

# Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Number 565

October 10, 2007

## NEWS

### MTA: Variable Pricing for Riders, but Not Drivers

The MTA has announced two proposals which would raise its fare and toll revenue by 6.5%. The agency still plans to implement the increases in early 2008, thus far ignoring calls from ten civic and advocacy groups, including the Tri-State Campaign and Straphangers Campaign, to postpone hikes until after until the fate of congestion pricing is decided in March (see *MTR* #564).

The first fare hike proposal would raise the cost of a single ride to \$2.25, up from \$2, and would increase the cost of unlimited-ride Metrocards by 4 percent. A new 14-day Metrocard would cost \$45.

The second proposal would create **off-peak discounts** on pay-as-you-go Metrocards—fares would be \$2 during peak hours and \$1.50 off-peak (single ride cards would still be \$2.25). The 6-rides-for-5 discount would be scrapped, and unlimited-ride Metrocards would be more expensive than under the first option. A 14-day Metrocard would cost \$48.

The MTA should be applauded for considering variable pricing for transit riders, but it should extend the same benefits to drivers. Variable tolls and fares would use the same basic economic principles to shift traffic to off-peak times. A TSTC analysis found that variable tolling at crossings could save drivers up to 3 million hours per year (see *MTR* #564). Instead, the MTA wants to raise tolls by a flat 50 cents, except on lesser used crossings like the Cross Bay Bridge and Marine Parkway Bridge where tolls would increase only 25 cents. There seems to be **no legal or practical reason** why the MTA could not extend the benefits of variable pricing to the users of its bridges and tunnels.

The Straphangers Campaign has called for a compromise 10-cent base fare hike and increased city and state aid. New York City's transit riders pay for almost **60%** of the system's operating costs, a figure far above the national average of 40%. The City and State should commit to paying their share before hikes are passed.

The MTA will hold public hearings and one listening session to get feedback on the fare hikes in November. See [mta.info](http://mta.info) for details on locations and fare and toll hikes. ❖

### Wetlands Impacts, High Cost = NJ Turnpike Widening "Highlights"

On its website, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority boldly lists the following "highlights" of its Turnpike widening project, which would add three new lanes in each direction from exits 6 to 9:

- **"\$2 billion program with 170 new lane-miles of roadway"**
- **"114 acres of wetlands impact"**
- **"10 million cubic yards of earthwork."**

Wait, is it 1950? It's appalling that in 2007 a government agency still portrays these facts as positive (see [njturnpikewidening.com/overview](http://njturnpikewidening.com/overview)).

Public hearings on the Turnpike widening were held last month, and, citing environmental and monetary concerns, the Tri-State Campaign called for the **postponement of the Turnpike project** until Governor Corzine releases the details of his plan to raise revenue by leasing assets like the Turnpike to a nonprofit corporation. The project's environmental review also fails to adequately address alternatives to widening, such as high-occupancy toll lanes, cashless tolls, and expanded mass transit.

Other major flaws exist with the environmental documents. The project's stated purpose is "to service existing and projected future traffic demand on the Turnpike mainline." Yet the EIS fails to adequately demonstrate or define this need. The text makes repeated references to peak hours—but those hours are left undefined. In describing traffic conditions, one table breaks out several discernable level of service failures, while another shows the only failure of the roadway occurring during the Friday PM peak. If the latter is believed, the state is prepared to spend \$2 billion on a highway that fails a **few hours a week**. Either way, the state must demonstrate the need for the project before proceeding.

Further condemning the project is the well-documented fact that widened roads quickly fill their added capacity, creating an expensive cycle of perpetual widening — a fact acknowledged in the turnpike EIS with tables outlining the enormous growth in traffic volumes **attributable only to the expansion project**. In the past 10 years, NJ has made great strides towards sustainable development and fixing existing infrastructure, and away from mindless road expansion as a solution to congestion.

This trend must continue if the state is to get the most out of its transportation investments.

Tri-State Campaign was not alone at the hearings in its concern about the project. Elected officials and community members from the project corridor testified, citing concerns with eminent domain, a lack of noise barriers, and a lack of community input in the design process.

The project appears even more inappropriate given the state's existing infrastructure needs. In a recent letter to Gov. Corzine on bridge maintenance needs, NJDOT Commissioner Kris Kolluri, who is also Chair of the NJ Turnpike Authority, wrote, "Repairing these [NJ Turnpike, Garden State Parkway, and Atlantic City Expressway] bridges in addition to the **unfunded Turnpike widening project** between exits 6 and 8A, would require a 45% toll increase." This doesn't even include the maintenance costs of other bridges throughout the state, let alone other transportation needs.

Kolluri should be applauded for making a case that New Jersey must find new revenue sources for transportation, a very real and looming problem (the state has no revenue for transportation needs after 2011; see *MTR* # 556). However, Kolluri may be simply laying the groundwork for Governor Corzine's asset monetization plan. ❖

### I Held Up \$35 Billion And All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt

The vote on NYMTC's 2008-2012 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) was postponed due to "unforeseen circumstances" on Sept. 29. As predicted in the last issue of *MTR* (# 564), Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy decided to veto the program, but he did it silently.

A unanimous vote of all NYMTC's members, which comprise the five downstate suburban counties, NYC and NYS DOTs, the MTA, and NYC City Planning, is necessary to approve the TIP and enable federal transportation dollars to flow into the region. The TIP is the basic blueprint of our transportation spending; in the NYMTC region alone the 5-year, \$35-billion program includes everything from road and sidewalk maintenance, to hybrid bus purchases, to major construction projects like the LIRR Third Track and the Second Ave. Subway.

Given the importance of the TIP to our region, Levy could have used his veto as a serious threat, making a big public episode to put pressure on the NY State Legislature, which has not approved a sales tax renewal for Suffolk County and is presumably the target of Levy's wrath. Instead, the vote was postponed with little fanfare and without explanation. If Levy continues to veto the program and hold up the money, however, the issue will no doubt attract more attention. ❖

### Connecticut's Road to Reform

The Tri-State Campaign has been criss-crossing Connecticut of late, giving presentations and handing out copies of our new fact sheet, *It's the Sprawl Stupid! What's Driving Connecticut's Traffic Congestion*. Our work has been recognized by the ConnDOT Reform Commission, which linked to both the fact sheet and our report *Reform: The Road Not Taken* (see [www.ct.gov/dot](http://www.ct.gov/dot)). The Commission was set up by Gov. Rell earlier this year to reform the agency's internal structure and mission and has been holding public hearings throughout the state.

The fact sheet explains the cycle of **sprawl and congestion** which has led to vast increases in Connecticut's per capita traffic delay and vehicle-miles traveled over the last two decades. It recommends that CT embrace smart growth policies and create a transit village program that would provide state funding and incentives to interested towns. ConnDOT should also shift funding from highway expansion to maintaining its aging infrastructure, and increase bicycle and pedestrian funding. See [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org) for the full fact sheet.

The commission hearings have thus far produced several administrative reforms, but it's not yet clear that ConnDOT is moving away from its highway-building past towards innovative, sustainable policy. Interesting smart growth programs were signed into law this summer (*MTR* # 560), but the state is still marching forward with its unwise and unfunded \$900 million plan to extend Route 11 (*MTR* # 562).

This is despite Connecticut's heavy state debt, a circumstance which has Gov. Rell and the legislative Democrats in stalemate over a multibillion-dollar bonding package for fiscal years 2008-09. The package would fund transportation infrastructure projects, as well as schools and other projects that Gov. Rell contends are pork and the reason for the standoff. She vetoed the latest version of the package last week. As the Democrats do not have the votes to override the veto in both legislative houses, they will now begin work on a compromise package. In the meantime, the money for many transit projects will lie in limbo. ❖

### ANNUAL GALA!

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

NYCDOT Commissioner **Janette Sadik-Khan** will speak. We will be honoring **Jon Orcutt**, senior policy advisor at NYCDOT and former Tri-State Campaign executive director. For information, call us at 212-268-7474 or visit [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org).

## Progress on PlaNYC Initiatives

The Traffic Mitigation Congestion Commission tasked with studying congestion pricing in NYC held its first meeting last month, and will hold public hearings later this month. The commission will recommend a plan to the City Council and State Legislature by January 31, 2008.

But while the future of congestion pricing remains unclear, several of the other transportation elements of PlaNYC, New York's sustainability plan, have recently moved forward.

When the lower deck of the Manhattan Bridge reopened on Oct. 1, it included a Manhattan-bound **bus and carpool lane** in effect during the morning peak. PlaNYC also envisions bus/carpool lanes on the Williamsburg and Queensboro Bridges, as well as a second bus-only lane or a bus/carpool lane on the Lincoln Tunnel.

NYCDOT announced last month that it would reconfigure Manhattan's Ninth Avenue between 16th and 23rd Streets to include a Class 1 bicycle lane **separated from automobile traffic by a concrete buffer and a parking lane**. Though the buffer has not yet been paved, the lane is open for riders and is currently marked off with plastic bollards. PlaNYC calls for the completion of the city's 1,800 lane-mile Bicycle Master Plan.

Both houses of Congress recently passed versions of the fiscal year 2008 transportation funding bill. The House bill authorizes \$200 million for the Second Ave. Subway and \$225 for LIRR East Side Access to Grand Central Terminal, while the Senate bill provides \$125 million for the Second Ave. Subway and \$200 million for East Side Access. The differences between the bills will be decided in conference between the two houses. Construction on both projects is underway.

### -On Ninth Ave., Ghosts of Bike Lanes Past?-

For some veteran advocates, the Ninth Avenue bike lane has conjured up painful memories of the short-lived barrier-separated bike lanes installed on Broadway and on Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Avenues in 1980. The lanes were clogged by pedestrians and garbage, and decried by taxi drivers and truckers. They lasted only a few months before being closed.

But never fear, a very different political climate exists now. The 1980 lanes were installed seemingly on a whim after Mayor Ed Koch visited bike-filled Beijing, and without consultation from advocates or community groups. By contrast, the Ninth Avenue lane is being built at a time when there is broad **civic and business support** for sustainable measures, and Westside community groups like the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association and the Clinton-Hell's Kitchen Pedestrian Safety Coalition

are strong supporters of such measures.

Perhaps the largest factor behind the downfall of the Koch lanes was the perception that they were not sufficiently used. When he dismantled the lanes, Koch told the *New York Times* "I saw a million bikes in Beijing. And I see two in New York City — on a Sunday." There were obviously more than two cyclists in New York in the 80s, but it is also true that there are many more now. According to NYCDOT's annual "screen-line" count of bicycles, a measurement of the number of cyclists entering and leaving central Manhattan, bicycle use has **nearly doubled** since 1985. While data outside of central Manhattan is harder to come by, it is clear that cycling is very popular in the boroughs, especially in neighborhoods like Park Slope, Williamsburg and Sunset Park, where the bike lanes are filled, especially on weekends.

Also, 9th Avenue generally sees less pedestrian traffic than 5th, 6th or Broadway, a good sign that the separated bike lane concept will receive a relatively calm re-entrance in NYC's urban fabric.

But to ensure success, cyclists and pedestrians will have to be cautious and respect each other. NYC can do its part by keeping the lanes clear of garbage and car and truck traffic. ❖

## MTA Takes a Look At Flood Measures

Late last month, the MTA released a report recapping the Aug. 8 storm that momentarily paralyzed the NYC subways, as well as commuter railroads and some highways in the region. The report contains mostly worthy, **common-sense recommendations** like text-message alerts for riders, sharing service alerts with NYC's 311 information system, and better inspections of sewers and drains in flood-prone areas.

While it would be prohibitively expensive to "flood-proof" the system, the report identifies several engineering solutions which would reduce flooding during a similar storm, including closable vents and step-ups at station entrances to prevent water from flowing down the stairs. One of the more interesting recommendations is building **raised grates** that would double as street furniture. Replacing sidewalk grates with these raised grates would reduce the available amount of space for pedestrians; where this is considered the MTA must ensure that there is sufficient pedestrian space.

The report noted that **global warming** could increase the incidence of heavy storms in the New York metro area, putting additional pressure on the subway system. The MTA has committed \$30 million for recommendations that can be implemented over the next 18 months; longer-term fixes may end up in the MTA's 2008-2013 capital rebuilding plan, which will be finalized in March 2008. ❖

## DEC to NYC: Park Those Zoning Changes

Officials at the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation say DEC is resisting New York City's efforts to increase parking in the Hudson Yards/Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan. The area, along with the rest of Manhattan below 60th street, is currently subject to restrictions in the number of off-street parking spaces allowed as part of NY's State Implementation Plan (SIP) for attaining carbon monoxide (CO) levels in accordance with EPA standards. The City raised the level of allowable parking in a 2005 zoning change, essentially **changing maximum parking restrictions into minimum parking requirements**. The direct conflict between the new zoning and the SIP forced the City to seek a revision of the SIP to remove the parking program, and also got it hit by a lawsuit (see *MTR* #554).

In short, the City claims to have attained EPA CO standards without the aid of the parking restrictions making the parking restrictions unnecessary and burdensome on planned development of the area. In response to the City's requested SIP revision, NY-DEC has asked for an update regarding the status of a parking study mandated by the SIP; the chimerical study has been "in the works" since 1979. Although the meaning of "update" remains ambiguous, a source says the DEC won't entertain the City's request without some accounting for the study.

Furthermore, the DEC is studying the possibility that the parking restrictions in the SIP may apply not only to CO, but also particulate matter and ozone, neither of which are within EPA target levels for NYC. If this is the case, the City's CO attainment may be moot.

It remains a mystery why the City is pushing so hard for more parking. The zoning was changed when NYC was a contender for the 2012 Olympics and had proposed building a stadium over the Hudson Yards. With the bid a memory, the zoning change is now a relic. With PlaNYC, congestion pricing and the great promise of progress looming over the City, to encourage more traffic-inducing parking spaces is counterproductive at best. ❖

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

## CALENDAR

**October 11**, 12:15-2pm. Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**October 12**, 9am-3pm. The NY Metro Chapter of the APA (in conjunction with NYU's Rudin Center) presents its fall conference, "Planning a More Livable NY: Regional Growth, Nature and the Ecological City," Elliot Sander and others will speak. NYU's Kimmel Center for University Life, 60 Washington Square South, New York. To register, visit [www.planning.org/calendar](http://www.planning.org/calendar).

**October 16**. MTA Committee Meetings. 9:30am - LIRR Committee; 10:30am - Bridges & Tunnels Committee Meeting. Registration begins 15 minutes prior to meeting start and must be done in person. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room.

**October 18**, 4:30-6:30pm. Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council meeting. MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, 5th Floor Board Room, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

**October 18**, 6pm. Advancing Women in Transportation Greater New York Chapter 2007 Awards Dinner. Bridgewaters restaurant, 11 Fulton Street (South Street Seaport), Manhattan. See [www.wtsinternational.org](http://www.wtsinternational.org).

**October 22**, 10am. Nassau County Budget Hearing, Full Legislature. The legislature will hear public testimony on the county's proposed 2008 budget and 2008-11 financial plan. Legislative Chamber, 5th Floor, Ralph G. Caso Executive and Legislative Building, One West Street, Mineola.

**October 23**, 6-8pm. Auto-Free New York meeting - "Why Aren't NYC's Streets More Walkable?" With Robert Sullivan, contributing editor to *Vogue* and author of *Rats and Cross Country*. Conference Room, NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington St., Manhattan. For information call 212-475-3394.

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

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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