

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

NYC Congestion Mitigation Commission Members Named

Just a week after USDOT's announcement that New York City would receive \$354.4 million through the Urban Partnership Program in order to improve mass transit and implement congestion pricing, the city and state took the important step of naming members to the NYC Traffic Mitigation Congestion Commission. The 17-member panel contains many supporters of congestion pricing, and a majority of its members were appointed by Governor Spitzer, Mayor Bloomberg, and City Council Speaker Quinn, all of whom support congestion pricing.

However, the Commission is charged only with reviewing Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC proposal and other congestion mitigation proposals, holding public hearings, and presenting its recommendations to the state and city lawmakers.

The Commission's recommendation must be approved by the City Council in a "home rule" vote. Legislation then requires the state legislature to consider the Commission's recommended plan by March 31st (coinciding with federal requirements for the city's participation in USDOT's Urban Partnership Program). However, state lawmakers may choose to approve an entirely different plan, or no plan at all.

Known congestion pricing supporters on the panel include NYC DOT Commissioner **Janette Sadik-Kahn**, MTA Executive Director and CEO **Elliot Sander**, the Straphangers Campaign's **Gene Russianoff**, **Kathy Wyld** of the Partnership for New York City, **Andy Darrell** from Environmental Defense, and **Andrea Batista Schlesinger** of the Drum Major Institute.

State Assemblyman **Richard Brodsky** (D-Westchester), who has been an outspoken opponent of congestion pricing, was also appointed to the Commission, by NYS Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. Though he promised to remain objective, his opposition to the plan seems firmly entrenched and will likely be a large obstacle to the consensus Commission Head Marc Shaw hopes to find. ❖

Reminder: Congestion Pricing Good for NJ

A few rumbles of discontent over congestion pricing have come out of New Jersey in the last week, despite the plan's benefits for the state.

Some NJ politicians and media outlets have complained that NJ does not have a seat on the Traffic Mitigation Congestion Commission (see story at left). There is no question that NJ should have a role in the regional discussion regarding congestion pricing, but imposing its body politic on an out-of-state political process is a step too far. The commission was created by the NYS legislature in order to help create **New York State law**; a change in membership would require the out-of-session NYS legislature to reconvene and pass additional legislation.

Most NJ commuters would see the benefits of congestion pricing without paying the costs. Only 21% of Manhattan-bound commuters from NJ drive alone; more than 70% take transit. Aside from gains in air quality and commute time, a portion of the congestion pricing revenues are dedicated to improving mass transit in NJ—including building new trans-Hudson express bus lanes and train tunnels, increasing capacity and easing congestion. These transportation improvements are sorely needed, as NJ's beleaguered Transportation Trust Fund is set for bankruptcy in 2011 (see MTR # 556).

Congestion pricing also falls **directly in line with the state's emission-reduction goals** (MTR # 559). Executive Order 54, signed by Gov. Corzine in February, compels NJ to minimize its carbon footprint. Specifically, it compels greater roadway efficiency through pricing and demand management.

Even the "negative" effect of congestion pricing, the \$8 congestion fee, is less onerous than it first appears, as the \$5 E-ZPass toll drivers currently pay at Hudson River crossings would be deducted. Planned Port Authority toll hikes could mean that the charge is completely offset, making this concern moot.

NJDOT Commissioner Kris Kolluri told the *Bergen Record* that congestion pricing would lead to a 6% increase in NJ Transit daily ridership, straining the system. This projection is at odds with NYCDOT's PlaNYC data. According to PlaNYC, total transit trips into NYC—from Connecticut, Long Island, Westchester County, the rest of New York, and New Jersey—would increase by only 1.9%. ❖

Q Poll Asks Misleading Questions, Gets Misleading Answers

Though a Quinnipiac University poll released last week reported that citywide opposition to congestion pricing rose to 57% (from 52% in July), **potentially misleading language** and a failure to inform respondents of the details of New York's proposed congestion pricing plan bring the poll's validity into question.

Transportation Alternatives noted that the poll language implied congestion fees would be levied all day (in fact, drivers would be charged on weekdays between 6 am and 6 pm) and did not mention that congestion pricing was a pilot program. The poll also failed to mention that the congestion fee would be charged only once a day or that tolls would be deducted from the \$8 fee. The poll did not ask respondents how familiar they were with congestion pricing.

Most egregiously, **pollsters did not tell respondents that congestion pricing revenues would be dedicated to improving mass transit**. People are more willing to pay fees or taxes if they know their money is going to tangible improvements. A May 2006 Tri-State Campaign poll found that New Yorkers supported and opposed congestion pricing about equally—44% were in favor and 45% against (MTR # 544).

Interestingly, support for congestion pricing on Staten Island rose from 26% in May to 39% in the most recent poll. Staten Islanders who commute via the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge would not pay a congestion fee, as it would be completely offset by the \$9 bridge toll.

Historically, congestion pricing has proved popular once it is tried. Four-fifths of Stockholm residents opposed congestion pricing in a survey done prior to its implementation, but ultimately voted to make the plan permanent in a referendum held 7 months after the plan began. A Transport for London survey conducted three years after the implementation of pricing found that pricing supporters outnumbered those opposed two to one. ❖

SAVE THE DATE!

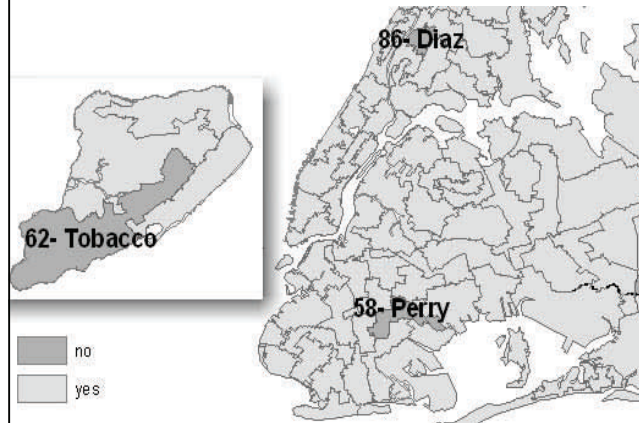
Wednesday, October 24th: TSTC Annual New York Gala in Midtown Manhattan, New York City. Please join us!

NYCDOT Commissioner **Janette Sadik-Khan** will speak. We will be honoring **Jon Orcutt**, senior policy advisor to Commissioner Sadik-Khan and former Tri-State Campaign executive director. For information, call us at 212-268-7474.

NYC Votes on Congestion Commission Bill

State assemblymembers from New York City overwhelmingly supported passage of the bill creating the Congestion Mitigation Commission tasked with studying congestion in the New York City metropolitan area (see story, front page). A majority of NYC's state senators also supported the bill. ❖

New York State Assembly



New York State Senate



NJ Turnpike Widening Hearings Announced

In September, there will be four public hearings on the proposed widening of the NJ Turnpike between Exits 6-9. All meetings run from 5pm to 8pm:

Tuesday, **Sept. 18** – Senior Center, 3 Municipal Drive, Bordentown, Burlington County.

Wednesday, **Sept. 19** – Hilton Garden Inn Hamilton, 800 Route 130, Hamilton, Mercer County.

Monday, **Sept. 24** – Crowne Plaza Monroe, 390 Forsgate Drive, Jamesburg, Middlesex County.

Thursday, **Sept. 27** – Holiday Inn of East Windsor, 399 Monmouth Street, East Windsor, Mercer County.

The \$2 billion widening would be the largest expansion project in the Turnpike's history, according to the *Star-Ledger*. For more information on the project, visit www.njturnpikewidening.com. ❖

Correction: More Self-Congratulation

In the last edition of MTR (#562) we lamented our failure to reduce parking at the new Yankee Stadium. We'd like to issue a correction, as the Yankees are **dropping one of the four parking lots** (Lot D) they proposed to add to the new stadium, and shrinking a second lot (Lot B). Altogether, the Yankees are shrinking their proposed parking by 1,145 spaces.

Even without Lot D, parking will still increase by about **3,600 spaces**. And unfortunately, the alteration does not save any of the parkland which the lots will be built upon.

Good Jobs New York, New Yorkers for Parks, Save Our Parks, the Tri-State Campaign, and other allies had fought vigorously to cut proposed parking, arguing that additional parking would only encourage more driving in a neighborhood which already suffers from among the city's worst asthma rates. We successfully lobbied for a new Metro-North station as a more sustainable means to improve transportation to the stadium (the station groundbreaking took place in July).

In the end, market realities forced the Yankees' hand. When no operators were willing to take on the money-losing proposition of running the parking lots, the NYC Industrial Development Agency agreed to give a nonprofit developer more than \$180 million in triple tax-free bonds. The IDA is now proposing to raise that to **\$225 million**, though rising construction costs will mean that even this hand-out is not enough to build more than three of the planned lots. ❖

Stumble in ConnDOT Reform Public Process

In Connecticut, Gov. Rell's office has taken flak for providing the public **only 2 days notice** for the Sept. 6 meeting of the governor's commission to reform ConnDOT.

While we were able to attend, many state legislators and members of the public were unable to clear their schedule to attend the meeting at Pitney Bowes headquarters in Stamford, according to the *Stamford Advocate*.

Without public testimony, it is unclear whether these meetings will result in innovative reform. The scheduled presentations have largely been from ConnDOT bureau heads, not a format which would seem to lead to new ideas. ❖

MTA: No Wait at Our Toll Plazas

Following our call for MTA Bridges & Tunnels to update its toll facilities, and our criticism of growing queue times at toll plazas (MTR # 561), the MTA wrote to the Campaign that its originally published numbers were wrong. According to the corrected numbers from MTA B&T, median queue times have fallen significantly over the past year, to just 2 seconds (for both cash and E-ZPass lanes). That represents an **unbelievable 80% decline in wait time**, even as traffic volumes rose slightly.

More detailed materials we received from MTA B&T provide a breakdown of 2007's 1st quarter median queue times by bridge/tunnel, and by cash or E-Z Pass (all numbers in seconds):

Wait Times at MTA Bridges and Tunnels, Q1 2007

MTA Bridge/Tunnel	E-ZPass	Cash	Total
Q1 Actual Median	0	7.1	2
Henry Hudson Bridge	0	0	0
Throgs Neck Bridge	0	8	2
Bronx-Whitestone Bridge	0	7	2
Triborough Bridge	0	22	4
Marine Parkway Bridge	0	0	0
Queens Midtown Tunnel	0	0	0
Brooklyn Battery Tunnel	0	0	0
Verrazano Bridge	0	9	3

When we shared our skepticism about these numbers, MTA B&T responded that the queue times "excludes traffic queues that begin prior to the toll plaza" because of construction or accidents. MTA B&T's methodology for measuring queue times is to send out drivers a few times each day during peak period to wait in the toll line and time their trips.

Our own experiences driving through MTA toll plazas suggest that something is fishy with these numbers. We will continue to seek clarification from the MTA. ❖

SAVE THE PLANET!

(or, at least, stop getting MTR by fax)

SIGN UP FOR MTR E-MAIL ALERTS!

As announced in MTR # 561, we are in the process of turning MTR into a blog. As a result, we will soon stop faxing MTR.

Conserve paper. Save trees. Switch to MTR e-mail alerts at www.tstc.org.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

NYC "Bus Innovation" Oxymoronic No More

In the last few weeks, NYCDOT and the MTA have either announced or begun to implement three bus service improvements that will help New York City **catch up to other major cities** in terms of bus system speed and reliability. Bus signal priority, real-time bus arrival displays, and painted bus lanes are being tested in different locations around the city. These features will eventually be combined as part of the city's Bus Rapid Transit pilot program.

The *Staten Island Advance* reported last week that signal prioritization would be used on bus routes on Staten Island's Victory Boulevard by the end of September. Buses within 120 feet of an intersection would be able to shorten red lights by seven seconds, allowing for more reliable travel times.

Real-time bus information displays have been installed at eight bus shelters and will eventually go up at seven more. Notably, many of the display-equipped shelters are on the planned route of the First/Second Avenue BRT.

Sections of existing bus lanes on 57th St. in Manhattan and Fordham Road in the Bronx are being painted red in order to make them more visible to drivers. The color treatment should reduce bus lane violations, but effective enforcement is the true key to keeping bus lanes moving freely. Bus lane cameras must be authorized by the state, and were included in the PlaNYC legislation which was introduced in the State Legislature but not voted on. ❖

More Riders, More Service for Bee-Line

According to Westchester County Transportation Commissioner Larry Salley, Bee-Line Bus ridership has increased an **average of 9.5% every month** since April, when the transit agency began accepting MetroCard for fare payment (see MTR #s 543, 561). The Bee-Line has responded with a new express route between the Bronx and Westchester Medical Center, and with more frequent service on several other routes. These service adjustments took place earlier this week.

It will be up to state and county officials to ensure that the Bee-Line has sufficient funding to maintain expansions in ridership and service.

Along with Long Island Bus, which saw similar increases in ridership when it began accepting MetroCard in 1998 (see MTR # 137), the Bee-Line experience demonstrates the importance of making connections between transit systems in a region as seamless as possible. ❖

CALENDAR

September 8, 9am-2pm. Discover Hartford Bicycling and Walking Tour: A day to explore and learn about Hartford's historic past and promising future. Choose between a 2-hour walking tour and 10- and 25-mile bicycling tours of Hartford's historic and modern landmarks. Hosted by the Central Connecticut Bicycle Alliance and the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society. Visit www.hartfordbiketour.org for details.

September 8, 1pm-5pm. New Jersey Conference of Mayors 16th Annual Executive Summit & Jersey Seafood Fest. Viking Village at Barnegat Light on Long Beach Island. Meet one on one with top state officials and enjoy fresh New Jersey seafood and vegetables. Register at www.njcm.org.

September 14, 11:45am. Transportation Research Forum meeting, "Regional Airport Capacity: Adding Stewart to the Mix." Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington Street, New York City. Register by Sept. 12 at 212-435-4226. Registration is \$27 for members, \$37 for non-members.

September 18, 8:30am-1pm. Transit-Oriented Development Conference, sponsored by the South Western Regional Planning Agency. Learn about transit-oriented development and how Connecticut and other states are working to advance the concept. UConn-Stamford Campus, One University Place, Room 109. Early registration is \$10 or \$20 day of. Registration form available at www.swrpa.org.

September 18, 5pm-8pm. New Jersey Turnpike Authority Public Hearing on the NJ Turnpike Interchange 6-9 Widening Program. Bordentown Senior Center, 3 Municipal Drive, Bordentown, NJ.

September 19, 5pm-8pm. New Jersey Turnpike Authority Public Hearing on the NJ Turnpike Interchange 6-9 Widening Program. Hilton Garden Inn, 800 Route 130, Hamilton, NJ.

September 20, time TBD. Governor's Commission on the Reform of the Connecticut DOT meeting and hearing. New Haven (location details forthcoming, for more information see www.ct.gov/dot).

More calendar items at www.tstc.org

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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