

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Amtrak on the Brink

Representatives of six unions representing Amtrak workers say they will **walk off the job** this Friday to protest weak Congressional funding for the railroad. Amtrak officials are seeking a court order to compel the workers to stay on the job. The unions, however, are calling the action a political protest rather than a labor action that could be prevented by a court under provisions of the Railway Labor Act.

Some Republican Amtrak supporters, such as Mississippi Senator Trent Lott, said a walkout could alienate some supporters of the railroad, and that only bi-partisan support was keeping it alive.

But Labor leaders said they had little choice. Amtrak president David Gunn said the railroad needed a **\$1.8 billion budget** next year, and that anything short of that would compel him to shut down the railroad. "Without that level of funding, Gunn said he will seek to shut down Amtrak nationwide. Nevertheless, President Bush proposed only \$900 million for Amtrak, a **death sentence for rail passenger service** in the U.S.," said Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Acting President Freddie Simpson.

Although Amtrak management thinks a job action will be counterproductive, the unions are increasingly frustrated. Many Amtrak workers have been without a contract since 1999, but management routinely calls on its labor force to lobby Congress on the railroad's behalf.

One transit labor observer told *MTR* he thought Amtrak **would win the court order** it seeks, and that the threatened action will peter out.

In a message to Amtrak employees circulated earlier this month, Gunn wrote that "We cannot go on like this. We cannot be forced to limp along each year hoping just to make it to the end. We have got to fix the railroad and bring it up to a state of good repair so that we do not have to worry each and every day if we are to do what is expected of us." Gunn said his \$1.8 billion budget, which emphasizes capital investment, would begin to do that.

The Senate's 2004 appropriation bill is only about \$350 million short of that amount for Amtrak, but it still needs to be reconciled with the House \$900 million "death sentence" bill and signed by President Bush. **See: Nationalcorridors.org** ❖

Riders Fall Victim to City Bus Stand-off

Last week, four of the seven NYC private bus lines — Green Bus, Triboro Coach, Jamaica Buses and Command — sued the NYC Department of Transportation, saying the city has shown a "deliberate pattern and practice designed to strangle the companies" by not providing them with enough money to run the system.

The city provides the private companies — the others are New York Bus, Queens Surface and Liberty Lines — with an annual operating subsidy of \$100 million, and sets routes, fares and operating standards. 400,000 riders rely on the seven lines to get around each weekday. But capital funding shortfalls seem to be the chief problem at the moment.

The companies say that they have already started to cut service because some buses, many of which are 16-18 years old, continue to go out of service and are **not being replaced**. For example, Triboro Coach has planned a 43-bus reduction this fall from fall service last year. They say without increased capital investment, further service cuts will ensue. The city has **stopped investing** in the bus lines as it tries to transfer them to the MTA.

"The city has purposefully undertaken a strategy to destroy our companies," said Jerry Cooper, spokesperson for the four companies.

Earlier this year, the private bus companies, along with Local 100 Transport Workers Union, said the city and the MTA had left them in the dark about the takeover. The MTA takeover has been postponed repeatedly over the past year. Mayor Bloomberg has identified the takeover as a cost saving measure for the city, but the MTA is understandably unwilling to take on the routes without new money to support them. ❖

Bus Funding in Crisis Across Downstate NY

Mayor Bloomberg is not the only one trying to unload unwanted bus costs to someone else. As we reported last week, Nassau County Executive **Thomas Suozzi** recently provoked the latest in a running series of funding crises at Long Island Bus by proposing to halve the county's dwindling budget support for the agency in 2004.

But the problem extends further than Nassau and NYC. *MTR* readers will recall that last winter,

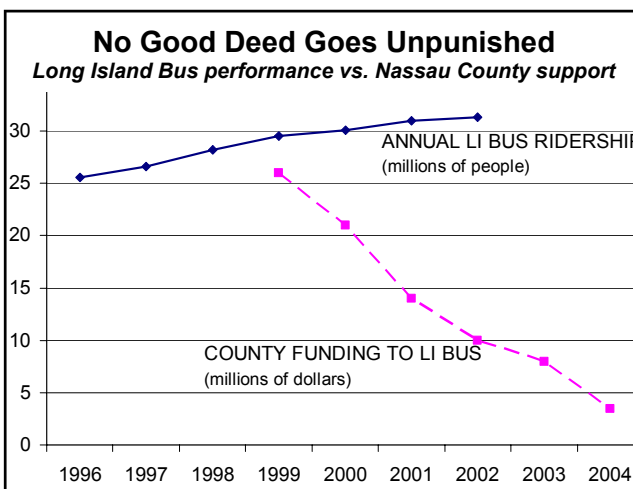
Westchester County imposed fare increases on its Bee-Line bus system that ranged from 25% to a whopping 50% for certain fare packages. The occasion for the hike was a reduction in county support for bus operations. As in Nassau, the cut was just the latest in a steady series extending back several years.

Suffolk County too, seems to begrudge its outlays for bus service. In 2002, Suffolk raised bus fares, but lowered them six months later when the state budget brought in new money and advocates and state legislators challenged the hike (see *MTR #372*). The county later used the money it banked from the hike to **reduce its contribution** to the bus budget rather than improve service.

The fact that the bus funding problem is regional may lend itself to a solution. The state should enact a new, relatively small tax to support downstate, non-MTA bus operations. The part allocated to NYC franchise bus operations should go to the MTA when it takes those lines over.

Albany lawmakers may not like the idea of letting the city and county off the transit funding hook, but they **are getting off the hook on their own** anyway. Those who suffer are bus riders, employers who depend on bus-riding workers, motorists stuck in worsening traffic and everyone impacted by car-generated air pollution.

Fixing the bus funding problem will be one less perennial headache for everyone. That includes state legislators, who see transit managers, bus riders, unions and transportation advocates troop into their offices to plead for **emergency state aid** every time a county executive takes another shot at one of the bus systems.



City Says Traffic Calming is Alive and Well

The New York City Dept. of Transportation has written the Tri-State Transportation Campaign to refute an account of the conclusions of its Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming study presented here in July (*MTR #424*).

The *MTR* piece in question represented an account by Transportation Alternatives of the study's conclusion. It stated that the agency did not intend to implement any of the study's recommendations.

DOT's letter says this is not the case, but rather that action on the study's recommendations will be **put off until 2008** or 2009 due to funding constraints. The study recommended a variety of measures to reduce traffic flow on neighborhood streets surrounding downtown Brooklyn, including traffic calming installations that would be **new to New York City**, like raised crosswalks, diagonal diverters and median barriers.

NYC DOT is implementing a variety of smaller improvements, such as new bike lanes and traffic signal adjustments designed to give pedestrians more crossing time. These may be worthy steps, but they are not a lot to show for a **six year planning effort** that citizens spent thousands of hours on in a good faith effort to participate.

The agency also took issue with our characterization that it has largely abandoned traffic calming as a guiding principle for traffic policy on NYC streets, and claims it is at the forefront of pro-pedestrian measures, such adding pedestrian space in Herald Square and implementing 700 speed humps.

Again, such examples are worthy, but they stand out against most of the Department's activity. NYC DOT began installing speed humps in the early 1990s, so a total of 700 adds up to **less than 100 new speed humps per year** on NYC's 10,000-mile street network. To us, a concerted effort to calm traffic and save lives and limbs on city streets would be accomplishing much more. Our view that traffic calming and pro-pedestrian efforts represent a small ghetto within the Dept. of Transportation, often at odds with its abiding preoccupation with shoehorning more cars through the city, remains unchanged. Transportation Alternatives wrote recently that the Downtown Brooklyn study report is heavily colored by a **"cars-first" philosophy**, that the agency ruled out any reduction in traffic capacity in the study area from the get-go and took a hostile stance toward most of the expert traffic calming advice developed by the study's consultant, Arup.

DOT asserts it is working on more studies to improve traffic conditions in Downtown Brooklyn, so that nearby neighborhoods, such as Brooklyn Heights, Cobble Hill, and Fort Greene, will not see

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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worse traffic conditions in the future. Maybe so, but in the 21st Century, New York City deserves and needs a transportation department that makes traffic calming central to its mission. It cannot succeed if it is merely tacked on to traditional approaches or grudgingly tolerated by traffic flow engineers. ❖

Transit Village or Swamp Thing?

Under the banner of transit-oriented development, the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission is considering construction of **large-scale developments around the new Secaucus Junction** train station. The commission is apparently being approached by developers eager to take advantage of the new station, and wants to organize any development into a single overall plan.

But the area – the heart of the environmentally sensitive Meadowlands – is inappropriate for large scale new development. The new station, meant to increase the utility of the state's rail network, should not be **transformed into a car traffic generator**. Scarce state resources, which the commission anticipates being used on **highway interchanges** and other roads, should be spent where they support the McGreevey Administration's smart growth program. In the Meadowlands, for green-field development, such expenditures will only mock that agenda.

The commission, which is working with NJ Transit and the Town of Secaucus, has dubbed the project a "transit village." Indeed, New Jersey has a **poorly funded transit village program**, which aims to reward municipalities that orient development to transit stations. The program is meant to revitalize existing centers, however, not to promote new ones in undeveloped or sensitive areas.

The "Secaucus Junction Vision Plan" – released earlier this month – foresees substantial development in co-existence with 114 acres of threatened wetlands. It includes: construction of 1,850 residential units, with some on the riverfront; a 300-500 room hotel with conference facility; and 575,000 to 750,000 square feet of new commercial space. The plan would require new roads and ramps and is estimated to take twenty-five years to complete. The state has already spent \$80,000 to study the idea, and may be poised to pour far more into the swamplands. ❖

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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Calendar

September 29, 11am. Grand Opening and Dedication Ceremony for Senator Frank Lautenberg Transportation Opportunity Center, 32 Spruce Street, Paterson, NJ, 973-225-0555.

October 2, 11:45am. Transportation Research Forum: "Labor Management Lessons from the Rail Industry: The Enemy is Not Each Other," Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St.. 212-435-4226, pgessner@panynj.gov.

October 8, 2pm and 6pm. Port Authority hearings on Lower Manhattan Transit Hub. Hudson Cty Admin. Annex, 3rd floor, 567 Pavonia Ave. Jersey City. Contact: 212-435-7777.

October 9, 2pm, and 6pm. Port Authority hearings on Lower Manhattan Transit Hub. Custom House lower-level auditorium, One Bowling Green, Manhattan. 212-435-7777.

October 16, 10:30am. Long Island Sound Ferry Coalition Meeting, Five Islands Park Pavilion, Rt. 1, New Rochelle. Fatai Adekoya at fadekoya@dot.state.ny.us, 718-472-3179.

October 21, 6:30pm. West Harlem Environmental Action 15th Anniversary Celebration, International House, 500 Riverside Drive, NYC, 212-961-1000, www.weact.org

October 23-24, 10am. "How to Turn a Place Around," Sponsored by Project for Public Spaces, Various locations. For more info, contact Jande Wintrob, jwintrob@pps.org, 212-620-5660.

October 28, 6pm. "Reclaiming the High Line - a citizen's initiative," Joshua David, Friends of the High Line, 104 Washington St, 212-475-3394, www.auto-free.org.

October 29, 8:30am. 4th Annual Tri-State Transit Symposium. NYU Wagner Rudin Center for Transportation. Kimmel Center, Rosenthal Pavilion, 60 Washington Square South, izp200@nyu.edu, 212-998-7545

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