

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 404

February 24, 2003

NEWS

New York Looks to London

In an editorial last week, the *Daily News* urged New York City to follow London's lead with an ambitious congestion pricing plan. "As in London [East River bridge tolls] would cut traffic and bring in plenty of revenue. Marrying the tolls to congestion pricing would have an even bigger impact."

We would add that **the MTA** should begin charging higher rush hour tolls and offering off-peak discounts when it raises tolls later this year.

The *News* noted that State Assembly Speaker Silver's district would benefit from reduced traffic. The piece also dissected the "**toll back-ups**" canard frequently issued by Silver and other toll critics. The *News* agreed with Bloomberg and transportation experts that E-ZPass technology is capable of collecting tolls on the bridges without imposing traffic-clogging toll plazas.

"Toll the bridges, use congestion pricing, and the effect on our traffic-clogged streets would be nothing less than dramatic."

The first week of London's central pricing cordon appeared to go more smoothly than many had expected. No major technical problems or payment center meltdowns were reported, and traffic actually moved in central London (Mayor Livingstone in fact filed a formal complaint against what he called phony reports of technical trouble by the *Evening Standard*). The worry at week's end was that the £5 driving charge was deterring even more central area driving than expected. City government is counting on annual revenues of £130 million from the program for a transit investment program. London officials felt volumes would increase somewhat after school holidays end this weekend, and that additional revenues would be recovered in fines for non-payment. No information on the **transit ridership impact** of the program was presented in British press internet reports last week. Comparisons to "normal" transit ridership data may be difficult right now at any rate, since two subway lines were knocked out of service by a recent derailment. *

One Year to PATH MetroCard Compatibility

Port Authority spokesmen told Lower Manhattan Development Corporation advisory committees last week that the PATH system would accept fare payments by MetroCard by the **end of 2003** or in the first few months of 2004.

The statement appears to be the first by the PA that puts a timetable on implementation of PATH's new fare system. The ability to use **one fare medium** for both PATH and NYC subways and buses will be a boon to many PATH riders who transfer in the city. It will also be a strong feature for the lower Manhattan design plan to knit city subways and PATH trains into an interconnected transit hub. It is not clear as yet whether there will be any fare discount for PATH-NYC Transit transfers. *

PATH Sets Downtown Reopening Timetable

The Port Authority has announced that a temporary PATH station at the World Trade Center site is scheduled to open in December. Additionally, the **Exchange Place** station in Jersey City will open in **June**, with new connecting ferry service to lower Manhattan.

The World Trade Center station was destroyed on Sept. 11, 2001. The destruction of the Trade Center caused flooding in the downtown PATH tunnels and at Exchange Place.

The Port Authority described work on the PATH system at a meeting of advisory committees to the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) last Thursday. To make **Exchange Place** a **temporary terminal**, the PA has had to excavate a new track crossing. Flooding in the tunnel required a thorough overhaul of the line under the Hudson, including new electrical and signal equipment, and new track underpinnings.

A PA spokesperson said the refurbished tunnel would provide a smoother, faster and quieter ride under the Hudson. However, it will not permit additional train service in the peak, since the new signals do not extend further than Jersey City. PATH is working on a broader signal modernization that will not be complete for some time.

PATH officials project 50-53,000 trips in each direction through the temporary station (presumably for its first year of operation), down from 66-67,000 prior to

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

the Trade Center attack.

The temporary WTC site station now being built will be roofed, but not fully enclosed or heated. The PA says its work on the temporary station anticipates construction of the permanent station on the same site.

Route 92: Big Test for McGreevey's Anti-Sprawl Agenda

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is planning to release a 3-year environmental study of the NJ Turnpike's proposed Route 92 highway in April. If the Corps approves the project, Governor McGreevey's anti-sprawl agenda will be put to its first major test.

Under federal regulations for U.S. "navigable waters," the Army Corps is in charge of protecting and mapping wetlands. Because Route 92 would destroy 14.8 wetlands acres, the Turnpike Authority needs clearance from the Corps to build the project.

The Corps' environmental recommendations will determine whether or not plans for the heavily contested \$350 million, **6.7-mile toll road** move forward. If the Corps issues a thumbs-up, the Governor will be next in line to approve or call off the project. If he lets it proceed, the credibility of his highly publicized anti-sprawl agenda will be severely compromised. It could derail the entire effort

That's because **Route 92 is well within the "red zone"** on New Jersey's recently released "big map" of growth zones and areas where the state says it will no longer subsidize sprawl. Since the Turnpike hatched the road scheme in the early 1990s, its many opponents have predicted that it would help spread office parks, warehouses and housing in the last large undeveloped portion of Middlesex County. The highway's frequent interchanges (one per 1.7 miles) would **act as "can openers" in big tracts of undeveloped land.** It will also destroy critical fish and wildlife ecosystems.

Route 92 fans say the highway would help reduce congestion, but it's a dubious claim. The new highway would dump an additional 10,000-15,000 vehicles on Route 1 south of the new road and attract over 1,200 additional trucks to the area each day, according to Turnpike estimates. The agency's numbers do not account for traffic serving development that would be induced by the road's can-opener effect.

There are alternatives to Route 92. Turnpike truck lanes can be better used, the existing road network can be improved and County Route 522 can be better utilized. Especially in today's climate of fiscal stress, these modest options are preferable.

In his State of the State speech, Gov. McGreevey said that "it is time to draw the line and say 'no more' to mindless sprawl." We agree wholeheartedly. Route 92 gives the governor a major opportunity to translate these words into action. *

Port Authority presentations to date on the future station have depicted a design featuring extensive natural lighting and an open, multi-level concourse design that will link the PATH terminal to lower Manhattan subway lines.

However, the Thursday LMDC meeting focused entirely on PA projects. No one from the MTA or NYC Transit was present, though a *Daily News* report Friday said MTA planners were pushing for the overall plan in other public meetings. Thursday also omitted any discussion of various West St. tunnel proposals.

Much of the meeting was taken up by the objections of family members of those lost in the WTC attack to PA plans to locate **bus parking underground** in the "bathtub" foundation area. Planners anticipate that a WTC memorial will draw significant numbers of tour buses, potentially adding to the bus parking and idling burden that downtown already suffers.

Some of the family members feel that bus parking would be a violation of the hallowed nature of the attack site. However, they do not seem to object to the presence of the PATH station, whose construction is already occupying a significant portion of the "bathtub" area.

According to a recent edition of the *Downtown Express*, Gov. Pataki's recent request to federal officials stated that "safe pedestrian across West St. will be restored. Such restoration will likely occur through the **tunneling of some portion** of Route 9A." However, it is still unclear what portion would be submerged and how much of the federal rebuilding fund would be spent on such a project. *

Third Track Not Derailed, Says LIRR

In MTR #402, we noted an MTA procurement notice that cancelled the contract for the environmental impact statement for the LIRR Main Line third track project.

But LIRR and Nassau County officials contacted by reporters and transit advocates said the project is not dead, but that the request for proposals was halted due to **unspecified administrative problems.** Another RFP may be issued in a few months.

Unfortunately, the delay seems par for the course for a project the LIRR has **failed to develop any momentum** for whatsoever since passage of the current MTA capital program in 2000.

A third track on the LIRR's Main Line between Jamaica and Hicksville would provide capacity for more peak train service -especially for the railroad's ability to run both west- and east-bound service during rush hour. It is an important complement to the East Side Access project and, according to LIRR, necessary to develop a rail freight yard at the Pilgrim State Hospital Site. *

The Plan to Close Subway Station Booths: The Facts

When the MTA initially proposed NYC transit fare increases in November, it outlined two options – a 25-cent fare hike with service cuts, or a 50-cent hike with **no service cuts**.

Two months later the MTA changed its tune, opting to **close one-quarter of the city's staffed station booths**, regardless of the amount of the fare hike. This \$20 million savings plan will replace 177 station agents with HEET's – High Entry/Exit Turnstiles – that can only be activated with MetroCards.

Station booth closures have been one of the hottest topics at recent MTA hearings, meeting **overwhelming opposition** from riders and elected officials. A recent Straphangers Campaign fact sheet, "Keep the Booths Open!" outlines the MTA plan and the importance of station agents. Key points to know include:

- Station agents are the eyes and ears of subway stations – the first line of defense against crimes and other emergencies.
- 177 booths are slated for closure, or 25% of total station booths.
- In 2000, station agents called for the police over 60,000 times.
- Station agents activate their emergency buttons an average of 85 times per year.
- The closure of 177 booths could lead to as many as 15,000 incidents going unreported every year.
- Any reduction in staffed booths helps to disenfranchise disabled riders; parents with strollers; those with large packages, bikes, or luggage; and people in need of directions or medical assistance.
- Anyone needing assistance, access to a service entrance, or having technical problems with MetroCards, will have to make their way to one of the staffed entrances.
- In some cases those requiring assistance will have to travel in the opposite direction because the only staffed booth does not serve trains going in both directions.
- EMTs will not be able to gain access to stations with HEETs, forcing them to use entrances that may be nowhere near their patients.
- Past MTA policy argued that "A human presence is especially important to reassure and protect riders in a time of great concern about security and safety." (NYC Transit memo, April, 1989).

For a complete list of proposed token booth closures, visit www.mta.info/mta/booth.htm. For an original copy of the Straphangers factsheet, see www.straphangers.org/tokenbooth/intro.htm. *

Community Wants Highway's Elimination Included in Study of Sheridan Expressway

The NY State Dept. of Transportation will begin the scoping process for its project to rebuild the interchange between the Bronx' Sheridan and Bruckner Expressways in March.

Although no formal notice has been received by the public, DOT consultants say that **scoping meetings** are scheduled for March 18 and 20, in Hunts Point and at the Bronx Borough President's office on 161st Street, respectively. There is usually a 60-day period for public comment once a scoping process begins. The process is to provide input about what a project's environmental impact statement should consider.

The DOT's concept for the Bruckner-Sheridan connection is to upgrade the interchange ramps to provide smoother, safer traffic flow, and to provide better access for trucks from the Sheridan into Hunts Point, which features NYC's primary wholesale food market. However, the **new complex of ramps** the DOT envisions will further cut Hunts Point off from the rest of the Bronx.

Moreover, the **Sheridan** is essentially a **minor connector road** between the Cross-Bronx and Bruckner Expressways, which intersect at two other points, and are also linked by the Bronx River Parkway. The Sheridan — just 1&1/4 mile long — sees very little overall traffic volume by NYC standards.

For several years, transportation watchdogs and South Bronx community activists have asked the DOT to consider **removing the Sheridan** from the highway network, instead of investing over \$400 million to upgrade its interchanges. Eliminating the road would free up land along the Bronx River for parkland and/or economic development. It would also smooth traffic along the Cross-Bronx and Bruckner by eliminating complicated, congestion-causing interchanges. The groups favoring the Sheridan's demise also favor construction of a new interchange along the Bruckner (at Leggett Ave), to facilitate **truck access between the highway and the Hunts Point market**. That route would have a smaller impact on Hunts Point residential and small business environments than the Sheridan route proposed by NYSDOT.

The groups, which include Sustainable South Bronx, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, Pratt Institute and Tri-State, have asked the DOT to develop an **EIS alternative** that encompasses the Leggett entrance/exit and the elimination of the Sheridan Expressway.

DOT has not responded in a clear manner, and plainly does not want to do this. The advocates plan to be very active during the scoping process to ensure that their point of view is fully considered. *

Federal Fund Facts

The 2003 federal budget signed by President Bush last Thursday includes \$1.05 billion for **Amtrak**, resolving for another year an impasse that threatened to shut the railroad down as recently as January.

The House appropriation shorted Amtrak by nearly half a billion, though the Senate measure gave the railroad the \$1.2 billion it said it needed. Rail advocates apparently prevailed in the conference committee.

The \$1.05 billion contains \$522 million for operations, \$295 million for Northeast Corridor capital investment, and \$233 million for other capital spending, according to the National Corridors Initiative.

Bush's proposed **2004 mass transit spending** level is \$7.22 billion, the same amount as in 2003, according to the American Public Transit Association. Washington sources say the budget plan provides clues about the administration's likely proposals for transit for "TEA-3," the six-year transportation authorization that Congress will take up this year. One change is the breakup of a discretionary bus program and the distribution of its funds to "new starts" and regular transit formula programs. *

NY State Bridge Authority: Homeland Stupidity

The NY State Bridge Authority has closed all the bike/pedestrian walkways over its Hudson River crossings in response to the national "orange alert" for possible terrorism.

The Bridge Authority is a state entity that runs the Bear Mountain, Newburgh-Beacon, Mid-Hudson, Kingston-Rhinecliff and Rip Van Winkle bridges over the Hudson. The Authority told Tri-State that it is **not inspecting trucks** crossing the bridges.

While foot and bike traffic over the bridges is probably low due to the weather, the move is a very bad precedent and **does not mark the first time the agency has overreacted** for security reasons. The Bridge Authority also banned cycling and walking in the fall of 2001. To their credit, NYC DOT, the MTA and the Port Authority have maintained bike and pedestrian access to the bridges in an around NYC since September 11, 2001, regardless of alert levels. *

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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CALENDAR

February 24, Noon, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, NJTPA Headquarters, One Newark Center, 17th floor, Newark, della@njtpa.org, 973-639-8406

February 25, 6-8pm, Auto-Free NY Meeting, "East River Bridge Tolls- a Boon for New York," Charles Komanoff, Bridge Tolls Advocacy Project, 212-475-3394, www.auto-free.org

February 25-26, 2003 Public Advocacy Day, New York Public Transit Association, Inc., Holiday Inn Turf, Albany, 518-434-9060.

February 27, noon, NYC Transit Riders Council, 347 Madison Ave, 5th Floor, 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org

March 5-7, League of American Bicyclists Bike Summit, Washington D.C., 202-822-1333, www.bikeleague.org

March 6, 7:30am, NJ Alliance for Action, "NJ \$12 Billion School Construction Program", Ramada Conference Center, East Windsor, NJ. 732-225-1180.

March 25, 6-8, Auto-Free NY Meeting, "Towards an Auto-Free Governor's Island," Robert Pirani, Regional Plan Association, 212-475-3394, www.auto-free.org

April 7-9, TransAction 2003: New Jersey's state-wide transportation extravaganza. Atlantic City, NJ. www.njcost.com/transaction.htm

April 25, Regional Plan Association: Shaping the Region for the 21st Century, Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, Tom Johnson, CEO Greenpoint Financial, Marriott Marquis Hotel, NYC, www.rpa.org, 212-253-2727

MTA FARE HIKE HEARING

For more information call 212-878-7483

February 27, 4pm (rescheduled), Bronx County Building, Rotunda, 851 Grand Concourse.

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