

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 386

October 7, 2002

## NEWS

### Schumer Tiff Reflects Downtown Divisions

The media flap U.S. Senator Charles Schumer set off last week when he appeared to oppose federal funding for upgrades to the South Ferry and Rector Street subway stations seemed on the surface to be much ado over very little. By week's end, Schumer said he had been merely trying to draw a **distinction between two sources of federal rebuilding aid**. Mid-week news reports had contained criticism of Schumer action from the Straphangers Campaign, MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow, Rep. Vito Fossella and a dig from Mayor Michael Bloomberg, all of whom support near-term upgrades for the stations.

However, the dispute suggests the fight to include some form of commuter rail to lower Manhattan in immediate rebuilding activities is alive and well. Schumer's letter to the Federal Emergency Management Administration complained that the South Ferry and Rector St. subway projects would divert funds for a downtown hub with a **Long Island Railroad link**.

But where the subway renovations are fairly straightforward projects, a new LIRR right of way to downtown would be far more complex, requiring **new tunnels or appropriation of city subway tracks**.

The cost of new rail tunnels would go far beyond authorized federal disaster relief or supplemental transportation funding, and require years of study, planning and engineering.

It is clear that taking over subway tunnel capacity would invite **strident opposition** from transit riders and advocacy groups, and from officials like the Manhattan and Brooklyn Borough Presidents. The MTA also opposes such a move. (*MTR* #369).

Improvements to South Ferry and Rector St. stations would benefit nearly **a million commuters** who use Staten Island ferries and the 1/9, 2, 3 and N/R subway lines. They would directly benefit LIRR passengers who use these lines to reach downtown.

The outdated South Ferry station currently accommodates only five of the 1/9 train's ten cars. Awkward turns coupled with the shortened platform cause delays and limit service frequency for passengers on the West Side IRT. The "Rector connector" project would provide a quick transfer for riders between the 1/9 and N/R trains, providing better transit service and access near the World Trade Center site.

### Jersey Rail Network Continues to Expand

New Jersey Transit unveiled its latest rail expansion projects last week – the **Hudson-Bergen Light Rail** extension to Hoboken and the **Montclair Connection**. The latter provides more direct access to Penn Station for commuters in Montclair and along the Boonton Line, which previously terminated in Hoboken. Although it is unclear how many cars the projects will take off New Jersey roads, they provide strong new transit options to important destinations.

The projects serve very distinct purposes and markets, showing the variety of roles mass transit can play in the region's core. The new Midtown service is a boon to both the Manhattan economy and residential communities. The Hudson-Bergen light rail shows that transit **need not enter Manhattan** to serve critical functions. It connects business subcenters and urban neighborhoods, linking other transit lines. Its current segments in some ways mirror the Brooklyn-Queens G-train, two rivers away.

An *MTR* correspondent riding the light rail from Hoboken to Jersey City Wednesday morning noted that Hoboken appears to be attracting **more southbound passengers** than northbound. 60 passengers boarded the train at Hoboken, primarily disembarking at Exchange Place and Harborside Financial Center. It was not clear whether they were New Yorkers switching from ferries to a PATH-light rail trip, or Hoboken residents switching from intra-Jersey PATH trips. On the northbound trip, an initially crowded train let off few riders in Hoboken.

NJ Transit's earlier "Midtown Direct" project — on the Morris and Essex Line — attracted more bus riders than motorists, but many riders told reporters the switch would be a big improvement in comfort and reliability. Montclair-Midtown service will add pressure to the **capacity crunch at Penn Station**, highlighting the need for a second rail tunnel under the Hudson and additional midtown station capacity.

The new services will also exacerbate **pressures on NJ Transit's budget**. The agency is already raiding its capital budget for daily operations (*MTR* #374). NJ Transit continues to deliver projects and ridership growth. **Trenton** will have to do its part in future budgets, or the agency's performance will falter.

## Bloomberg Takes Aim at Midtown Mess

The Bloomberg administration announced a new congestion-fighting measure last week – the city will ban turns off of ten crosstown street in Midtown Manhattan streets, and give pedestrians lead time to get across 37 intersections at streets that will not have the turning ban. The plan takes effect Oct. 15.

The “Thru streets” plan aims to speed cross-town traffic, and to reduce conflicts between turning vehicles and Midtown’s legion of pedestrians. It could also help bus riders and unclog portals around the Queensboro Bridge and Queens-Midtown Tunnel.

Mayor Bloomberg announced the plan on Monday with Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall and NYPD Chief of Transportation Michael Scagnelli. They said the average automobile speed in Midtown during spring, 2002 was 4.8 miles per hour, just 1.4 miles per hour faster than average walking speed.

The “Thru-streets” will be organized in pairs: drivers will no longer be able to turn off of 36th and 37th Streets, 45th and 46th Streets, 49th and 50th Streets, 53rd and 54th Streets, and 59th and 60th Streets between 3rd and 6th Avenue.

To improve conditions for pedestrians at many Midtown intersections, the city said it would institute a “split phasing” signal scheme to give walkers an exclusive crossing period. Turns onto the “thru-streets” from the avenues will still be permitted.

Changes in “no standing” rules will also add un-

loading spaces for trucks. The city hopes this can cut down on double parking and consequent blockages.

The *NY Times* is the only city daily to comment on the plan. Unfortunately, but not entirely surprisingly, the paper adopted the cab riders’ view: “the no-turn zones are also likely to lead to a new level of tension between taxi drivers, who must follow the new traffic patters, and their impatient passengers, who can’t understand why there is no way to turn off 45th Street once they start down it.” The editorial ignored potential benefits to pedestrians and bus riders.

Hearteningly, the city announced the plan as part of an ongoing series of policy innovations to bust gridlock and make city transportation more efficient. The mayor’s release situated the “Thru-streets” rules in the context of the HOV-3 lane on the Gowanus Expressway, the Church Street bus-way and the lower Manhattan crossings carpool rule. Hopefully, we can all look forward to more such steps.

### “Save the Fare” Unveils Posters, Website

Last week, NYC riders began to see subway ads raising the spectre of a \$2 fare. Today, the Save the Fare Campaign, led by led by the Straphangers Campaign, Transport Workers Union Local 100 and Citizen Action, launched the web site and toll-free line the ads advertise. The groups promised vigorous action against a an MTA fare hike proposal, which they believe will be announced this fall or winter.

The ads will run in 2,000 subway cars. The web site is [www.savethefare.org](http://www.savethefare.org).

The campaign says city and state leaders could avert a city subway and bus fare increase.

“Our ads allow us to reach the millions of riders who would be hurt by a fare hike,” said Roger Toussaint, TWU Local 100’s president.

“Our message to riders is simple: ‘Fight now or pay later,’”said Gene Russianoff, staff attorney for the Straphangers Campaign, at a news conference.

So far, the Governor’s office has generally commented on how long ago the last fare increase was. Mayor Bloomberg, in contrast, has talked openly about the MTA budget crunch and the city’s desire to reduce its transit budget contributions (*MTR #375*).

Transit advocates say **declining state and city budget support** for mass transit is the reason for MTA budget woes. The current MTA capital plan relied very heavily on borrowing, and fares are increasingly called upon to pay off the big debts.

### Traffic Calming on the Way

The New York State DOT has issued the third call for project proposals for its “Local Safe Streets and Traffic Calming Grant Program” on **Long Island**. The funding program was created in 1999 after the Campaign drew attention to high pedestrian death and injury rates, and pays for about \$3 million in municipal traffic calming projects each year (*MTR #320*).

About 15 projects have been funded since 2000, and some are beginning to break ground now. Long Island towns and villages that have pedestrian and bicyclist safety projects in mind but have not received the state’s **application package** should contact David Glass at the State DOT’s Long Island office: 631-952-6058. Applications are due December XX.

The Borough of **Somerville, NJ** has also recently issued a request-for-proposals for a traffic calming implementation plan that would cover Raritan and Somerville Boroughs, and part of Bridgewater Township. The project would identify all locations in the area that warrant traffic calming measures, and rank and prioritize them. It will also develop conceptual plans for several sites, identify funding sources and lay out an overall traffic calming implementation strategy. [www.sommervillenj.org](http://www.sommervillenj.org), 908-725-2300.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

## CT Congestion Busting Plan May Miss Mark — Curry Continues Challenge to Rowland Record—

Bill Curry, opposing Governor John Rowland in the Connecticut gubernatorial race, continues to criticize Rowland's transportation policies. Curry says the possible failure of a five-year plan to reduce congestion calls into question Rowland's commitment to solving Fairfield County's traffic problem.

In 1997, the state legislature passed a special act to cut local highway traffic by 5% over a five-year period – a measure Rowland supported strongly in the 1998 gubernatorial race. The plan was championed by the Coastal Corridor Coalition, made up of civic, business and environmental groups. It envisioned a strategy that would combine additional transit service and private sector policies to reduce traffic on I-95, the Merritt Parkway and Route 1. (MTR #166).

Although this year's figures are not in, it seems the plan may miss its goal by 10%, DOT officials told reporters. Data in 2000 showed some peak-hour reduction on I-95, but worsening traffic on the Merritt. It was unclear whether the I-95 change resulted from time-shifting or switches from cars to transit (MTR #261).

Curry also recalled Rowland's attempts to end service on Metro-North's Danbury and Waterbury branches and eliminate Shore Line East commuter service, and recent cuts to CT Transit's bus operating budget. Curry also pointed to a \$1.8 million cut to a transportation program for the disabled and elderly.

Under Rowland, ConnDOT has just begun a \$1 billion project to widen I-95 through New Haven and Branford and is planning a similar project on Interstate 84 in Waterbury. While Rowland's spokesman told the *Advocate* that the challenge is to change drivers' attitudes and increase use of alternate forms of transportation, these big highway projects are more likely to encourage more driving and longer motor trips.

Curry has advocated for integrating transportation and land-use planning to address congestion and growth issues. In addition, he has shown an interest moving freight traffic from roads to rail and barges, investigating the effects of limiting truck access during peak hours, and increasing parking at train stations. Rowland says Curry has big plans but no clear budget proposals to pay for them.

Connecticut has been struggling to address various transportation issues through the Transportation Strategy Board, which was established in 2000. The Strategy Board is sifting through a wide variety of proposals and policies put forth by various issue and regional groups, though it is still very unclear whether the Board will cover much new ground or produce any real momentum for new policies.

## Don't Uproot SEEDS

Recent disagreements between towns participating in Long Island's Sustainable East End Development Strategies (SEEDS) need to be addressed in a way that does not undermine the project's main goal. SEEDS has been the largest example in the region of a pro-active, community-based planning effort that integrates transportation and land use (MTR #364).

According to the *NY Times*, Southold supervisor Josh Horton has tried to convince his town board to **withdraw from the project** and refuses to allocate the required \$8,000 yearly contribution to SEEDS in his executive budget for 2003.

Horton is reportedly angry because of a deal between East Hampton and other participants to keep consideration of a **ferry route** between East Hampton and New England out of the planning process. Horton said he was told about the deal, which he says is a huge impediment to the SEEDS process, by East Hampton's new town supervisor, Jay Schneiderman.

Though the details of the disagreement are not yet clear, the East End towns participating in SEEDS cannot allow squabbling over a single specific issue to dissolve what is probably their best chance to direct future development on the East End as a whole.

Clearly, something should be done to rectify the situation if SEEDS planning is not going forward in the open, collaborative way that was intended. But supervisor Horton appears ready to give up on the process rather than work through the dispute at hand.

Horton's predecessor, Jean Cochran, was a prime mover of the SEEDS project. If Southold leaders try to withdraw from the process, they will compromise the ability of the East End – and particularly Southold – to shape development and transportation priorities.

## No Word on Fallout from AirTrain Crash

It's still unclear what affect the recent JFK AirTrain crash and pending investigation will have on the project's schedule. The Port Authority was set to begin AirTrain service between JFK terminals, the Howard Beach subway station and parking facilities late this year. The Port Authority has not made any definitive statements on the crash or its impact on the project time line, citing a **pending investigation** by the National Transportation Safety Board.

The PA's Newark AirTrain, linking air terminals and the Northeast Corridor rail line continues to draw increasing ridership. Also last week, the PA's **PATH** system received the American Public Transit Association award as the nation's **top passenger rail system**. The award cited PATH's efforts to provide service after the destruction of the World Trade Center station and the closure of its downtown line, as well as the introduction of a train status information

system for riders waiting on platforms. Governors McGreevey and Pataki hailed the award.

### E-ZPass Gains New Customers

New Jersey transportation officials released statistics last Tuesday that showed more customers than usual signed up for E-ZPass in the month after it fired WorldCom as its contractor and announced a plan to reform the financially floundering system.

Despite the implementation of a \$1 monthly fee, which was announced July 15 along with other planned changes, about 35,000 new customers opened New Jersey E-ZPass accounts in the month that followed. Officials said that was about 7,000 more than average. Although 1,000 more customers than average also dropped out of the program between July 15 and August 15, these losses were clearly outstripped by gains in new customers. Officials from the Port Authority told the *Star-Ledger* that it had not seen unusual gains in customers to New York's system, which does not charge a fee.

The enrollment hike is likely the result of restored confidence in the system, which is projected to have a \$469 million debt by 2008. As New Jersey's system expands the use of high-speed toll collection technology, E-ZPass will likely attract even more new customers. Putting in more high-speed gantries, which read E-ZPass transponders at regular highway speeds, was one of the stated goals of the report release by DOT in July (*MTR* #374).

Another perk that would likely attract new customers is more congestion pricing that rewards E-ZPass over cash payers and gives big discounts to off-peak E-ZPass holders. The Garden State Parkway recently abolished the small incentive it provided

In the future, a larger discount for E-ZPass users, such as the 50-cent one given by MTA Bridges and Tunnels, should be used along with congestion pricing as a greater incentive.

#### Employment Opportunities at the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

- Legislative Agent, Trenton, NJ
- Northern New Jersey Advocate

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

#### TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



*Mobilizing the Region*

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### Calendar

**Oct. 10, 11:45 am** "Port Security: One Year Later," Transportation Research Forum meeting, Richard M. Larrabee, Port Authority. 212-435-4226 or [pgessner@panynj.gov](mailto:pgessner@panynj.gov)

**Oct. 10, Noon-8pm** Bruckner-Sheridan Interchange open house. NY State DOT. 198 East 161st St., Bronx. 212-799- 8803 or [www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/bese/](http://www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/bese/)

**Oct. 10, 4:15-6:15pm or 6:45-8:45 pm [new date]** Long Island Sound Waterborne Transportation Plan Community Planning Workshop. Murphy Rd. Jr. High School, Oxhead Road, Stony Brook. 917-339-0488 or [crya@hshassoc.com](mailto:crya@hshassoc.com)

**Oct. 12 and 13** Harvest Rides 2002 Bicycle Tour and Dinner. Westport. 860-527-520 or [www.soundcyclists.com/Harvest](http://www.soundcyclists.com/Harvest)

**Oct. 15, 12-8pm** Bruckner-Sheridan Interchange open house. NY State DOT. 940 Farrison Avenue, Bronx. 212-799- 8803 or [www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/bese/](http://www.dot.state.ny.us/reg/r11/bese/)

**Oct. 17, noon** Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087 or [www.pcac.org](http://www.pcac.org)

**Oct. 17, 6:30pm** Women's Transportation Seminar 25th Anniversary Celebration and Fundraising Gala. Bridgewater, South Street Seaport, Lower Manhattan. 212-564-2750 or [www.wtsnational.org](http://www.wtsnational.org)

**Oct. 18, 8:30- 4:30pm** 2002 Environmental Congress. "What's Ailing Us? The Sprawl- Health Connection." Busch Campus, Rutgers University, Piscataway. 609-278-5088 or [www.anjec.org](http://www.anjec.org)

**Oct. 19, 10am-3pm** 2002 Harmon Shop Open House, Metro-North maintenance and repair facility. Take shuttle bus from Croton-Harmon MNRR Station. 212-672-1200 or [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info)

**Oct. 22, 6-8pm** Auto-Free NY meeting, "Who Killed NYC's Once Extensive Streetcar Network?" Edson Tennyson P.E., retired transit executive. 212-475-3394 or [www.auto-free.org](http://www.auto-free.org)

**Oct. 25, 8:30am-2pm** 3rd Annual Tri-State Transit Symposium. NYU Wagner School and others. Keynote speaker: MTA executive director Katherine Lapp. Others include NJ Transit's George Warrington, USDOT's Emil Frankel

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