

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Pataki Budget Strengthens Stadium Critique

It's worth considering the implications of Governor Pataki's budget proposal, which pulls the rug out from under the MTA 5-year capital program, and the transportation assumptions in New York City's West Side stadium environmental impact statement.

Lawsuits against the stadium plan, including the one filed by the Tri-State Campaign and NYPIRG, argue in part that the stadium environmental review presents an overly-sunny explanation of how the transit system will absorb stadium-going crowds and others using the #7 subway to reach new destinations on the far West Side.

The environmental review admits that stadium events will cause additional subway crowding, especially jams on platform stairways, on a variety of lines serving Midtown and connecting to the #7. This impact is on top of expected background growth in use of the city subways.

The study's main answers to these problems is **construction of the Second Avenue subway** through Midtown, the completion of the LIRR link to Grand Central Terminal and a variety of capacity improvements to Midtown subway stations.

The problem is the governor's budget plan provides almost no funding for the Second Avenue line or the LIRR connection. The funding he has offered is in fact so low it will probably jeopardize expected federal funding as well, since the feds require local matching funds. Meanwhile, the midtown subway station fixes called for in the stadium study are not in anyone's budget, and the governor's budget seriously shorts core MTA repair funds.

Thus, the governor is proposing a "**worst case**" for the transit system, while the stadium transportation plan, which sees about 88% of patrons arriving by mass transit after the #7 subway is extended, relies on an extreme "best case" scenario.

If the best case doesn't play out, the stadium environmental review is worthless and the West Side may be looking forward to gridlock on an unprecedented scale.

The traffic study needs to be re-done with a variety of likely transit scenarios examined, so New Yorkers get a sense of what the Bloomberg Administration is really getting us into. ❖

Mobilizing for New York's Future

The Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA), a coalition of transportation, business, civic and labor organizations, invites you to a press conference and rally to kick off a campaign to build public support for fully funded five-year New York State transit and highway Capital Programs.

The purpose is to urge the public to become involved and contact their elected representatives to fully fund the MTA capital program and ensure adequate funding for NY State DOT capital needs.

Former MTA board members, former NYC transportation commissioners, business, civic, labor leaders and transportation reform advocates will speak on the need to invest billions of dollars for New York's transportation infrastructure.

When: Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2005, 11:00 a.m.

Where: Grand Central Terminal main concourse

Contact: Beverly Dolinsky, Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, 212-878-7087; Kate Slevin, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, 212-268-7474.

Transit Trials

NYC Transit's success in restoring C-train service is a relief for riders and transit managers alike. Hopefully, several positive developments can come from the recent troubles:

- Realization across New York City that Governor Pataki's proposal to stiff NYC Transit's **core infrastructure repair and upgrade program** will spell disaster over the long run. Riders and their local elected officials need to focus on the MTA capital program debate and ensure full funding for "invisible" progress like newer signal systems and more security, as well as more tangible upgrades like new trains and buses and station renovations.
- Better communication with riders. Difficult developments are one thing, but compounding their impact because of lousy information systems, management and practices is another.

A **Straphangers Campaign** survey released last week said on-train announcements of delays and service changes remain poor throughout the subway system. While the study found that basic announce-

ments about stations and connections improved across the board, it also found that in **more than five of every six delays** and disruptions experienced by surveyors (84%), there was either no announcement at all—or an inaudible, garbled or useless one.

On-subway information is not the whole problem. Stations seem especially disconnected from timely news flow about what is happening and what waiting riders should do when things go wrong. Turning this problem around will take a concerted effort by Transit president Lawrence Reuter and his lieutenants. The C outage should provide that impetus.

Bee-Line Prospects Up in State Budget

Governor Pataki's proposed budget increases state contributions to Westchester's Bee-Line bus by \$7.7 million, according to the *Journal-News*. \$2.6 of that would be used implement the **MetroCard system**, with the remaining \$5.1 million for operating support. In September, we reported that Bee-Line could be facing an \$8.8 million deficit this year (*MTR #471*). Apparently, Westchester's Albany delegation worked hard throughout the year to win more state funding.

Westchester elected officials had a good case. According to county data, Westchester received about \$25 million from the state in 2003 and 2004, while Nassau County's Long Island Bus received about \$34 million. Both systems' annual ridership hover around 30-31 million and have comparable operating budgets.

The implementation of MetroCard could help increase ridership on Bee-Line. Long Island Bus has seen steady ridership growth since the late 1990s thanks to free transfers with subways in Queens. Bee-Line's ridership has remained stagnant for years, and many riders complain of poor, unreliable service, and high costs. **Free transfers to Bronx subways** could significantly increase the value of Bee-Line travel for riders, changing a two-fare, \$3.75 trip to a single \$2 fare. Although news reports have been unclear about whether NYC Transit or Bee-Line would absorb the cost of the transfer. Westchester officials have estimated the free transfer would cost the agency \$3 million in farebox revenue. But the new convenience may attract new riders to make up for it. **28% of Bee-Line's roughly 110,000 daily riders** now switch to subway service.

Long Island Bus officials told the Campaign they were still evaluating implications of the executive budget for their system. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

"Robo-Trains" ?

Continuing news coverage of "Robo-trains" coming to the NYC subway system has **conflated the issues** of a modern signal system with one-person subway train operation. The fact is that the subway sorely needs the new signal system – it will allow for additional subway service in the future, as anyone who rides the rush hour L train can tell you is desperately required. The one-person train issue should be debated separately.

In 1997, NYC Transit selected the L subway line, which runs through Brooklyn and across 14th Street in Manhattan, to develop its Communication-Based Train Control (CBTC) pilot program. The \$288M system was installed in sections and will be operational by summer 2005. While "automation" – the removal of personnel – is under debate for a number of reasons, "modernization" is critical to subway service improvements: CBTC will make it possible to **run subway trains closer together**, allowing trains to run more frequently.

NYC Transit has indicated that its plan to have CBTC operate the train will still involve a worker to **monitor the auto-pilot and act as conductor** – cutting the on-board staff from two to one.

We agree with Beverly Dolinsky, executive director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, who recently told the NYC City Council that "While safety concerns must be addressed, we cannot be afraid of proven technologies that make the system operate more efficiently."

Transit workers argue that NYC Transit attempts to seize on every new technology to reduce "the human presence in the system." One of their safety concerns that needs a clear explanation from transit management is how a conductor in the front car, where he or she would need to be to monitor CBTC operation, can safely see and operate all of the doors on a two-block-long train. ❖

How NJ Bus Riders Fare

The *Star-Ledger* recently noted that over the past three years, New Jersey's 227,000 daily train riders have enjoyed about \$1.2 billion dollars in capital improvements, but that the half a million everyday bus riders have seen a far smaller investment in the same time — only about \$300 million. The article also noted that the largest recent expenditure was for express buses designed for trips like **commutes to Manhattan**, rather than urban service within New Jersey. Operating costs for train service are also increasing faster than for buses.

In part for this reason, the structure of the proposed NJ Transit fare increase cuts intra-New Jersey **bus riders some breaks**. They will not pay more for a monthly pass, for example.

A NJ Transit spokesperson told *MTR* that the cost of providing bus service should account for road infrastructure costs as well. Buses do increase pavement wear, but we believe the roads would generally be provided bus service or no.

A good remedy after NJ grapples with its transportation funding problems later this year would be an initiative, led from the top of the agency, to **improve bus equipment and service** around urban centers, with a look at bus rapid transit techniques to move buses more efficiently through traffic. ❖

No Data, No Peace

The NYPD recently released figures on 2004 traffic deaths, touting the **lowest number of city fatalities** since recording began in 1910 (292 in 2004 vs. 353 in 2003). What is happening elsewhere in the state? Good luck finding out.

The NY State Governor's Traffic Safety Committee (GTSC), comprised of more than a dozen state agencies (including the DMV, Division of State Police, and the state DOT) seemed a logical place to lodge a query. The committee's web-site (www.safeny.com) indeed provides county-by-county reports of traffic crashes and fatalities, but **nothing more recent than 2001**. When the Campaign called and pointed out that 2003 NY traffic fatality data were available from the federal government, the GTSC spokesman implied his office could not access the publicly available, online dataset.

The Campaign also tried the NY State Police and the Dept. of Motor Vehicles. The police only had data on arrests, speeding, and DWI up to 2001. The call to DMV led to an **amazing goose chase** when an operator directed us to the Michigan office of international automobile marketing firm R.L. Polk.

We eventually uncovered a January 10th press release by Governor Pataki lauding the record low traffic deaths in the state in 2003. It cited the Institute of Traffic Safety Management and Research (ITSMR), a consultant that compiles traffic fatality data for the GTSC. ITSMR provided 2003 figures (1,477 in 2003 vs. 1,509 in 2002) and indicated that the GTSC's website would soon be updated soon to reflect the newer data (but not as of this writing).

But providing '03 numbers would still leave New York State behind the curve. One call to NJ's Dept. of Law and Public Safety generally yields **to-date records** on traffic deaths and crashes, sorted by county and victim type. Individual New York county police departments (notably Suffolk and Nassau counties) were also responsive in providing up-to-date data. ❖

Calendar

February 7, 8am-12pm. *3rd Annual New Jersey Transportation Conference*. The War Memorial Building, Trenton, NJ. RSVP by 1/28/05, \$95, www.allianceforaction.com 732-225-1180

February 10, 12:15pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council Meeting. 10th Floor, 347 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. 212-878-7087. www.pcac.org

February 10, 7pm. Vision Long Island Presents: *The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream* (film). Molloy College, 2nd Floor, Wilbur Arts Center, Rockville Centre. 516-541-4321. endofsuburbia.com/

February 15, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit hearing on proposed fare hikes. Passaic County Building, Freeholders' Board Room, 401 Grand St. Paterson. 973-491-7453. www.njtransit.com

February 15, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit hearing on proposed fare hikes. NJ DEP Hearing Room, 1st Floor, 401 E. State St. Trenton. 973-491-7453. www.njtransit.com

February 16, 5-7pm. MTA Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee— President's Forum w Metro-North president Peter Cannito. 5th Floor, 347 Madison Ave. Manhattan. 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org.

February 16, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit hearing on proposed fare hikes. Camden City Hall, City Council Chamber, 520 Market Street, Camden. 973-491-7453. www.njtransit.com

February 16, 5:30-8:30pm. NJ Transit hearing on proposed fare hikes. John Wiley & Sons, 2nd Floor, Cafeteria, 111 River Street, Hoboken. 973-491-7453. www.njtransit.com

more calendar entries at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Mobilizing the Region

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