



# **An End to Commuter Chaos**

## **A Rescue Plan for Staten Island Express Transit**

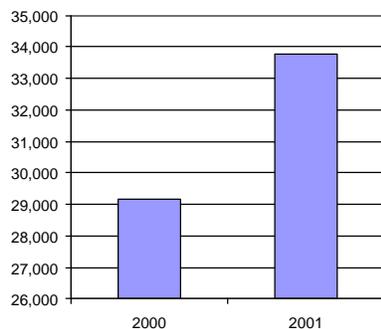
**Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
Straphangers Campaign**

**August, 2001**

# An End to Commuter Chaos

## A Rescue Plan for Staten Island Express Transit

**NYC Transit Staten Island Express Bus Ridership**



data: NYC Transit

***To meet the collapse of Academy service, and accommodate rapid overall express bus use, NYC Transit needs to boost Staten Island express service 20%***

The collapse of Academy Co.'s Staten Island commuter bus service in June stranded an estimated 3,100 daily Staten Island-Manhattan commuters — approximately 8 percent of Staten Island express bus riders. Academy's withdrawal left big holes in service on Staten Island's north and south shores, and in neighborhoods like Annadale, Arden Heights and Eltingville. In the weeks since, Staten Islanders have adapted by crowding into already packed NYC Transit express buses, finding other private and "gypsy" buses, using an excruciatingly slow chain of local transit services, or car commuting. Overall, transit commuting from Staten Island to Manhattan has become slower, longer, less reliable and more of a chore.

Beyond the immediate problem of Academy's withdrawal, express bus ridership on Staten Island continues to grow rapidly. From April 2000 to April 2001, NYC Transit express bus ridership on Staten Island grew by 15.7%, the fastest growing segment of bus ridership in all of New York City. NYCT express bus ridership has nearly doubled since the beginning of 1998, and Staten Island riders make up almost three-quarters of the city's daily express bus passengers.<sup>1</sup> But scheduled service has not increased sufficiently to meet burgeoning demand. The Academy problem is just one piece of the worsening structural inadequacy of the mass transit system serving Staten Island. This summer's crisis indeed grew out of citizen demands for additional NYC Transit express bus service.

Our organizations call on Governor Pataki to implement the following five steps to end commuter chaos and provide Staten Islanders with sufficient and attractive mass transit commuting options to the Manhattan central business district.

- 1. Increase overall NYC Transit express bus service by 20%, with special focus on areas abandoned by Academy.**
- 2. Begin south shore service immediately.**
- 3. Add service on lines like the X10, X12 and X14, and split them into dedicated Lower Manhattan and Midtown services.**
- 4. Speed bus service along the Gowanus Expressway by implementing a three-per-car or bus-only rule for the Gowanus HOV lane during rush hour.**
- 5. Increase Staten Islanders travel options to Manhattan by providing direct bus service to the Hudson-Bergen light rail line in Bayonne.**

<sup>1</sup> NYC Transit reported 23,990 average weekday express bus riders in January, 1998, and 46,976 in April, 2001. As of February, 2000, Staten Island riders commanded 71.1% of NYC Transit's express bus market.

## 1. Increase NYC Transit express bus service 20%

Stabilization of Staten Island's express bus system requires MTA New York City Transit to step up and play a much larger role. The experience with Academy has demonstrated the significant pitfalls of relying on private operators to provide essential public services, and of awarding government contracts to one or another company in a competitive environment. Even before this summer's crisis, Staten Island riders complained bitterly over the quality and reliability of service provided by private bus companies on Staten Island.

Indeed, today's problems arose because of the tepid response by the MTA and Governor Pataki to reasonable calls for extension of NYC Transit express bus service to Staten Island's south shore, one of NY State's fastest-growing residential areas. Ridership on NYC Transit Staten Island express buses is also the fastest-growing segment of bus usage in New York City. Riders and drivers report persistent crowding problems — passengers are forced to stand on dozens of trips each day, on buses not designed to accommodate standees. A major overall service increase would ease crowding, accommodate and encourage the steady upward ridership trend, and provide reliable service to those left in the lurch by the end of Academy service.

The seven bus lines abandoned by Academy were distributed across Staten Island's south shore, north shore, neighborhoods like Annadale, Arden Heights, Huguenot, Eltingville and the communities in the midst of the greenbelt. The *Staten Island Advance* estimated that 3,100 former Academy riders needed to find other ways to get to work.

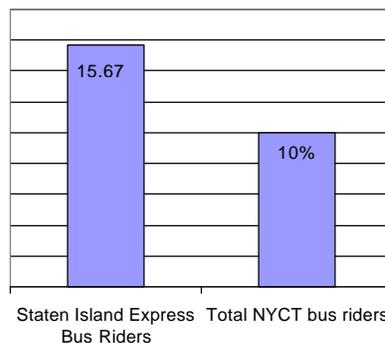
NYC Transit can make up much of the gap in areas other than the south shore by increasing service on the following existing express bus routes:

- On the north shore, the X10, X12 X14 and X16 routes.
- In the Greenbelt/Staten Island Mall area: the X17 services.
- In Annadale, Arden Heights and Huguenot, the X17, X19, X1, X4, X5 and X6.
- In Eltingville, the X1, X4, X5, X6, X7 and X8.

To increase Staten Island express service overall by 20%, NYCT will likely need to acquire more buses. There may be a number of avenues open to the agency in this regard:

- Accelerate a scheduled 2003 purchase of additional over-the-road buses.

**NYC Bus Ridership Growth,  
April 2000-April 2001**

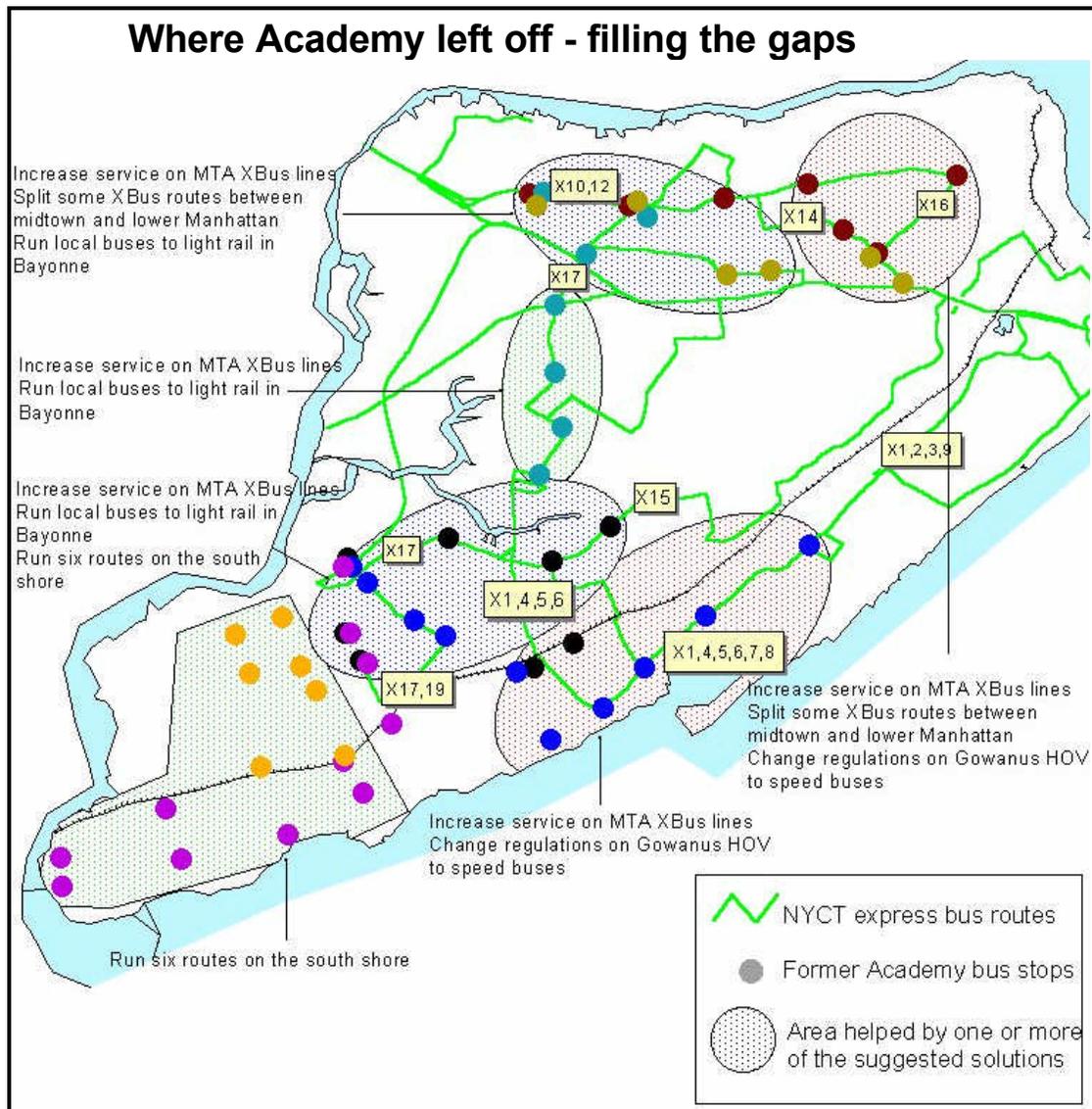


data: NYC Transit

***Today's problems  
arose because of the  
tepid response to rea-  
sonable calls for ex-  
tension of NYC Transit  
express bus service to  
the South Shore***

- Include over-the-road buses in bus purchase orders for 2001 and 2002.
- Add new over-the-road bus purchase orders to its capital program. The MTA may be able to do this by realizing unplanned gains in the bond market, through savings in other programs or by “flexing” federal money slated for the State DOT to NYC Transit.

Good candidates for the latter are the millions of dollars the DOT has programmed for “intelligent transportation systems” on highways around the city. The state has never documented the time, congestion or pollution savings this expenditure will yield. On the other hand, we know that a bigger S.I. express bus fleet is needed and will promote transit use and congestion relief now.<sup>2</sup>



Operating funds for significant expansion of NYC Transit service can in part come from the state funding Governor Pataki has allocated to support private bus operation on the South Shore. Overall, however, NY State needs to address its recent successes in making NYC Transit service more affordable and attractive by increasing state support for transit operations. Despite huge system-wide ridership gains, NYC Transit's receives a smaller proportionate share of state transit operating aid today than it did in 1994.

## 2. Don't short the South Shore

In January, the MTA outlined two new bus services it planned to provide as part of the agreement reached Governor Pataki, legislators and New York City. One is to run from Pleasant Plains and one from Tottenville. These two lines would closely mimic two of the old Academy lines, providing service to Tottenville, Richmond Valley, Pleasant Plains, Rossville and Woodrow. Additionally, Atlantic Bus will operate two new South Shore routes. However, the collapse of Academy service still leaves the South Shore with less service than anticipated in January. NYC Transit should make up the difference.

## 3. Create more direct service to Midtown Manhattan

An expanded Staten Island NYC Transit express bus fleet would not only provide more reliable and accountable service than many Staten Islanders experience today. It would also enable NYC Transit managers to better tailor the services they offer. A big problem many NYC Transit express bus riders face now is that many Midtown Manhattan commuters must travel through lower Manhattan and sit in terrible traffic before reaching Midtown destinations.

A bigger fleet could and should offer more distinct services to the Lower and Midtown Manhattan business districts, avoiding city avenues and streets as much as possible and speeding travel times. Direct service could reach Midtown via Brooklyn and Manhattan's perimeter highways or New Jersey and the Lincoln Tunnel, as appropriate. NYC Transit should increase frequencies on the current X10, X12 and X14 routes in Staten Island, but split destinations to provide dedicated Downtown and Midtown services.



***Bus-eye view of  
Madison Avenue***

***A bigger fleet would  
enable NYC Transit to  
offer more direct serv-  
ice to Midtown Man-  
hattan, and keep ex-  
press buses off of city  
streets***

---

<sup>2</sup> For instance, NY State DOT project number X804.18 in the NYC Transportation Improvement Program will provide "intelligent transportation systems" for Staten Island highways at a cost of \$5.6 million. The funds could purchase 14 new express buses.

**Over 80% of passengers using the Gowanus Expressway HOV lane are express bus riders**

#### 4. Develop a rapid bus-way on the Gowanus

One reason S.I. bus riders are clamoring loudly for more service via the NJ Turnpike is that the Gowanus moves so slowly. A State DOT study using 1998 data showed that 80% of travelers in the Gowanus Expressway HOV lane are bus riders, but that heavy car use of the HOV lane resulting from liberal two-per-car "HOV" rules slows traffic in the lane to speeds barely above those on the rest of the chronically jammed Gowanus.<sup>3</sup> Rapid growth of Staten Island NYC Transit express bus ridership indicates that bus riders' share of total use of the Gowanus HOV is considerably higher than 80% today. Thus, a small number of motorists prevent the Gowanus from serving as a rapid transit-way between Staten Island and Manhattan.

A number of elected officials, civic groups and transit advocates have asked the DOT to tighten the lane's access rules to three-per-car or bus-only and give Staten Island a direct, reliable transit lifeline to Manhattan. So far, the state has refused to budge. Governor Pataki should order the change.

#### 5. Provide a direct link to the light rail line in Bayonne

The Governor should also direct his agencies to further increase Staten Islanders' travel options to Manhattan by providing direct bus service links to the Hudson-Bergen light rail line in Bayonne.

Staten Island is only a short distance, via the Bayonne Bridge, from the terminal of the Hudson-Bergen light rail in Bayonne. That train connects Bayonne and Jersey City and will shortly reach Hoboken Station. But there is no transit service between Staten Island and Bayonne.

The Port Authority has offered \$300,000 to fund such a service – estimated to cover one-third to one-half of its cost. Five local buses currently terminate in Port Richmond – the S 53, 57, 59, 66 and 67 - a mere seven blocks from the Bayonne Bridge. These buses serve the Westerleigh, Castleton Corners, Bulls Head, Staten Island Mall and Sunny Side neighborhoods – all of which used to have Academy service. If NYC Transit has a statutory problem serving a stop in New Jersey, the Pataki Administration should implement an alternative shuttle service to the light rail line until the state legislature is able to remove any limitation on NYC Transit in this regard.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Gowanus Expressway Bus/HOV Lane Continuation Study Phase I*, NY State DOT, April, 1999.

# **An End to Commuter Chaos**

## **A Rescue Plan for Staten Island Express Transit**

August, 2001

Research and writing: Jon Orcutt and Lisa Schreibman. Valuable input and perspective was provided by Gene Russianoff.

Thanks to Larry Hanley of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 726 for providing NYC Transit bus ridership data.

Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
240 West 35th Street #801  
New York, NY 10001 212-268-7474 [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign  
9 Murray Street #3  
New York, NY 10007 212-349-6460 [www.straphangers.org](http://www.straphangers.org)