

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 380

August 26, 2002

NEWS

Reuter Remarks Signal Fare Hike in the Works

New York City Transit President Lawrence Reuter remarks to a NY 1 news reporter last week appeared to indicate that Transit and its MTA parent agency are working on a plan to increase fares.

Reuter sought to refute the contention of advocates that **fare increases reduce subway and bus ridership**. "I think we changed the world we live in when we put in the Metrocard system," Reuter told NY 1. "We put in the fare discounts, we put in the unlimited and daily ride and weekly ride passes, so I think that we can't use what history has shown us in the past to really predict what will happen in the future."

NY 1's coverage was stimulated by a letter from the NYC Transit Riders Council to Governor George Pataki, urging him to avoid a fare hike. "While everyone is keenly aware of the fiscal pressures facing both the State and City, we believe that a fare hike would be counter-productive to the economy of New York City and State, and particularly to the recovery of Lower Manhattan," the letter reads.

Despite pressure from Democratic primary candidates H. Carl McCall and Andrew Cuomo, Pataki has avoided comment on the fare hike issue (*MTR #376*). Mayor Michael Bloomberg has indicated that **the city may reduce its contribution** to NYC Transit's budget (*MTR #375*), which would add to Transit's financial pressure and make it politically easier for Governor Pataki and the MTA to propose a hike.

In 1995, the city cut its MTA contribution by \$128 million. **The city's reduction was followed by state cuts**, spurring the biggest fare hike in city history. Within a month, subway ridership fell by 4 million.

If a fare hike is proposed, advocates will spread the word that MTA fares already fund the highest proportion of transit costs of any big city system, and that MTA fares are proportionately higher than other New York systems. "We move 84 percent of the state's riders but only get 63 percent of the aid from Albany," Neysa Pranger of the Straphangers Campaign told NY 1.

McCall Supports Sheridan Alternative

NY Democratic gubernatorial candidate **H. Carl McCall** called on Governor George Pataki last week to require that the state transportation department study the option of **taking down the Sheridan Expressway** as a part of its Bruckner-Sheridan interchange environmental review process. McCall also urged that removal of the Sheridan be studied in his June "Plan to Rebuild New York."

McCall included his statement on the Sheridan in a broader plan to promote clean air in the South Bronx. Other elements are reducing emissions from a sludge plant and removing emergency electric generators in the Mott Haven and Port Morris neighborhoods.

Both candidates for New York's Democratic primary have said removal of the Sheridan Expressway in favor of open space along the Bronx River or other community uses **should be included in all DOT studies** for the Bruckner-Sheridan interchange.

In March, **Andrew Cuomo** urged the state DOT to study the Sheridan's removal (*MTR #356*). "The State DOT should include in its upcoming environmental impact study a serious and thorough review of the community-based proposal to decommission the Sheridan Expressway, provide more green space, and provide a viable alternative to address the flow of traffic over the expressway," Cuomo said.

Community groups and transportation reformers broached the issue of removing the 1-mile, little used Sheridan Expressway in 1998. Then, state plans to rebuild the Bruckner/Sheridan interchange at a cost of \$245 million (*MTR #178*) were becoming more widely known. The groups proposed a new Bruckner interchange at Leggett Avenue to improve access to Hunts Point Market and reduce local truck impacts.

The NY State DOT says the Bruckner-Sheridan EIS process will begin this fall.

More Density Needed to Support Central NJ Rapid Bus Plan

Bus rapid transit service would be feasible in the Mercer-Middlesex Route 1 corridor only if key municipalities **greatly increase employment and residential densities**, according to a NJ Transit analysis.

Transit spokespeople told the Central NJ Transportation Forum, a group of civic and municipal leaders, that

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

West Windsor and Plainsboro townships would have to concentrate 26,000 jobs and 2,600 households in areas to be served by the rapid bus service for it to attract 760 peak hour riders.

The service modeled by NJ Transit would run between Route 1 and the Northeast Corridor rail line from an I-295 park-and-ride in Lawrence to South Brunswick. The main-line busway would be fed by numerous local routes.

It remains to be seen whether the municipalities in the corridor are interested in significantly densifying development in order to support mass transit. Most of the bus rapid transit systems being developed in the United States will operate in urban settings like Boston and Los Angeles, or serve express bus routes from suburbs to central business districts (for instance, the New Britain-Hartford busway — *MTR #364*). Routes in urban north Jersey not well-served by Newark- and NYC-oriented rail service may be better candidates for rapid bus development than suburban corridors further south.

Another study conducted for the forum found that congestion is likely to worsen despite plans for new roads like the Millstone Bypass and Route 92, whether or not transit service in the corridor is augmented.

Orphaned Northeast Corridor Would be Capital-Starved, Not Self-Supporting

Common wisdom about passenger rail operations in the U.S. says that trains between Boston and Washington, D.C. pay for themselves, while routes serving the country's interior are "money losers."

However, an analysis in the *NY Times* last weekend pointed out that Northeast Corridor operating revenues **do not cover the line's considerable capital needs**. According to the *Times*, the corridor itself, exclusive of the cost of rolling stock, needs up to \$12 billion in improvements.

Some experts say that regardless of the conditions of the Acela trains, deferred track maintenance may soon force northeast trains to reduce speed.

If the Bush administration and Congress lets Amtrak go under, it may be **up to the northeast states to pick up this tab** and work out the system's problems. The picture of a dozen-odd states negotiating over costs and service schedules is not an inspiring one.

The Acela Express' summer of woe due to technical shortcomings underscores the need for capital investment. It also raises other points. One is that weak investment in rail eliminated the U.S. train-manufacturing industry. Some point to Acela's flaws as the product of strict U.S. standards for crash-worthiness clashing with European design emphasizing lighter weights needed for high-speed operation.

Bus Lane Extension for S.I. Expressway

NY State Dept. of Transportation officials unveiled a plan to extend the Staten Island Expressway bus-only lane several miles further west by 2005 at a public meeting last week. The lane is an early part of a **decade-long project to overhaul the SIE**. Transit advocates and civic leaders who fear escalating traffic favor development of a transit-oriented corridor. In the long run, the DOT may still propose "special use lanes" — rush hour HOV lanes that serve as truck-only lanes at other times (*MTR #364*).

The existing one-mile bus lane stretch on the SIE opened in 2000 (*MTR #297*). The extension will bring the lane west to Slosson Avenue, where a ramp will be carved out of the median, allowing buses to access the lane without cutting across highway traffic. According to the Staten Island *Advance*, residents complained that bus-only capacity is not being added to the New Jersey-bound lane, which will be used as a shoulder.

Officials have chosen to move quickly on the lane to meet public concerns that they are studying the corridor to death with no real improvement in sight. The project's funding is also tied to a federal grant that stipulates the lane must be open by 2005. If it is completed by 2005, the federal government will pick up 80% of the project's \$20 million cost.

The busway extension and recently implemented higher occupancy standard for the Gowanus Expressway are positive steps for improving **express transit service** between Staten Island and Manhattan. There is still work to do, however. It makes little sense for the Gowanus' special lane to have a lower occupancy standard than that on the SIE, for instance. Enforcement of the Gowanus HOV-3 rule appears sporadic, limiting its benefits to bus riders. The Verrazano Bridge also has no bus lane, though some contend that the bridge is not a bottleneck in the corridor.

A main concern about the long-term SIE plan is that it may fuel traffic growth rather than make progress toward development of a bus rapid transit corridor. The "special use" lanes could admit two-passenger vehicles, an approach that **hindered bus travel on the Gowanus**. Opening the lane to trucks may also be unpopular in Staten Island and Brooklyn.

NYC Bus Tracking Back to the Drawing Board

New York City Transit is scrapping its first attempt to tailor global positioning technology for its Manhattan buses and starting over. The agency, which intended to implement the system by 1998, will now delay its use until 2008. NYC Transit fired its original contractor, which had trouble adapting the software for use in areas with tall buildings, and will

start accepting bids from new companies soon.

The technology tracks buses and provides real-time schedule updates to waiting passengers. Transit agencies can make the vehicle information available to riders in a variety of ways — websites, telephone hotlines, hand-held PDAs, signs at transit stops or kiosks set up in traffic-heavy areas. Buses in Albany began using the technology in 1998 (*MTR* # 170). The Port Authority also uses tracking technology for its airport circulator buses at JFK (*MTR* #359).

Several U.S. cities also have operating bus tracking systems, as does London, Paris and Singapore.

West Side Bikeway Shows Huge NYC Demand for Safe Bike Routes

The cover story in last week's *Villager* examined safety issues on Manhattan's waterfront greenways, which have skyrocketed in popularity among cyclists and pedestrians. While raising the important issue of safe behavior, the paper missed the mark by ignoring the need to **take pressure off** of the paths by developing a safer street environment throughout Manhattan.

More than a destination for recreational cyclists, the greenways provide car-free routes for people who use bicycles for transportation. This is true particularly on the Hudson River greenway, which, despite being bisected by driveways for various waterfront sites, has fewer gaps than the East River route. City officials told the *Villager* that traffic on the Hudson bikeway has far exceeded expectations. "We are kind of a victim of our own success: the Hudson River Park is so nice," said Jack Schmidt, director of the transportation division of Dept. of City Planning.

Schmidt said **New York City has seen "astronomical" growth over the last ten years in bicycle commuting and riding** and said the city wants to encourage cycling to keep cars off the streets. While improving signage and closing gaps will improve the greenways, New York still suffers from a general lack of safe cycling routes citywide.

The city made stronger efforts to develop safe bike lanes in the early years of the Giuliani administration, when wide bike lanes on Lafayette and Hudson Streets (*MTR* #23) were implemented. Many other bike lanes expose riders to the potentially injurious or deadly "car door zone" alongside the parking lane.

City cyclists also continue to await the mayor, DOT chief or police commissioner willing to send the strong and consistently enforced message needed to reverse the **culture of aggressive and reckless driving** that has developed unchecked for decades.

Calendar

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 5, noon Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, Fifth Floor Board Room. 212-878-7087 or mail@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 18, 3-7pm Public scoping meeting for widening of Route 9 in Ocean County, NJ. Lakewood Municipal Building, 231 Third Street, Lakewood. 609-530-4899

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

September 25, 3-7pm Public scoping meeting for widening of Route 9 in Ocean County, NJ. Dover Township Municipal Complex, Toms River. 609-530-4899

October 18, 8:30- 4:30pm Assoc. of NJ Environmental Commissions 2002 Congress. "What's Ailing Us? The Sprawl- Health Connection." Rutgers University. www.anjec.org

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

MTR#380 Contributing: Fred Kaimann Editors: Jon Orcutt, Lisa Peterson Executive Director, Janine Bauer

240 West 35th Street #801 , New York, NY 10001 tel. (212) 268-7474 fax (212) 268-7333 tstc@tstc.org