

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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## NEWS

### Corzine Chops State Car Fleet

We applaud Governor Corzine's announcement that New Jersey will **eliminate 809 vehicles** from the state's official car fleet. The governor's office said the move exceeds its goal of chopping the state fleet by 10%, and that at least one more round of vehicle cut-backs is in the offing.

Corzine said auctioning the vehicles will yield several hundred thousand dollars, while reducing fleet size should save \$1 million in annual maintenance and fuel costs. The governor's office did not mention savings in vehicle replacement costs.

Though cast as a penny-pinching measure in a tough budget season, it's also appropriate that the state leads by example in cutting unnecessary driving. New Jersey also offers the federal transit commuter tax benefit to state employees (*MTR #438*). ❖

### Moto-Crats Mass in Manhattan

Meanwhile, Transportation Alternatives has issued a report that found that official provision of free parking causes **New York City employees to drive at twice the rate** of other Manhattan commuters. The study, by Schaller Consulting, said 19,200 fewer cars would enter Manhattan if the city did not provide free parking and city workers consequently used mass transit and cars in the same proportions as other commuters. One-third of the 47,000 public workers that the study found driving into Manhattan worked for a branch of government other than the City of New York.

A Bloomberg administration spokesperson told the *Daily News* **the city has cut down** on agency-issued parking permits, though T.A. says this has happened only on a tiny scale within City Hall, not on a government-wide basis.

In April, Mayor Bloomberg launched a crackdown on illegal parking by city government car potatoes in Chinatown, which abuts the downtown government district. The effort appears to have been sustained, but Chinatown leaders have told T.A. that the **moto-crats have migrated** to downtown streets outside the crackdown area. ❖

### Before Summer Vacation

Key bills the NY State legislature should pass before adjourning for the summer:

◆A8038/S5357 – Would expand the **red light camera** program in New York City to 100 cameras, from 50. This simple measure has been stalled by the State Assembly for years, leading to avoidable crashes, injuries and deaths on NYC streets.

◆A11333/S7963 – Would remove legislative obstacles claimed by NYC Transit regarding the establishment of a **bus route linking Staten Island** to the light rail terminal in **Bayonne, NJ**.

◆A6450 – Would allow towns to create **“community preservation funds”** to protect natural areas, support family farms, and preserve historic buildings with local real-estate transfer taxes. The legislation has passed the Assembly before but the State Senate leadership apparently is opposed to the measure.

◆A2230/S6718 – Would extend the federal **mass transit commute tax benefit** to state employees. CT and NJ state workers and City of New York employees already enjoy this benefit. ❖

### City Finishes Drawn-Out Truck Study, Neighborhoods Await Action

It's not difficult in New York City to confuse local government's approach to key transportation problems with some sort of zen-like devotion to non-achievement. One of the worst examples is the city transportation department's nearly decade-long “Truck Route Management and Community Impact Reduction Study.”

However, the NYC DOT does now appear to be wrapping up the study. **The big question** is, and has been for several years, **if and when any action might ensue**. Most of the material recently presented around town was a more detailed version of past presentations that have called for more consistent and clear signage directing truckers to legal routes, and provision of clear information to the police to facilitate better truck law enforcement.

The city has posted detailed documents from the study on its web-site at [www.nyc.gov/html/dot/](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/), and is taking comments on the study findings and recommendations until the end of August.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

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

There is universal agreement among consultants and residents that NYC's truck route signs are often unclear or contradictory, but it is more confusing why it has taken the city over eight years to say it will change the signs and why it has still taken no action to actually do it.

The recommended formation of a NYC DOT "Office of Freight Mobility" to streamline action and provide information to truckers and neighborhoods alike sounds good, but the city still offers no time-line for its implementation (see *MTR #522*).

Consultants for the effort are still using words like "investigate" and "evaluate," perhaps auguring even more foot-dragging before anything real happens.

The *NY Post* reported recently that Assemblyman Joe Lentol has elevated his advocacy to address truck issues in northern Brooklyn, persuading city transportation commissioner Iris Weinshall to undertake a pilot program to monitor overweight and off-route trucks in his district. The DOT will use **high-tech sensors** to weigh trucks at one location, while cameras will monitor two other locations. Apparently, though, state legislation will be needed for the sensing project to actually issue tickets to over-weight trucks (*MTR # 524*). ❖

### Pressure for Progress on Staten Island

The NYC DOT does claim progress on its program of Staten Island improvements. The agency says implementation of the mayor's Staten Island transportation task force recommendations is underway, with a **handful of short-term items completed**. Van Duzer St. has been reduced to one lane, the intersection of Forest and South Avenues has been upgraded, and visibility at intersections has been improved by restricting parking at corners. Police have also increased enforcement 20% along known speedways like Victory and Hylan Boulevards.

Staten Islanders are likely to see more significant relief from two transit projects — extending local bus service to Bayonne, New Jersey and implementing **bus rapid transit** service along Hylan Blvd. Both are still being studied, along with the full set of ideas recommended by the Task Force (*MTR #527*). A bill, sponsored by Assemblymembers Cusik and Lavelle, clearing obstacles to NYC Transit operation in New Jersey was passed by the New York State Assembly last week. Reports indicate that the MTA is now studying the connection, with a report due in the fall. Bus rapid transit may be a longer proposition, however. Another study is dragging along, with no guarantee for a Staten Island route and implementation planned in 2008 at earliest. There has also been no progress on Staten Island Safe Routes to Schools, another new city program build on a promising concept but requiring much stronger implementation. ❖

### East Side Access to Unlock West Side Commuter Rail Access?

The MTA continues to quietly examine the potential for **Metro-North access to Penn Station** once some LIRR trains are diverted from Penn Station via the soon-to-begin project to connect the LIRR to Grand Central terminal.

Amtrak routes already make it feasible for Metro-North trains to reach the West Side. The main problem is capacity in Penn Station. With appropriate power systems, Metro-North Hudson Line trains could use Amtrak's **west side Empire Line** to reach Penn Station. Similarly, New Haven Line trains could reach the West Side via Amtrak's **Hell Gate Line**, the route through Queens and the Bronx that Amtrak uses to reach New England.

Of most interest in the city is the potential for developing new stations along the routes. The MTA study is examining the potential of new Metro-North stations at **West 125<sup>th</sup>** and **West 62<sup>nd</sup> Streets** along the Empire Line and of Bronx stations at **Co-op City, Parkchester and Hunts Point** along the Hell Gate Line. Especially at the more northerly Bronx locations commutes could improve dramatically. Many in the northeastern Bronx now use express buses to reach the Manhattan business district. The stations at each point would also be boons for reverse commuters seeking access to suburban jobs.

A meeting organized this spring with northeastern Bronx citizens and MTA officials by **Congressman Joseph Crowley** underscored the importance of the work for these areas of the city. Crowley has helped maintain a flow of federal transit funds for the planning work. His district spans areas that would benefit from both LIRR East Side Access and Metro-North West Side access.

If the Metro-North to Penn Station work was better known, it is possible that more city residents would appreciate the LIRR-Grand Central project more. That project could lead to more LIRR service at Queens stations that now have weak schedules. If it facilitates the West Side access plan, it could also over the long run lead to new commuter rail stations in the Bronx and Harlem. Study documents are online at [www.mta.info/mta/planning/psas/overview.htm](http://www.mta.info/mta/planning/psas/overview.htm).

### Funding for Cut-off Back On

With \$20.5 million in federal funding in hand and another \$120 million pledged, rail advocates in Pennsylvania are pressuring NJ Transit officials to complete the environmental assessment for the proposed reactivation of the Lackawanna Cut-off passenger rail line. NJ Transit may release the assessment for the project later this year.

If the line is re-opened, commuters will be able to travel **from Scranton, PA to Morris County** where

trains would link onto the NJ Transit Morris & Essex Line. Currently, there are no tracks in the right of way — they were torn up in 1978.

Reactivating the Cut-off has never been a high priority for NJ Transit. At a meeting of the Highlands Council Transportation Advisory Committee last August, a NJ Transit official stated that it will have virtually no impact on automobile congestion. Also, Sussex County, which would host most of the new route, **does not have the population density** associated with successful rail projects. Other projects that are competing for the funds, such as commuter rail in Bergen County and light rail between Newark and Elizabeth would serve areas that have much higher population densities and much worse traffic congestion.

Proponents of the project claim that New Jersey has already pledged \$40 million from the Transportation Trust Fund for the Cutoff, a fact NJ Transit officials denied. The expected cost of the project is \$350 million. ❖

### Congestion Pricing Works...

**In Stockholm** A study commissioned by Stockholm, Sweden's city government has found that traffic going through central Stockholm is down 25%, with traffic-related delays in the morning rush hour reduced 33%, since the beginning of 2006, according to *The Local*, a Swedish English-language newspaper.

The city also estimates that car crashes in town are down about 10% and public transit ridership is up 4.5%.

Voters in the city will decide on the fate of the policy in a referendum later this year. An opinion poll released in May found that public opinion about congestion pricing had swung dramatically from a 69% opposition rate in late 1995 to 62% declaring they will vote to keep the traffic fee in place, now that the traffic and quality of life benefits of the measure have been demonstrated.

**At the Port of Los Angeles** The year-old "PierPass" system at ports Los Angeles/Long Beach has shifted about one-third of "truck moves" to off-peak hours, according to the *Journal of Commerce*. The program extended gate-hours for trucks at port terminals, but imposed premium access fees for entering terminals at peak times. ❖

## TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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## CALENDAR

**June 27, 8:00-10:00am.** Citizens Budget Commission forum: "How to Balance the MTA's Budget." Metrazur Restaurant, Grand Central Terminal, Manhattan. RSVP [ftompson@cbcny.org](mailto:ftompson@cbcny.org) or 212-279-2605 x310.

**June 27, 3:00-5:00pm and 6:30-8:00pm.** NYMTC TIP solicitation workshop for Nassau and Suffolk Counties. 100 Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, NY. 631-952-6112.

**June 27, 6:00-8:00pm.** Auto-Free NY & Institute for Rational Mobility meeting: "Residential Parking Strategies for Reducing Car Use in NYC" with Jeffrey Otto, Citizens Housing & Planning Council. Conference Room, NYPD Center, 104 Washington St., Manhattan. 212-475-3394.

**June 27, 6:00-8:00pm.** Southern Brooklyn Transportation Investment Study meeting. Brooklyn Borough Hall. 212-799-8803 x58.

**June 27, 6:00-8:00pm.** Goethals Bridge Replacement EIS - Public Open House. Presentation at 6:30pm. Elizabeth Public Library, 11 South Broad St., Elizabeth. 917-339-0488.

**June 28, 6:00-8:00pm.** Goethals Bridge Replacement EIS - Public Open House. Presentation at 6:30pm. Staten Island Hotel, 1415 Richmond Avenue. 917-339-0488.

**June 29, 3:00-5:00pm.** NYS DOT stakeholder meeting for the Sheridan/Bruckner Interchange. Police Athletic League, 991 Longwood Avenue, Bronx. [BrucknerSheridanEIS@dot.state.ny.us](mailto:BrucknerSheridanEIS@dot.state.ny.us).

**June 30:** Public comment deadline for Farley Post Office/Moynihan Station Project. Send comments to Rachel Shatz, Planning & Environmental Review, Empire State Development Corp, 633 Third Ave., NYC 10017. 212-803-3252; Fax 212-803-3855; [rshatz@empire.state.ny.us](mailto:rshatz@empire.state.ny.us).

**July 13, 12:15-2:00pm.** Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**July 20, 4:30-6:30pm.** [Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council](#) meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 10th Floor Conference Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

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