

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### **NJ DOT Calls Off Highway Bypass**

After facing opposition from residents, and environmentalists for years, and under Governor Jim McGreevey's emphasis on smart growth, **NJ DOT has tabled plans** to build the unnecessary and sprawl-inducing **Millstone Bypass** in central NJ.

The bypass highway — which would have traversed Sarnoff Corporation property between Washington Road and the Millstone River in an area along Route 1 just east of Princeton — threatened **drinking water and several historic sites**. Large-scale development along its route would bring even more traffic into the congested Penns Neck district.

At a meeting last Wednesday, DOT officials announced a preferred alternative that avoids these impacts, omits construction of a new highway and will alleviate traffic with cheaper means. It will place Route 1 in a below-grade underpass in one intersection, build Route 1 frontage roads to keep driveways from interfering with through traffic and add a minor connector road west of Route 1.

The preferred alternative is a slight modification to one option among many in the draft environmental impact statement. It is projected to **improve traffic flow** on Route 1 and reduces delay at several intersections. The Tri-State Campaign testified in favor of this option during proceedings in 2003.

The final environmental impact statement is due this summer. Although the plan has been scaled down significantly, fixing Route 1 and rearranging intersections could still cost \$65 million or more.

Though the **project decision is a win** for the McGreevey Administration, transportation reformers and smart growth advocates will keep a close eye on the area. Without careful zoning, big-box stores could appear along the frontage roads and add to traffic. It's also possible that Sarnoff Corporation could attempt to build the bypass as a private road.

The McGreevey Administration could follow this important decision up with a similar **smart fix for the Route 92** conflict in Middlesex County. The re, the state wants the Turnpike Authority to build a new limited-access highway across open space. It would be a major inducement to sprawl and additional traffic. However, there are cheaper fixes to existing roads that can relieve traffic without spurting big new green-field developments. ❖

### **MTA Budget, Projects Head Into Crucial Year**

An unfocused list of big transit system expansion projects coupled with the increasingly enormous debt payments featured in the MTA's budgets are likely to make the upcoming debate and negotiations over the 2005-2009 MTA capital plan **even more difficult** than those of previous years.

The MTA will release its draft of the five-year plan **this summer**, and it will likely be debated by the Bloomberg and Pataki administrations and NY State legislative leaders through the 2005 budget season.

Despite its successes in rebuilding the mass transit system during the 1980s and 90s, the MTA has been flirting with trouble during its past two capital programs. Under **Governor Pataki**, NY State has not developed new revenue sources for mass transit, and the system has had to rely on borrowing and two record-size fare increases to pay for capital improvements. "The MTA has big financial woes because Governor Pataki starved the agency for rebuilding funds. They had to borrow and now pay back many billions of dollars," Straphangers Campaign attorney Gene Russianoff told the *Daily News* last week.

Although MTA day-to-day operating budgets are separate from the capital plan, they are linked in that capital debt service payments come out of the operating budget. Thus, borrowing for capital projects can put a lot of **pressure on the fare**, in the absence of other revenue sources like direct state and city support. Of course, a cash-strapped MTA also will have a tough time making progress on big new projects — various political powers and interests want the MTA to build a LIRR connection to Grand Central, the Second Avenue subway, a #7 subway extension and a new tunnel connecting the LIRR to lower Manhattan.

There are signs that some of the debate could be heated. **Mayor Bloomberg** was faulted by bus and subway riders for not championing their case when the MTA hiked fares in 2003. But he now appears peeved that over lack of headway on the transfer of the city's franchise bus system or financing for the #7 subway extension, and voted against accelerated financing for new Metro-North trains last week. If further fare hikes look likely, a more serious divide

could open between Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg, who will stand for re-election late next year. Another outstanding issue is the reorganization of MTA operating agencies. Folding the Long Island Railroad into a more generic commuter rail agency is unpopular in both Long Island and the Hudson Valley.

As the MTA debate becomes more focused in coming months, it's important to remember **how critical capital investment in mass transit** has been to the recovery of NYC and the surrounding region from the depths of the 1970s. As noted by Michael Gecan in a recent *Village Voice* piece, New York would not be what it is today without the amazing reconstruction of the city's transit system. Consider: since 1982, subway trains have increased ridership by 39% and one-third of subway stations have been extensively renovated. Subway trains now break down everyone 100,000 miles, rather than every 7,000 miles in 1982.

The question for the region today is whether it can continue to grow and thrive without continued improvement in the transit system. Will political leaders like **Governor Pataki** and **Mayor Bloomberg** make the case for the public investments needed to do so? ❖

### MTA Says it Won't Subsidize Ratner

MTA leaders say that any transfer of air rights and yard space at the LIRR storage area along Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn will be a sale for **market value**, not a hand-off to subsidize a new NBA basketball arena and related commercial and residential development.

We argued last week that the developer, Forest City Ratner, should contribute to Brooklyn transit service if studies show the development will create a marked increase in subway and bus ridership.

Testifying at budget hearings in Albany last week, **MTA executive director Kathryn Lapp** said any transfer of property would be for fair market value, and said the agency had not yet analyzed whether it was possible to move its storage tracks.

Her comments were reiterated by **MTA chair Peter Kalikow** to reporters. Kalikow told the *Daily News* that a price had not yet been estimated or negotiated for the space Ratner would require, but that "it's **always been understood** that it will be fair market value." ❖

### Hundreds of Bus Riders Say No to Cuts

About 300 angry bus riders attended a meeting last week on drastic cuts proposed for Westchester County's Bee line bus system.

Along with riders and bus drivers, Westchester DOT Commissioner Larry Salley, Yonkers city council members, county elected officials, and State Assemblymember Mike Spano were in attendance. The elected officials assured the raucous audience that they would **work to stop the bus cuts**. Bee-Line is facing a \$1.6 million budget gap this year, a number Salley says may triple by 2005. A new contract between the county and Transport Workers Union Local 100 must be negotiated in early 2005.

Many riders wanted to know why drastic cuts were proposed just months after a **25-50% fare hike**. "Where did our fare hike go?" one rider asked Salley. "Aren't you supposed to predict a deficit and stop it from happening?" According to the *Journal News*, 7,000 of the 55,000 daily riders will be affected by the cuts to 44 bus routes.

Salley said the system's insurance, labor, and health benefit costs have skyrocketed in the past few years. Focusing on Nassau County's Long Island Bus, he said current state transit allocations are distributed unfairly. It is still unclear how other county bus systems are dealing with similar increasing health, labor, and insurance costs.

But Salley is right that Westchester gets less state transit operating assistance than Nassau. A NY Public Transit Association analysis shows Westchester received the **second lowest amount** of state revenue per passenger of any New York transit system during 2002 and 2003. New York City Transit subway and bus riders got the least state assistance at \$.49 per passenger. Metro-North and LIRR get the most at \$2.64 per passenger. Syracuse and Albany bus systems also do well, at \$2.18 and \$2.10 per passenger, respectively. Westchester gets the second least at \$.85 per passenger, followed by Nassau at \$1.08.

The meeting was organized by Greenburgh Supervisor Paul Feiner and bus commuters. A public hearing on the bus cuts will be held **February 10** (see calendar section). ❖

### Metro-North's Winter of Woe: Whose Fault?

Although commuters burned out by Metro-North Rail Road's frequent train cancellations and delays this winter aim their ire at rail managers, the Connecticut Rail Commuter Council blames the **Rowland Administration's** skinflint transportation budgets for the rail system's winter of woe.

Metro-North riders have seen a rolling wave of train cancellations during January.

The Commuter Council says Metro-North is doing all it can with its equipment, but that many train-sets suffer from a design flaw that sucks fine snow into

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

electronic systems, where it melts and re-freezes. The week of Jan. 19th, about **40% of train cars** on the New Haven Line were **out of service**. Many of the cars are over 30 years old and have exceeded their expected service life. The Council reports that the railroad's Connecticut shops are laboring 24/7 to return equipment to service, but that repair capacity is also weak, especially considering the age of the New Haven line fleet.

The 180 new rail cars set for delivery to Metro-North's NY lines will not suffer the same cold-weather flaw as the older cars (Long Island Rail Road is already using many of the newer cars and is suffering fewer problems than Metro-North), but they will offer no relief on the New Haven Line, which uses an overhead wire power system, rather than the 3rd rail the new cars will be outfitted for.

Metro-North's Hudson and Harlem lines and the LIRR have nonetheless had their shares of trouble with older trains. MTA action to accelerate a train-set purchase for Metro-North's NY lines last week set off a protest by **Mayor Bloomberg**, who said it tilted transit capital spending emphasis in favor of the suburbs. MTA leaders said a NYC Transit subway car purchase was similarly moved up in 1999.

The New Haven Line is scheduled to get about 15-20 new cars in 2007-08. ConnDOT acknowledges it needs to buy up to **400 new cars** for the New Haven Line, but that the Rowland Administration has kept on lid on such a request to the legislature. The state Transportation Strategy Board has confirmed the need for a huge capital investment in the New Haven Line, but has been unable to win appreciable new funding.

The Commuter Council is attempting to direct riders' ire toward the Connecticut legislature: [www.trainweb.org/ct](http://www.trainweb.org/ct). ❖

## Save the Date! April 16, 2004

Regional Plan Association's 2004 Regional Assembly: **"Make No Small Plans: The Far West Side and Its Impact on the Region."** Stay tuned for details: [www.rpa.org](http://www.rpa.org)

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

## Calendar

**Feb. 3**, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](#) Regional Plan Update. Palisades Center, W. Nyack. 718-472-3197, [nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us).

**Feb. 5**, 11:45am. Transportation Research Forum. Jeff Zupan of RPA will present "RPA's Third Regional Plan - What's Been Accomplished, What Hasn't... and Why?" Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington St., Manhattan \$. RSVP to Paul Gessner 212-435-4226.

**Feb. 5**, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](#) Regional Plan Update. Schomburg Center, NY Public Library, Malcolm X Blvd at W. 135th St., Manhattan. 718-472-3197, [nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us).

**Feb. 6**, 9:30-12pm. CUNY University Transportation Research Center seminar: "Transportation, Border Control, and Homeland Security." Baruch College, 151 E. 25th St., # 750. [seminars@utrc2.org](mailto:seminars@utrc2.org); [www.utrc2.org](http://www.utrc2.org).

**Feb. 9**, 5:30-7:30pm. American Planning Association, Municipal Art Society & The Women's City Club's panel: "The Economic Vision for NYC and the Physical Redevelopment of the Far West Side." RSVP 212-935-3960.

**Feb. 10**, 2-5pm and 7-9pm. Public Hearing on proposed reduction in Bee-Line bus services. Westchester County Center, Central Ave. & Tarrytown Rd., White Plains. 914-813-7777, [beeline@westchester.gov](mailto:beeline@westchester.gov).

**Feb. 10**, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](#) Regional Plan Update. Supreme Court Building, 198 East 161st Street, Bronx. 2nd Floor. 718-472-3197 or [nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us).

**Feb. 11**, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](#) Regional Plan Update. Polytechnic Univ., 5 MetroTech Center, Brooklyn. 718-472-3197 or [nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us).

**Feb. 12**, 3:30-5:30pm and 7-9pm. [NY Metropolitan Transportation Council](#) Regional Plan Update. Putnam County Courthouse, 40 Gleneida Avenue, Carmel. 718-472-3197 or [nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:nymtc-rtp@dot.state.ny.us).

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

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