

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Fare Hike Watch



• Last Tuesday, the **MTA board** approved a **restructuring plan** that will reorganize the organization's five operating agencies in order to reduce administrative costs at a Tuesday meeting. Governor Pataki has indicated that the restructuring could impact agency finances enough to affect the possible fare hike (*MTR*. #388).

• MTA spokesman Tom Kelly, however, reiterated last week that any savings coming from the restructuring will not have an immediate effect. "This reorganization as envisioned now would have **no effect on the upcoming budgets** presently under discussion," Kelly told the *Staten Island Advance*.

• MTA board member **Rudy Washington** called restructuring the agency's branches a "window of opportunity" for more fairly distributing MTA bridge and tunnel revenues between city and suburban transit. "If we're going to talk about legislation to fix the MTA and make it a better business entity, well then let's fix it completely and bring equity to the people of New York City," he said during the meeting.

• Transit riders organized by the **Straphangers Campaign** protested for fair funding for NYC transit outside the board meeting. Holding signs depicting Edvard Munch's "The Scream," the protesters handed out gag candy with names such as "We already pay Good 'N Plenty" and "Fare Savers."

The current system for **dividing MTA toll revenues** dates to the late 1960's. It gives the first \$24 million of toll revenue after the cost of maintaining bridges to NYC Transit. The rest is split equally between NYC Transit and suburban commuter rails. As originally conceived, the formula gave NYC Transit about 2/3 of the surplus. Now that toll revenues are higher, NYC receives just over half, but moves 83% of the state's transit riders.

The Big Political Races

Who's Saying What, What's at Stake

New York Governor's Race In keeping with his overall campaign strategy, Governor George Pataki's material on transportation refers exclusively to accomplishments over his two terms rather than looking ahead to the next term. Similarly, the *Daily News* endorsement of the Governor cited his record implementing ridership-building MetroCard discounts.

The next four years, however, will likely chart the path for MTA system expansion projects. At the moment, the LIRR-Grand Central link, the Second Avenue subway, the #7 subway extension, downtown transit and commuter rail projects like the LIRR Main Line 3rd track project are all potentially in play. The Governor did discuss downtown transportation projects in a Thursday *Daily News* op-ed. He supported construction of a lower Manhattan transit hub that would tie PATH and subway service together, but did not mention a downtown commuter rail connection. Many transit advocates fear that such a project will delay projects like the 2nd Avenue subway, which would serve far more people, relieve existing subway crowding and provide improved downtown access. The Governor's piece did advocate burying West Street, without committing to a specific plan.

During gubernatorial debates, Governor Pataki said the recently announced MTA reorganization plan would save transit agencies money, implying it could lessen the need to raise transit fares. Pataki would not rule out a fare increase, however.

In response to television ads run by advocacy groups opposed to the NY State DOT's plan to widen most major highways on Long Island, a spokesperson for the Governor said in October Pataki had not approved or made up his mind about the plan yet.

In endorsing the Governor's re-election, the NY League of Conservation Voters favorably cited Pataki's record on transit, in supporting the Port Authority congestion pricing program and for reducing investment in sprawl-inducing highway capacity.

In his *News* op-ed about lower Manhattan redevelopment, Democratic challenger **Carl McCall** appeared to advocate commuter railroad links to a downtown transit hub, and also called for burying

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

West Street. Like Governor Pataki, McCall has not ruled out a transit fare increase. He has criticized the MTA for not putting out budget details that could help analyze the condition of mass transit finances.

McCall position papers say he will appoint environmentally-oriented MTA board members and refer to unspecified transit improvements for Manhattan's East Side. An August campaign statement said he would consider demapping the Sheridan Expressway as part of a broader South Bronx clean air plan, calling on Pataki to do the same.

Independent candidate **Thomas Golisano** has had virtually nothing to say on transportation. When asked about a transit fare increase during a televised debate, Golisano reverted to a statement about the evils of tax increases, saying he was against "penalties on mobility." Pressed, Golisano said he would do "everything in his power not to raise fares."

The New York **Green Party** recently joined forces with Brooklyn and Queens "Save the G" advocates to campaign for restoration of G-train service in Queens. G-train advocates want service further restored to Queens Plaza at a minimum. They also say the reduction of G trains to only four cars is unsafe, because passengers who know that service is infrequent run down platforms to reach the truncated trains. The advocates say Governor Pataki asked them to give NYC Transit's V-train plan a chance. They say they have done so, and are not satisfied, but have not heard back from the governor.

New Jersey Race for U.S. Senate Republican candidate **Douglas Forrester** has not made a strong statement on transportation policy. On his campaign website, Forrester deals with a few broad transportation topics under his energy platform – it calls for drilling in Alaska's National Wildlife Refuge to support national defense and the economy. "Our defense machine, the most fearsome and effective in history, could literally run out of gas," the statement says. Forrester is also opposed to stronger federal fuel efficiency (CAFE) standards. He cites concerns about vehicle safety and the exemption of SUVs.

Democratic candidate and former U.S. Senator **Frank Lautenberg** has a long record of work on transportation legislation and project funding. Several of the newspapers that back Lautenberg's election – including the *Star-Ledger*, the *Trenton Times* and the *Bergen Record* – cited his record obtaining federal money for critical mass transit projects at the tops of their lists of reasons for endorsement. The *NY Times* said Lautenberg could play an important role in reviving Amtrak.

Citing his involvement in crafting federal transportation law and record of supporting transit pro-

jects, Lautenberg's website calls transportation issues the "key to the new century." Lautenberg refers to his record in supporting federal funding for Amtrak, leading the fight to keep NJ Transit fares stable, and his roles in several specific projects, such as the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail and Secaucus Transfer Station.

Connecticut Governor's Race Democratic challenger **Bill Curry** has made the state's problems with traffic congestion one of the main themes of his campaign, and has criticized incumbent Governor John Rowland for inaction in the area. Throughout the campaign, Curry has criticized Rowland for not taking steps on transportation policy reform until seven years into his administration and for failing to address land-use reform. Curry also criticized Rowland's attempts to eliminate Shore Line East and Metro-North's Danbury and Waterbury branches (*MTR* #114) and reduction of funding for the bus system (*MTR* #345).

Curry's own transportation proposals focus on curbing sprawl and joining transportation and land-use policy. In a questionnaire conducted by the CT League of Conservation Voters, Curry named adopting smart growth and sustainable development strategies as the most important initiative for improving both the economy and the environment. Curry says he plans to reform the property tax system, focus development in urban areas, foster transit-oriented development, invest in rail, bus and ferry services, and develop a new statewide land use plan.

Curry was endorsed by the *NY Times*, which cited his ideas about sprawl, congestion and the economy as his main positives. The *Stamford Advocate* endorsed Rowland "with reservations," writing that the Governor belittled threats posed by casino expansion and highway congestion for years. "Mr. Curry also has rightly criticized Mr. Rowland for failing to support mass transit options more vigorously to reduce highway congestion that threatens to choke the state's economy and quality of life," the paper wrote.

Incumbent **John Rowland** argues that his opponent has big plans for transportation but no way to pay for them. Like his NY counterpart, Rowland's campaign has focused on his record over the last eight years. Rowland's website mentions several accomplishments in transportation, including the creation of the Transportation Strategy Board in 2000, recent gains in transit ridership and the pending Hartford-New Britain busway project (*MTR* #364).

Rowland also named transportation issues in his top three priorities for improving the environment and the economy, saying that programs to alleviate traffic congestion are improving air quality while promoting the economy and quality of life and must-

continue. Rowland also told the League of Conservation Voters that he is committed to improvement to train stations, additional parking and commuter lots, rideshare programs and employer-based incentives to reduce vehicular emissions and congestion.

Ledger to McGreevey:

Make Transportation Reform Big Priority

In the Oct. 27 *Star-Ledger*, editorial writer P.L. Wyckoff created a checklist for measuring the McGreevey administration's success at controlling sprawl. **Building fewer new roads was #1** on the list. Wyckoff wrote that a clear measure in this area would be further limiting the level of spending on new roads, which the DOT says is 4% of its total budget, and spending more on repair of bridges and roads.

Two other points on the list specifically mentioned transportation: build more parking at train stations and limiting road-clogging development in outlying areas. Transportation Commissioner Jamie Fox also included all three strategies in his remarks during the sprawl summit (*MTR #389*).

Wyckoff's piece ran alongside an op-ed by Governor McGreevey and a Q&A with environmental protection commissioner Bradley Campbell, discussing topics from the summit. The centrality of transportation issues in their discussions is a hopeful sign.

Both the Governor and Campbell highlighted the need to focus transportation spending on maintenance and repair projects instead of building new roads. They also echoed a theme raised at the summit — that the **state transportation department should not take responsibility for congestion created by municipalities** with poor planning.

"...[W]e will control the development that spills onto our roadways by restricting major highway access," wrote the Governor. "We must consider the potential impact on our road system before development takes place. Sound planning must come first."

Commissioner Campbell also said the administration was already making strides towards capping sprawl, using the DOT as one positive example. "Under Commissioner Jamie Fox's "Fix it First" philosophy, DOT already has stopped sprawl-inducing road projects," he said.

Employment Opportunities at the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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

Details at www.tstc.org

For Long Island Bus, No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

MTA Chair Peter Kalikow and senior NY State legislators were on hand to celebrate with Long Island Bus managers and workers at a Garden City event marking the 10th anniversary of L.I. Bus' compressed natural gas (CNG) fuel program. The agency has one of the largest U.S. CNG programs, and expects to have **all fixed-route buses** powered by CNG next year. At the event, L.I. Bus received the "Natural Gas Vehicle Coalition 2002 Achievement Award." The coalition is an international group of vehicle manufacturers and energy companies.

The CNG program has undoubtedly increased the appeal of bus service in suburban Nassau County. L.I. Bus has not only run a successful clean fuel program, but continues to set **ridership records**. Despite the flat economy, it achieved a record high single-day ridership for the third consecutive year this fall. Daily bus use hit the highest level in Long Island Bus' 30-year history Sept. 3, with 115,630 riders.

Monday's accolades notwithstanding, Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi and the county legislature **reduced county operating support** for Long Island Bus by \$2 million in the budget they passed Tuesday evening. County support for the agency was cut to the bone by the previous county executive, Thomas Gulotta. Drastic service cuts were staved off only through emergency state funding in 2000 and 2001. The further county cut will leave the agency looking to plug holes once again.

It's possible that the widely discussed MTA **fare increase** will fill L.I. Bus' latest budget gap. In that case, higher fares paid by riders will flow into county coffers to make up for past mismanagement, rather than pay for necessities like more frequent service.

NJ Forges Ahead with High Speed E-ZPass

NJ Governor James McGreevey announced Wednesday that the state will install high-speed E-ZPass systems at **seven new locations** within three years.

High-speed collection will be used on the Garden State Parkway at Hillsdale, Toms River, Raritan South, and Asbury Park, Turnpike Interchange 18, and Atlantic City Expressway's Pleasantville plaza.

The installation will cost the Parkway \$34 million, the Turnpike \$11 million, and the Atlantic City Expressway \$8 million. But the investment is likely to offer a high return. Transportation commissioner Jamie Fox said, "the more high-tech we get the more people will sign up." He told the *NY Times*, "New Jersey has been behind other states in this, but we believe that E-ZPass is the future in terms of policy. Since July, when we took steps to improve the program, we have lost 2,000 users but gained 35,000."

The change will also be a huge benefit for drivers who use already use E-ZPass — speeding trips and easing congestion caused by outdated toll booths.

Interest in high-speed toll collection is increasing in the region. The Port Authority is working to replace several booths with high-speed installations and NYC Mayor Bloomberg recently made a case for bringing high-speed E-ZPass to the city's **East River bridges** (MTR #389). For the city, toll systems similar to those NJ has committed to would permit toll collection while keeping traffic queues from forming.

TEA-3 and the U.S. Transit Renaissance

Despite the recession, mass transit ridership is higher now than it has been in many years. Ridership growth is occurring throughout the country, in traditional transit bastions like New York and Chicago, but also in bus systems in cities like Albuquerque, Oklahoma City and Boise. The **demand for new busway and rail systems** is huge, with virtually every city of size in the country in the planning stage. Moreover, improvements such as rapid bus, smart cards, university passes, low floor buses, streetcars and car sharing programs are increasing the convenience and utility of transit to the consumer.

Sadly, many in Congress and the Bush administration see the growing popularity of transit and transit-oriented development as a problem, not an opportunity. The administration has already proposed to handle approximately **50-year waiting lists** for Federal Transit Administration "new start" funds, not by providing more resources, but by increasing match requirements. This move is totally wrong-headed, especially as the administration has not proposed to do the same for new highway capacity projects. Transit and highways should be treated the same.

Another dimension of the issue is the huge popularity of TEA-21 programs like Transportation, Community and System Preservation and Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality, which dedicate funds to transit-oriented development and transit projects, and the limited use of flexibility in the National Highway System and Surface Transportation Program state categories. This tells us that transit agencies and localities are eager to try new approaches, but that the traditional programming entities at the state level are intent on limiting the use of flexibility for funds.

Confronting and solving this issue of intense demand for transit in the face of resource limitations will be a key part STPP's reauthorization platform.

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CALENDAR

November 5, 8am-1pm CT Transportation Strategy Board meeting. Legislative Office Building, Room 2C. www.opm.state.ct.us, 860-594-2073.

November 6, 3:30-5:30pm "Getting To Density" discussion and internet seminar. The Regional Planning Partnership. Sarnoff, West Windsor. 603-452-1717 or rpp2050@aol.com

November 7, 9:15am 18th Annual Construction Forecast Seminar. Marriot, 1 West Lafayette Street, Trenton. 732-225-1180 \$\$

November 7, 11:30am-3pm Community Visioning Workshop for the Cony Island/Gravesend Sustainable Development Transportation Study. Lafayette High School. 212-442-7909 or www.nymtc.org

November 7, 11:45am Transportation Research Forum, "TEA-21 Reauthorization: Twelve Months and Counting..." Mortimer L. Downey III, Principal Consultant, PB Consult. Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington Street at Rector Street. 212-435-4226 or pgessner@panynj.gov \$\$

November 11, 1-2pm Transportation Strategy Board meeting. Omni Hotel at Yale, New Haven. 860-594-2073 or www.opm.state.ct.us

November 14, 8:30-10am Women's Transportation Seminar. "NJ Transit, Back to Basics," Executive Director George Warrington. 212-360-3061 or wts_ny@yahoo.com \$\$

November 14, 5-7pm Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA. 347 Madison Avenue. 212-878-7087 or mail@pcac.org

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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