

Take the Bus

Mass transit systems around the state are in serious trouble. Although Governor Pataki and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority have pledged to hold New York City transit fares stable during 2002, the picture is worse for smaller systems. This year's budget debacle threatens significant fare increases and service reductions from Buffalo to Long Island.

New York's smaller transit systems pay for day-to-day expenses from three sources: annual appropriations of state operating aid, county or municipal contributions and passenger fares. For most of 2001, transit managers have faced big gaps in aid expected from Albany. Badly needed increases provided in the Governor's budget were stripped out of the Legislature's "baseline" plan, and have not been addressed in subsequent negotiations. The result: sizeable budget gaps at most agencies. For example, according to the NY Public Transit Association, Suffolk County Transit will receive 28 percent less operating aid than it expected. Buffalo's Niagara Frontier Transit will get 13 percent less, and the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) is looking at a 36 percent reduction.

In most cases, the gaps are not big money. For Nassau County's Long Island Bus, the shortfall is only \$6 million. But for agencies already running on shoestring budgets, such a deficit can devastate scheduled service. When Long Island Bus faced a similar cut in county aid several years ago, it had to consider eliminating nearly 40 percent of its service.

Fare increases and service cuts can set off long-term declines in transit use, reinforcing car dependence and hurting efforts to revitalize downtown business and residential life and improve air quality. They will also limit the mobility of lower income workers and job seekers at a time when their economic vulnerability is increasing.

And the impacts of the shortfall are already hitting home. In November, Suffolk County voted to direct Suffolk Bus to hike fares 25 cents, to \$1.75. Albany's CDTA floated the likelihood of a fare hike in October, and a recent Transit Association press release said fare increases and service cuts at Syracuse's Central NY Regional Transportation Authority seem "inevitable."

Call or write Governor Pataki and legislative leaders. Urge them to restore transit operating aid to 2001 executive budget levels. ✨

On the Alert

■ **Bad Bet:** In October, the state Legislature authorized six new Indian gambling casinos in New York. One is to be located in Ulster County and could be built on state Forest Preserve lands in the Catskills that drain into the Ashokan Reservoir. This crucial part of New York City's upstate watershed supplies roughly one billion gallons of water a day to nine million residents of the city and Westchester County. Any casino located within the watershed area would have significant adverse impacts on water quality and on the wilderness. The legislation authorizes Gov. Pataki to negotiate the final siting of the casinos in tribal-state compacts under federal law. Urge Gov. Pataki to oppose any proposed casino within the city's watershed boundary or the Catskill Park.

■ **Carpool Rule:** In response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, single occupancy vehicles are temporarily banned from entering Manhattan south of 63rd Street during the weekday morning rush hours. As a result, traffic has decreased 23 percent from the average volume recorded during the same time last year. But the rule is only in place because the Mayor invoked his emergency powers. NYC-based Transportation Alternatives (TA) supports giving the Mayor the everyday flexibility needed to coordinate transportation and security measures to ensure the city is safe and recovering. Contact NYS Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and urge their support for a law that would permit NYC to effectively combat day-to-day traffic jams by giving the Mayor additional regulatory powers. For more information, contact TA at 212-629-8080 or info@transalt.org, or visit: www.transalt.org.

■ **Road Warriors:** State Rt. 17 in Sullivan County is being converted to Interstate 86. As part of this plan, the state Department of Transportation (DOT) is considering two alternatives for Exit 114, located on the crest of the Shawangunk Ridge at Wurtsburo/Highview. One calls for removing the westbound off-ramp, producing little disturbance.

THE GREEN SHEET

is produced monthly by Environmental Advocates of New York. Voluntary annual subscriptions of \$15 are encouraged. Free subscriptions are available via email and on the Web at: <http://www.eany.org>

Copy deadline is the 15th of each month. Send calendar events, action alerts & available publication information to:

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www.senate.state.ny.us

New York State Assembly
Albany, NY 12248
518.455.4100
www.assembly.state.ny.us

The other calls for an expansion that will physically remove much of the crest to allow an additional exit and two entrances. That \$30 million plan would permanently scar the ridge and harm the Basha Kill, an important freshwater wetland. Send questions and comments on the plan c/o Sear-Brown Group, David Balthasar, P.E., 85 Metro Park, Rochester, NY 14623, or 800-724-4131. For more information, call Lorraine Haring, Basha Kill Area Association, at 845-888-5381. Visit www.catskillhikes.com/bashakill.html.

■ **It Stinks:** For years, Syracuse residents have resisted a plan to build a raw sewage treatment plant in Midland, a residential neighborhood. The County plan uses old technology and Onondaga Creek as an open sewer, adding dangerous chemicals to the environment. Call County Executive Nick Pirro at 315-435-3516 and ask him when the county will discuss alternatives to the sewage plant — like selective sewer separation, underground storage and creating wetlands for stormwater runoff — with the community. For more information call, Partnership For Onondaga Creek at 315-476-7475 or email: syrungb@dreamscape.com.

The Month Ahead



December

3: *Wetlands in Danger: The Salt Marsh*, sponsored by Alley Pond Environmental Center (APEC). Visit one of the remaining salt marshes in Northeast Queens and view the function and value of this estuarine ecosystem. Call APEC at 718-229-4000.

3: *Brownfields and the Future of New York City Real Estate*, organized by the Newman Real Estate Institute at Baruch College/City University of NY and the Environmental Business Association of NYS. Newman Conference Center, Baruch College, CUNY, NYC. 8:00AM-2:00PM. \$45 for EBA/NYS members, \$75 for non-EBA/NYS members. Call 518-432-6400 x224.

3-4: *New Solutions to Environmental Problems in Business and Real Estate Deals*, conference sponsored by The Practising Law Institute. Luncheon speaker on 12/3 is Robert E. Fabricant, General Counsel of the US Environmental Protection Agency. Twelve hours of NY CLE credit provided. Call 800-260-4PLI.

4: *Urban Forests: Where Are They and Who Lives There?*, sponsored by Metro Forest Council and Wallerstein Collaborative of New York University (NYU).

Presentations on using science and technology to protect urban forest fragments. Kimball Hall, NYU, 246 Greene St. (corner of Waverly Place). 5:00PM-7:00PM. Call 212-253-2727 x319 or email: info@metroforestcouncil.org.

5: *Brownfield Redevelopment Projects for Upstate New York*, organized by the State University of NY's Center for Brownfields Studies with the Environmental Business Association of NYS. The Radisson Hotel – Utica Centre, 200 Genesee St., Utica. 8:00AM-2:00PM. \$45 for EBA/NYS members, \$75 for non-EBA/NYS members. Call 518-432-6400 x224.

6: *WTC and Beyond – Challenges Facing Planners*, American Planning Association NY Metro Chapter's Annual Conference. Baruch College, 121 East 25th St., Manhattan. 9:00AM-8:00PM. Call 212-228-7875.

7-9: Northeast Community Supported Agriculture Conference III. Frost Valley Environmental Education Center, Claryville, NY. Fees vary. Call Ann at 413-323-4531 or email: info@smallfarm.org.

13-15: Paul Winter's 22nd Annual Winter Solstice Celebration, a musical, theatrical and environmental spectacle. 12/13 and 12/14: 7:30PM; 12/15: 2:00PM and 7:30PM. Manhattan. For information and tickets call the Cathedral of St. John the Divine Box Office at 212-662-2133.

15: Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by the Teatown Lake Reservation, part of the 102nd Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. 1600 Spring Valley Rd., Ossining. Call Ruth Rubenstein at 914-762-2912 x17.

January

17: *Marketing the New Face of Agriculture in the Hudson Valley*. Innovative marketing ideas for Hudson Valley agriculture. Workshops include dairy and livestock marketing, agritourism, getting people to the farm, marketing the European way, specialty crops, and strategic planning for your farm. Holiday Inn, Kingston. 8:30AM-4:30PM. Contact Les Hulcoo at 845-677-8223.

18-19: Solar energy seminars, hosted by NY Shines, Clearwater, SUNY New Paltz and others. 1/18: 1:00PM-4:00PM. *Go Solar Now* seminar for architects and building owners. 1/19: 10:00AM-1:00PM. *Here Comes the Sun* seminar. Speakers, exhibits, music and food. Free. Contact NY Shines at 800-535-5267 or nyshines@skybiz.com.

24: *Who's Doing What in NY Harbor*, sponsored by Hudson River Environmental Society (rescheduled from 9/11). Conference will provide a comprehensive summary of all research and monitoring going on in the harbor. HRES members: \$50, non-members: \$75; students: \$25. Consolidated Edison Auditorium, #4 Irving Place at 14th St., NYC. Call 518-861-8020 or email stephenwilson1@compuserve.com.

For Your Information



Strong Foundation: The Hudson River Foundation for Science and Environmental Research, Inc. recently released *PCBs in the Upper Hudson River: The Science Behind the Controversy*. The report, from an independent panel of scientists and engineers on key scientific issues underlying the debate about active remediation of Hudson River contaminants, concludes that PCBs in sediments in the upper Hudson pose a threat to humans and wildlife. The report also concludes that active remediation is necessary to protect public health and that suitable dredging technology exists to reduce those risks by removing considerable quantities of PCBs from the river. Call 212-924-8290 or email info@hudsonriver.org for more information. The full report is available at www.hudsonriver.org.

Milk Man: A new e-book from Seven Stories Press by Dr. Samuel Epstein exposes the dangers of genetically engineered (rBGH) milk, and the Monsanto Company's longstanding attempt to suppress this information. *Got (genetically engineered) Milk? The Monsanto rBGH/BST Milk Wars Handbook* presents a comprehensive summary of the scientific literature since 1985, and Dr. Epstein's scientific publications on rBGH over the last decade. Contact Tania Ketenjian at 212-226-8760 or tania@sevenstories.com, or visit: www.sevenstories.com.

Shore is Fun: The Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Center for Marine Conservation are coordinating cleanups on a section of Jones Beach State Park on Long Island. The cleanups are part of a five-year study that monitors and removes marine debris on coastal beaches of the US. To volunteer, call the Nassau County SWCD at 516-454-4872.

Passing Grade: *Clearing the Air with Transit Spending: Sierra Club Grades America's Fifty Largest Cities*, a recent Sierra Club study, found a clear connection between investments in public transportation and success at cutting smog per person from cars and trucks. Although most of America's 50 largest cities failed in their performance at reducing car and truck smog, those like New York that invested in public transportation suffered from less automobile pollution per person. Visit www.sierraclub.org to view the complete report.

Activists' Corner

History Channel: The Capital District Preservation Task Force (CDPTF) is a loose coalition of individuals and organizations, including historians, archaeologists and ecologists, interested in the study and preservation of the natural and human history of the Capital District. CDPTF was formed three years ago following the destruction of important archeological remains unearthed in downtown Albany by a state agency that was building a new parking lot.

CDPTF acts as a clearinghouse and communications center for its members. In September, 2000, CDPTF hosted a conference to discuss the current state of preservation needs in the Capital District with more than 50 planners, archeologists, environmentalists and citizens attending. A report is forthcoming.

To join the group's new email discussion list, send an email to preservation-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. For more information, email themesh@global2000.net, or visit: www.themesh.com/cdptf.



December 2001

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Albany, NY
Permit #203

Environmental Advocates
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