the absorption of the franchise system by NYC Transit will be part of a highly complex set of transportation policy and finance decisions made in the first half of 2003.

Late Night Ferry Fight

Staten Island ferry workers say they will fight the pending privatization of late night boat service (*MTR* #373). They are using **safety issues** as their main public argument, saying that police will not be guaranteed to be aboard private ferries and that public ferry service requires a higher level of crew training than private boats. NY Waterway told the *Advance* that its crews have strong safety records, and the Coast Guard gives the company high marks.

City ferry workers said that if the city wants to trim costs, it should look at **management's overtime pay**, which has ballooned since 1999. Others point to the city's 1997 abolition of the ferry fare.

NYC DOT is developing the contract it plans to offer now. It hopes to have a private company running smaller boats for overnight service by January 1. Earlier reports said the city would try to increase the **frequency of late night service**, but it is unclear for now whether the contract will specify half-hourly service during late night hours.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

NJ Town Takes Action Against Road Expansion

Residents of Middletown not only oppose a Monmouth County plan to widen Route 520, they have hired a planner to create their own proposal for local streets. When the County Dept. of Engineering held a two-hour public meeting on its proposal last Tuesday, which includes the road-widening, a resident group called the Lincroft Village Green Association was **armed with alternative recommendations**.

Route 520 runs through the Lincroft section of Monmouth, passing through Red Bank and in front of the Lincroft Elementary School. In place of road expansion, residents want a reduced speed limit (now 40-mph) and new traffic control measures to increase safety on the street. The proposal, based on a study by professional planner Charles Carmalt, includes placing marked and signalized pedestrian crosswalks, construction of landscaped center islands and improvements to business district parking areas.

"The changes would emphasize that this is a **village area** and would **encourage drivers to slow down**," one association member told the *Asbury Park Press*.

The plan also calls for **filling gaps** in the local road network, which, when paired with aggressive traffic calming measures on local streets, can reduce or disperse traffic impacts and congestion. The study calls for a new parkway exit at Tinton Avenue in Tinton Falls and a new parkway overpass to reconnect two sections of Riverdale Avenue that were separated by the parkway years ago.

Middletown **Mayor Patrick Parkinson** was also at the public meeting and said he **opposes the widening**, and suggested that the group's study be prioritized and included in further County studies.

Communities that can get in on the planning process early, while alternatives are still being considered, will likely fare better in having concerns addressed. Communities across the region, including Byram, NJ (MTR #374), and Coram and Middle Island on Long Island (MTR #375) are having some success changing a system of transportation planning that often leaves citizens out of the process.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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Calendar

August 20, 6:30pm Canal Street Transportation Plan meeting. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 62 Mott Street, Manhattan. 718-482-4536 or www.nymtc.org

August 22, 5:30-7:30 Transportation Research Forum, "Similarities Between Present Rail in United Kingdom and U.S. Rail in the 1970's." Don Nelson, Vice President of and Transit, the Washington Group. 212-435-4226 and www.trfweb.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," briefing and walking tour, George Haikalis, Transportation Planner. 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394 or www.auto-free.org

September 5, 12-2pm Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA meeting. Location TBA. 212-878-7087 or www.pcac.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 Association of NJ Environmental Commissions Congress. "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