

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Strike!

As we prepared to distribute this edition, hopeful media reports indicated that the return of NYC Transit subway and bus service, suspended by the strike by members of Transport Workers Union Local 100, might be only hours away.

We profess no expertise in labor relations, but offer these observations on the experience of and public discourse around the strike:

Contingency plans and traffic

The city's tough HOV-4 rule and morning truck ban allowed the Manhattan street system to function during the traditional rush hour. But the HOV rule's suspension at 11 a.m. created mid-day traffic conditions far worse than any traditional rush hour, and made the evening commute period chaotic at best. Some individuals who were able to join informal 4+ carpools to get into the central business district (CBD) were left out in the cold for the return trip, since the incentive for drivers to pick up passengers was gone. In future transportation emergencies, the city should consider some variations, perhaps allowing HOV-4 or -3 vehicles in the morning rush and relaxing the rule only to HOV-2 at other times, rather than lifting the lid entirely at a known time. That only caused gigantic single-occupant vehicle-queuing across a wide arc surrounding the CBD and then flooded the city with cars.

Much of Brooklyn was a traffic disaster throughout the strike. For future planning, officials may want to consider moving HOV checkpoints for major arterials like Flatbush Avenue further away from Manhattan. While we observed, saw and read about unnumbered examples of the expected camaraderie of New Yorkers facing tough times, the feeling was balanced by equally countless scenes of reckless and aggressive driving we witnessed in Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan, including even more rampant red-light running than usual and some driving-on-sidewalks incidents. We hope this week does not end up exhibiting a big spike in injury-causing traffic crashes.

Strangely, considering their role after Sept. 11, the city's plans did not give ferries a strong role. Ride-seekers overwhelmed the private Water Taxi service at the Brooklyn Army Terminal on Tuesday morning, eventually causing a demand-driven diversion of a Staten Island ferry.

Walking and cycling played big roles in keeping the city moving, but a little management by the city could have made it smoother. The Queensboro, Williamsburg and Manhattan bridges all have dual bike/ped-ways — separating out foot and bike traffic onto separate paths would have sped and encouraged cycling, while making the crossings safer for all. Many people are apparently unaware of the Manhattan Bridge paths—a little direction by police and traffic agents could have diverted some of the dense throngs seen each day on the well-known Brooklyn Bridge promenade. By Tuesday evening, bicycle shops across the city reported unusually strong late December business.

Regional transit

The strike may have led to a new appreciation by borough residents of the Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road trains operating in their midst. Local officials should follow up with pressure for long-term service plans that better serve city stations as major capacity improvements like LIRR East Side Access come closer. The Metro-North station that was quickly cobbled together at Yankee Stadium will likely excite foes of the stadium redevelopment plan, which omits construction of a permanent station (see next page).

During the strike, the Port Authority was the only agency accepting MetroCards, both at its new dual-capable PATH turnstiles and at the JFK AirTrain.

Staten Island Borough President Molinaro worked out a deal with a private bus company to drive commuters to the NJ Transit light rail line in Bayonne, from which they could connect to PATH and ferries. Staten Island officials like Congressman Vito Fossella have long sought permanent MTA service to the Bayonne light rail terminus.

Hoboken Station, bypassed in recent years by new NJ Transit "midtown direct" services and transfers at Secaucus, again became a beehive of commuters

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

seeking PATH and ferry rides. Riders avoided NY Penn Station in favor of the multiple Manhattan stations afforded by PATH and the distributor buses operating from some ferry terminals.

Coverage

Balance to the “greedy worker” drumbeat maintained by Mayor Bloomberg and a number of newspapers was not easy to come by. Juan Gonzalez’ *Daily News* columns certainly stood out — one argued that the MTA’s biggest pension problem in fact lies with LIRR contracts negotiated over the past several years, rather than with NYC Transit workers. Other columns attempted to place the conflict within a poisonous daily relationship between MTA labor and management, and in the ongoing income polarization in New York and the U.S.

NY Times coverage also provided some of this context, though it could be hard to get to amid the welter of stories each day.

It was nearly impossible for a commuter to understand that the MTA’s biggest overall budget woes stem from the extreme borrowing for infrastructure projects triggered by state and city capital budget cuts from the mid-1990s to the present.

A great number of local television reporters seemed to have next to no knowledge of the basic function and layout of the city’s transportation systems. And why did they keep asking traffic expert Gridlock Sam Schwarz about the progress of a labor negotiation? ❖

North Jersey Plan Pushes Highway Expansion

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority’s “Project Development Work Program,” a list of projects in study and development phases, reflects the persistence of traditional thinking about traffic congestion at the local level even as the NJ DOT has largely concluded that road widening is futile if other things—especially development policies that favor sprawl—remain the same.

Some highway expansion plans under study are:

- Bergen County: Route 120 between the Sports Complex and the Garden State Parkway.
- Essex County, McCarter Highway in Newark.
- Middlesex County, Route 18 near Route 1.
- Morris County, Route 202 through Morristown.
- Ocean County, Route 70 in Brick.

Many of the PDWP plans come from county planners, and contrast starkly to the State DOT’s search for alternatives to paving more lanes. Counties and the TPA would better spend their time and money considering smart growth scenarios and other means to reduce trip generation than on projects the cash-strapped state is unlikely to support. ❖

Yankee Stadium Plan: Strike Two

Despite vigorous opposition from his constituents and Bronx Community Board 4, Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión signed off on the ULURP application for the Yankee Stadium redevelopment proposal on Thursday.

On Dec. 12, Borough President Carrión held a public hearing that local activists described as a “travesty.” Construction union members filled the hall early, and officials locked the door at 6 p.m., leaving as many as 150 community members out in the cold. Chants of “let us in” almost drowned out presentations by Yankees representatives who told community members not to worry about potential air quality impacts because the draft EIS says there won’t be any.

Unfortunately, the draft EIS is dead wrong: The dramatic increase in parking in the vicinity will lead to many more vehicle trips and a congestion nightmare (see *MTR* # 513). As word has spread through the South Bronx about the proposal, increasing attention is being paid to the number of parking spaces for the project, which will bring an estimated 5,000 additional cars through local streets on game days and cause more traffic backups on the adjacent Major Deegan Expressway. Four new stadium parking garages, along with a plan to build a suburban-style mall on the nearby Bronx Terminal Market site, will pose an added public health risk to a neighborhood with the unfortunate distinction of having one of the highest asthma rates in the nation.

The ULURP hearing was the second time Carrión’s constituents called on him to reject the plan. Over 250 residents showed up to speak at a Nov. 17 town hall meeting, only to be forced to sit through a 90-minute presentation by the Yankees. Their frustration was compounded when it became evident that not everyone who signed up would be able to speak. The Tri-State Transportation Campaign asked several questions about traffic generation that received poor responses — Yankees reps insisted that the extra parking garages are necessary to accommodate “attendance for high-stakes games” — and were not interested in discussing why the long-languishing Yankee Stadium Metro-North station is not an integral part of the plan.

The following week, Bronx Community Board #4 voted down the plan. Again, a multitude of community members attended to express outrage, and a few board members noted their disgust at the city’s and the Yankees’ indifference to the increased traffic congestion and related impacts the big parking plan would bring to their community. Although the board’s role in the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP) is advisory, it is supposed to be taken seriously by the Borough President (whose ULURP role is also advisory), and by city government. ❖

Meadowlands Traffic Plan: Create More Of It

At the recent press conference announcing plans for a new Giants-Jets football stadium, the NJ DOT unveiled its plan to deal with the congestion on local roads the stadium and the adjacent Xanadu recreation mall is likely to generate — add road capacity.

The centerpiece of the transportation element is adding 60% more traffic capacity to local roads and construction of a new train station (MTR #503). The road expansion will be completed before the train station, encouraging people to take their cars and undercutting any chance that people with a choice will use NJ Transit. Despite the pleas of local municipalities (MTR #498) the state refuses to look comprehensively at the transportation needs and mass transit opportunities created by all of the new development in the Sports Complex.

The plan throws one bone thrown to transit; it outlines an internal pedestrian plan that features dedicated walkways between the new stadium, mall, arena, racetrack and train station. ❖

New York Agencies and Land Use - Do It!

Commenting in a recent *Journal-News* column, a New York State Dept. of Transportation official repeated the agency's over-tired mantra that "we don't do land use" in reference to the major mass transit and bridge project contemplated for the Tappan Zee corridor.

Spokespersons for Scenic Hudson and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign had discussed with columnist Laura Incalcaterra the potential for more village-like development in Rockland County in the presence of frequent transit service. But the NYS DOT told the paper that it "did not have the authority to dictate land uses to a local community."

No one expects a state agency to dictate land use to municipalities, but big state outfits like the DOT, the Thruway Authority and the MTA can bring the resources to bear to allow a town or village in Rockland County, for example, to consider a variety of plans, and see what it can accomplish with a variety of zoning and infrastructure combinations.

This is what the NJ DOT is now doing across the Garden State, taking a leadership role to plan and produce sustainable transportation solutions, rather than hanging back and defining what it does not do.

The "Trouble Ahead" report (MTR #484) commissioned in 2004 by former state transportation chief Joseph Boardman urged a similar role for NYS DOT. "Traffic congestion is often the result of poor land use decisions....The Panel agrees that NYS-DOT must assume a much stronger role in working with local communities, governments and developers on land use decisions." ❖

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Contributing: Nancy Christensen, Michelle Ernst, Damien Newton, Teresa Toro

Editors: Jon Orcutt, Kate Slevin

350 West 31st Street #802, New York, NY 10001 tel. 212-268-7474 fax 212-268-7333 tstc@tstc.org www.tstc.org

CALENDAR

December 31. Deadline for written comments on the LIRR Main Line Corridor Improvement EIS scope (LIRR 3rd track project). Send written comments to Peter Palamaro, LIRR Public Affairs, Jamaica Station-1131 Jamaica, New York 11435.

January 9, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority general board meeting. One Newark Center, 17th floor. 973-639-8400, www.njtpa.org.

January 12, 12:00-2:00pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Board Room. 212-878-7087.

January 19, 12:00-2:00pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Board Room. 212-878-7087.

January 25, 9:30am. MTA Board Meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan.

January 27, 12:00-2:00pm. NYC Transit Riders Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room. 212-878-7087.

February 28, 9:30am. MTA Board Meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan.

March 8: Written comment deadline for "50th St. Facility Environmental Assessment Notice of Clarification (LIRR E. Side Access project). Mail to Joseph Petrocelli, Chief Administrative Officer, MTA LIRR East Side Access, 469 7th Avenue, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10018.

March 9, 8:30-10:00am. Municipal Art Society Planning Center Forum Series: "Market Forces and Community Vision: The Role of Community in 'As-of-Right' Development - Case Study: Flushing." MAS, 457 Madison Avenue. RSVP to Maia Mordana at 212-935-3960 or planning@mas.org.

[More calendar items at www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

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