

EXPRESS ROUTE

to Better Bus Service

How to Improve Bus Travel across the Hudson River, and Beyond



Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Even as New Jersey commuters increasingly pile into trans-Hudson buses, the ability of the region to serve those commuters is stifled by project delays, in-

Key Findings

- **More than 9,000 buses cross the Hudson River into Manhattan each weekday, serving a population the size of Cincinnati and twice as many passengers as commuter rail. Without buses, traffic would be 84% higher than it is today.**
- **The eastbound Lincoln Tunnel Express Bus Lane is the most efficient stretch of roadway in the country, carrying 62,000 people every morning.**
- **The growing popularity of buses is overwhelming the three major Hudson River crossings, the Port Authority Bus Terminal, and Manhattan streets.**
- **Port Authority documents state that bus trips across the Hudson River will increase by 18% by 2030, but the agency's plans to accommodate this growth are proceeding slowly.**
- **The growth of the private interstate bus industry has led to a proliferation of makeshift bus stops on already crowded city sidewalks.**
- **Buses are far less polluting per passenger than cars. The average bus emits less than one-fifth the carbon dioxide per person as a single occupancy car.**

Filling the Void

Finding information on bus service to and from the Port Authority Bus Terminal can be difficult. In an attempt to make bus service more customer friendly, TSTC has created a central webpage for all bus information, including maps of popular routes, and links to private carrier and interstate services.

frastructure constraints and severe information gaps. This report takes a comprehensive look at the major problems currently facing trans-Hudson bus service and offers strategies for how to address those problems and improve service. It's a call to action for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, an agency with good ideas but slow implementation timelines, and New York City, which is steadily enhancing the streetscape but hasn't developed a coordinated approach to dealing with interstate bus service.

Buses provide both significant environmental benefits and congestion relief to a region sorely in need of both. With each bus traversing the Hudson River carrying an average of 34 passengers, existing trans-Hudson bus service eliminates thousands of car trips (and their concomitant emissions) every day. The average bus emits less than one-fifth the carbon dioxide emissions per person as a single occupancy car.¹ And, per passenger mile, buses emit 25 percent less nitrogen oxide emissions, 80 percent less carbon monoxide, and 90 percent less hydrocarbon emissions.²

1. MTA. MTA Sustainability Report. 2008.

2. Alvord, Katharine. Divorce Your Car: Ending the love affair with the car. New Society Publishers. 2000.

With 315,000 bus passengers (and 226,000 cars and trucks) crossing the Hudson on the George Washington Bridge, or through the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels every weekday, totaling 100 million annually, the crossings are at capacity. Enhanced bus service, especially across the Hudson River, is one of the Port Authority's key goals in its Strategic Plan, but projects meant to improve bus capacity are moving slowly. Yet, even with the troubled economic situation, bus ridership within the region is maintaining high levels, expected to reach more than 371,000 daily passengers by 2030.

Similarly, the Port Authority Bus Terminal has far exceeded its useful lifespan and is in dire need of renovation and expansion, but plans to expand it have also slowed. An incredible 7,000 buses make the Port Authority Bus Terminal their destination on an average weekday, but the Terminal is packed and buses still spill out onto neighborhood streets to pick up and discharge passengers. And the lack of centralized information makes the terminal and the bus system it serves difficult to navigate, even for an experienced bus rider.

The growing private interstate bus industry (Megabus, GotoBus, Bolt Bus and the longstanding Chinatown bus carriers) is further straining Manhattan's already traffic-choked streets and sidewalks. These services are only anticipated to expand in coming years.³ How will New York City accommodate and manage them?

Key Recommendations

Short Term

1. *Expedite the completion of the Lincoln Tunnel High Occupancy Toll Lanes study and implement the recommendations immediately.*
2. *Establish a westbound XBL in the Lincoln Tunnel during the evening rush hour.*
3. *Create an online portal for regional bus riders, with maps, route schedules and carrier information.*
4. *Improve communications technology for buses and update signage.*
5. *NYC should develop, with community input, strategies for formalizing bus loading/unloading and bus parking areas in neighborhoods across the city.*
6. *Coordinate with MTA and Westchester County's Bee-Line to create and/or expand existing bus service between Westchester County and George Washington Bridge Bus Station.*

Long Term

1. *Study the potential for High Occupancy Tolling on the Holland Tunnel and GW Bridge.*
2. *Move forward plans to renovate and add capacity to the Port Authority Bus Terminal with community input, and to construct a bus garage on the West Side.*

3. J. Schwieterman, et al. "The Return of the InterCity Bus: The Decline and Recovery of Schedule Service to American Cities." DePaul University School of Public Service Policy Study. 2007.

Improved bus service complemented with better roadway efficiency across the Hudson River crossings into Manhattan can help reduce traffic congestion now. Relatively simple strategies such as the creation of bus loading and parking zones and bus terminal enhancements at the Port Authority Bus Terminal and the George Washington Bridge Bus Station can improve the travel experience for the millions of bus riders who cross the Hudson River annually. Continued mapping of the public and private bus carrier routes across the Hudson River can provide bus riders with information they currently lack.

A better bus riding experience can encourage more drivers to leave their cars at home. This will lead to less congestion and better air quality, and help the region maintain its competitive edge.

Introduction

Traveling across the Hudson River can be a nightmare. Car crossings are perpetually congested, and trains and buses are packed.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey promises to “determine how best to ensure that capacity exists for continued high quality service to bus commuters” in its recently revised strategic plan. But implementing that promise has been slow.

Demand for transit service is happening now, and is only expected to increase as the economy recovers. The PANYNJ cites “convincing evidence that continued growth will overwhelm the ability of the current transit, road, and highway system to meet the commuting needs of the new jobs and residents forecast for the region by 2020.”⁴ And fluctuating gas prices, environmental concerns, and congestion mean commuters are increasingly choosing to leave their cars at home to take advantage of public transportation. The faster decline in car and truck traffic versus transit use resulting from the economic downturn further indicates the popularity of transit.



Express bus lanes heading into Lincoln Tunnel. Photo from Federal Transit Administration.

This report offers suggestions for meeting the demand for increased bus service into and out of New York City in the near and long term, with a focus on the lower Hudson River crossings. It recommends a set of near term improvements, such as the creation of bus loading zones, and longer term initiatives

4. PANYNJ. The Port Authority Strategic Plan: Transportation for Regional Prosperity. 2006.

such as implementation of high occupancy toll lanes, a reverse exclusive bus lane outbound, and bus terminal expansion and improvements.

Better service and infrastructure for bus riders means significant benefits for our environment and mobility, as a greater number of drivers shift out of cars and onto more efficient modes of travel. It also means bus riders will be given

Access to the Region's Core

NJ TRANSIT and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey are constructing a new passenger rail tunnel, Access to the Region's Core. The \$8 billion tunnel will double passenger rail service across the river alleviating congestion at the Hudson River crossings. Though the ARC tunnel is expected to provide traffic and transit relief across the Hudson, even the most optimistic construction schedules put its earliest completion at 2017. But with the Hudson crossings already at capacity, expanded transit service is needed now. Improvements to the region's bus service, as identified in this report, can help meet the growing demand in the near term.

greater consideration and will be treated less like second-class transit passengers.

The Challenges

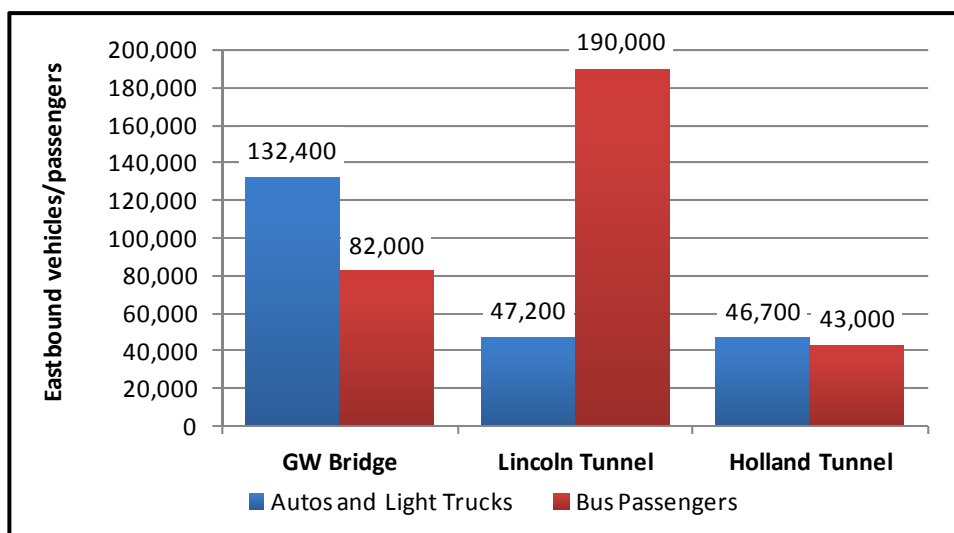
On any given weekday, more than 9,000 buses currently crowd onto the George Washington Bridge and through the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, carrying 315,000 passengers. This is the equivalent of moving nearly the entire population of Cincinnati across the Hudson every day. With transit use growing both nationally and in our region, transit carriers' ability to accommodate the demand is at a breaking point — the three major Hudson River crossings are already carrying far more vehicles than they were designed to accommodate, the City's bus terminals are either desperately outdated or provide limited transit connections to the rest of the region, and scarce street space is being overrun by loosely-regulated private bus carriers.

9,000 buses move the equivalent of the population of Cincinnati across the Hudson River every day.

Demand for Bus Service Is Strong

Over the course of a year, more than 100 million bus passengers travel across the GW Bridge or through the Lincoln or Holland Tunnels into New York City.⁵ The crossings accommodate significant car travel as well, with more than 226,000 cars and trucks passing over the GW Bridge or through the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels on any given weekday (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Average Weekday Bus and Car trips on the George Washington Bridge, Lincoln and Holland Tunnels (Typical 2008 Weekday, eastbound vehicles)



Source: Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

5. The Tappan Zee Bridge also accommodates significant bus ridership and has reached capacity. However, because the bus service crossing the Tappan Zee primarily serves the suburban market, the Campaign excluded this crossing from our analysis.

It would take almost 191,000 cars to accommodate the 315,000 commuters currently crossing the Hudson River on buses.

Table 1. Number of Cars and Trucks Needed to Accommodate Current Bus Ridership Across GW Bridge and through Lincoln and Holland Tunnels

	Number of Cars and Trucks Needed to Replace Buses	Hypothetical Traffic Growth
George Washington Bridge	49,697	38%
Lincoln Tunnel	115,152	244%
Holland Tunnel	26,060	56%
Total	190,909	84%

Source: TSTC calculation assuming vehicle occupancy of 1.65 people per vehicle.

Any driver or bus passenger traveling across the Hudson River during rush hour can attest to the traffic congestion at these crossings. Backups routinely extend for miles and delays can last for an hour or more.

But those delays would be far worse without the region's extensive commuter bus system. Accommodating the 315,000 daily bus passengers by car instead would further choke the already congested crossings. The Campaign calculated that if the 315,000 daily bus passengers traveling into New York City across the Hudson River were to instead travel by private vehicle, 190,909 additional cars would need to squeeze across the GW Bridge and through the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, nearly doubling the number of cars using the crossings (see Table 1). Recent research suggests that traffic is subject to a tipping point, and that shifting even a small portion of those bus riders into private vehicles would significantly worsen the already-terrible congestion.⁶

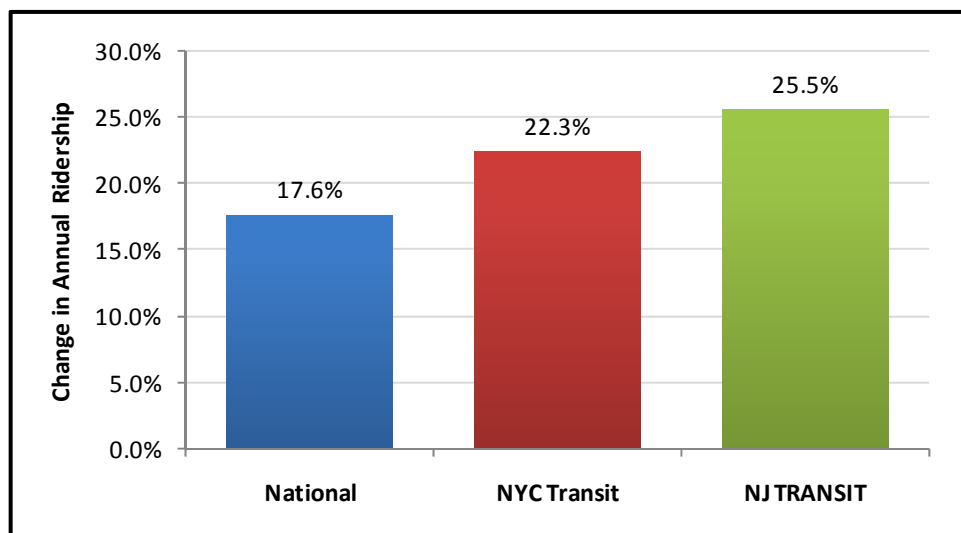
Transit Use Growing

Transit ridership continues to grow both nationally and regionally, and at a pace far faster than driving. While the number of miles driven has fallen by 3.6 percent over the past year, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) reports that 2008 ridership reached its highest point since 1956, and has grown more than 17 percent over the last decade. In New York City and New Jersey, this growth in transit has been particularly robust (see Figure 2), even as driving is flatlining or declining.⁷

6. CEO's for Cities. "The Tipping Point," March 3, 2009. <http://www.ceosforcities.org/blog/entry/2169>

7. FHWA. Traffic Volume Trends Monthly Report, December 2008. APTA. Fourth Quarter Ridership Reports by Mode. NYCT. Annual Bus and Subway Ridership Reports. NJ TRANSIT Ridership History.

Figure 2. Growth in Transit Ridership (all modes), 1999 to 2008



Source: FHWA. Traffic Volume Trends Monthly Report, December 2008. APTA. Fourth Quarter Ridership Reports by Mode. NYCT. Annual Bus and Subway Ridership Reports. NJ TRANSIT Ridership History.

Existing trans-Hudson bus service is provided by a number of private carriers and 60 different commuter routes operated by NJ TRANSIT, New Jersey's public transit operator. Ridership on NJ TRANSIT's commuter bus routes has grown significantly over the past few years. Between 2002 and 2007, ridership jumped 18 percent, with more than 52 million passengers utilizing NJ TRANSIT commuter buses to travel into New York City in 2007.

Bus ridership across the GW Bridge and through the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels is projected to climb by more than 18 percent by the year 2030.⁸ Assuming bus occupancy rates hold steady, that would mean an additional 1,650 buses crossing the Hudson on a daily basis.

The upward trend in transit ridership is obviously good news for our environment and economy. But the growth also presents challenges to transit systems operating against financial and infrastructure constraints. Demand for new or expanded service is putting increased pressure on transit agencies already struggling to maintain existing service levels under constricting budgets. And in the greater New York metropolitan region, the robust growth in trans-Hudson bus travel tests the limits of the physical infrastructure.

Crossing Capacity at a Breaking Point

Currently, only one accommodation is given to buses traveling across the Hudson and it was established nearly four decades ago. The Lincoln Tunnel's Ex-

8. Access to the Region's Core Final Environmental Impact Statement., Chapter 3.1, p. 8. 2008.

Bus ridership across the three crossings is projected to grow by more than 18 percent by the year 2030.



Typical Holland Tunnel rush hour congestion. Photo by Alex di Suvero for The New York Times

clusive Bus Lane (XBL), created in 1971, uses a westbound traffic lane for eastbound weekday morning bus travel. The XBL is the most efficient stretch of roadway in the country, carrying 1,700 buses with over 62,000 passengers heading eastbound into New York City on weekday mornings. The XBL is so popular that it is now congested at times (though it still speeds bus trips by 15 to 20 minutes according to the Port Authority). The XBL is close to reaching its capacity limit of 700 peak hour buses.⁹ Various reports, such as New York City's sustainability plan, PlaNYC, list the XBL as one of the region's most important assets.

The Lincoln Tunnel XBL, the most efficient stretch of roadway in the country, was established 38 years ago, in 1971.

This sole accommodation is sorely insufficient today and will be even more so in the future given the surging demand for bus service and skyrocketing ridership. The Port Authority acknowledges this in its Strategic Plan, stating, "continued growth will overwhelm the ability of the current transit, road, and highway system to meet the commuting needs of the new jobs and residents forecast for the region by 2020."¹⁰ Yet, in the past three decades there have been few new provisions for bus traffic and no large capacity improvements.

Bus riders across the Hudson River are attracted to the affordability, convenience, and environmental benefits. However, these benefits will quickly dwindle without measures to keep bus commuting a faster, more convenient alternative to driving.

9. ARC FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 6

10. PANYNJ. The Port Authority Strategic Plan: Transportation for Regional Prosperity. 2006.

Terminals

Outdated and Overcapacity: Port Authority Bus Terminal

The Port Authority Bus Terminal (PABT), in midtown Manhattan, is the largest and busiest bus passenger facility in the world. On an average day, 200,000 commuters and 7,000 buses make the PABT their destination. Over 53 million passengers come through this terminal annually. Used by both public and private bus carriers, the terminal has 223 bus gates, 1,250 spaces of public parking, along with commercial and retail space.

The terminal, built between 1949 and 1951, was already operating at its capacity by 1966. It was expanded by 50 percent in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but has seen few improvements since then, even though, according to the PA, the terminal now has the highest ridership and bus activity in its history. The Port Authority Bus Terminal is busier now than it ever has been but financial constraints and political pressures have inhibited its expansion.

Plans to renovate and expand the PABT have stalled as the Port Authority negotiates with a private developer to buy the air rights over the terminal, a process that is likely hampered by the national economic downturn. The agency budgeted \$5 million in 2008 to start work on a bus parking garage adjacent to the PABT, but that project is behind schedule.

The lack of a centralized information system alerting passengers and commuters to bus terminal locations or the times of arrivals and departures is a glaring shortcoming. For travelers not regularly commuting through the PABT, just figuring out which bus to take, where to find it, and when it leaves can be a dizzying experience. On several visits, Tri-State staff saw the information booth unstaffed, making it that much harder for commuters to get the information they need.



The Port Authority Bus Terminal is outdated and overcrowded.

In March 2009, NJ TRANSIT, which operates several commuter routes into the terminal, announced its contract with the PABT for several communication

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upgrades to be completed by December 2009. The upgrades include more video screens with real-time travel information, an improved public address system announcing bus departures, and faster ticket machines that expedite purchases. This is clearly a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done.

Out of Reach: George Washington Bridge Bus Station

Over the course of a year, more than five million passengers travel into the George Washington Bridge Bus Station on nearly 300,000 buses.

The PABT is the most widely used bus terminal for trans-Hudson bus service but the lesser known George Washington Bridge Bus Station (GWBBS) hosts a significant number of buses and passengers as well. The bus station, located in upper Manhattan, is directly linked to the George Washington Bridge via exclusive bus ramps. The GWBBS serves about 17,000 passengers and 950 buses each day. Over the course of a year, more than five million passengers travel into the station on nearly 300,000 buses.

Despite its award-winning design and the significant capital investments made by the Port Authority, the GWBBS fails to capture a larger share of riders and buses. One reason may be because transit connections are not as efficient as they could be.

Figure 3. MTA Buses Serving the GW Bridge Bus Station.



Source: MTA. Manhattan Bus Map 2008.

Located in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, the GWBBS is served by the A (express) and 1 (local) subway lines providing options for commuters headed further south and east. Several bus routes (see Figure 3) connect passengers to other Manhattan destinations such as Penn Station, Murray Hill, Greenwich Village, Inwood, and East Harlem but traffic congestion compromises their speed and reliability, often adding significant time to a commute that is already battling delays on the George Washington Bridge.

There are no bus connections into Westchester County, New York City's neighbor to the north, despite the GWBSS's proximity. Expanded northern and western bus service could open up an untapped market for increased travel choices into cities such as Yonkers and White Plains.

Street Space Used as Makeshift Bus Stops

Responding to the growth in regional leisure and business travel, carriers such as GotoBus, Megabus, and Bolt Bus are branching into new markets with affordable, reliable, and convenient bus service to destinations such as Atlantic City and Washington, DC. The carriers market themselves as serving neighborhoods (e.g. Chinatown buses), picking up and discharging passengers at locations throughout the city rather than at a major central terminal. For some passengers, the option to avoid the trip to midtown is a strong incentive.

These long-distance private carriers are using city streets as makeshift bus stops with waiting passengers queuing along crowded sidewalks without adequate shelter. Bus capacity constraints at Port Authority Bus Terminal are one factor why, according to an official at the PANYNJ. Private carriers seeking space at the Terminal are being turned away due to lack of capacity and are finding curb space on New York City streets instead.

The high cost of gate fees (relative to free street parking) may also deter bus carriers from using the PABT. Public documents indicate that the gate lease fee at the PABT for private long-distance carriers can approach \$20,000 for premium gates. Avoiding leasing fees at the Terminal might make it easier for some of these carriers to maintain these cheap fares, a strong incentive for customers.

Buses are increasingly being seen at makeshift bus stops on New York City streets.



MegaBus passengers waiting at 31st Street and 8th Avenue. Photo by TSTC

NYCDOT designates some locations for bus drop off/pick up sites but these loading and unloading zones are poorly enforced. Elsewhere, buses seem to stop wherever convenient with little consideration for neighborhood impacts.

Private Carrier Information Hard to Find

Beyond the private long distance carriers such as GotoBus, a number of private bus services such as Academy, Coach, DeCamp, and Rockland Coaches provide trans-Hudson service to regional commuters. Though these carriers are a vital part of our regional transit network, information about their routes and schedules is not user-friendly.

To travel via private bus into and out of PABT, one must visit each carrier's website (links are available through the Port Authority website) to figure out schedules or see route maps, if they exist. Many private carriers do not map out their routes, providing a huge disservice to travelers. Such maps are important visual aids for any commuter seeking travel options trans-Hudson. Sample maps have been created for this report with the intention of encouraging a more centralized and practical travel tool. Doing so can streamline and facilitate bus travel for these commuters.

Several private carriers serve trans-Hudson commuters in Bergen, Essex, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Somerset and Union Counties, all of which are geographically close to New York City. Yet, there is no public ridership data available that shows how many bus riders are using private carriers to get from these counties into NYC.

The Solutions

Additional lanes cannot be added to any of the Hudson River crossings into Manhattan, but existing lanes can become more efficient by better accommodating bus traffic. Bus facilities, particularly the Port Authority Bus Terminal, can be enhanced significantly with relatively minor improvements. The designation of street curb space for bus loading and parking areas, and in the longer run, the expansion of the PABT and the creation of a bus garage could alleviate the “musical chairs” for bus parking in many parts of the city. Much of this is included in the Port Authority’s strategic plan, and the agency’s most recent capital budget designates hundreds of millions of dollars to the effort. But progress seems stalled, even as ridership grows and the region’s facilities are bursting at the seams.

More Exclusive Bus Lanes

Regional bus ridership is skyrocketing, but riders are given few accommodations.

In 2005, the Port Authority began studying ways to alleviate congestion in the Lincoln Tunnel XBL. That report, for which \$5 million was budgeted in 2008 alone, was due out at the end of 2008. But the report has been delayed by another year due to glitches in the transportation modeling program being used. Such models may be the best methods we have to decipher possible impacts of transportation decisions, but they are far from being an exact science and never show precise impacts.

Port Authority officials have said they are leaning towards the conversion of an existing general-purpose lane to a High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lane to help relieve the gridlock on the bus priority route. HOT lanes charge solo drivers a premium for driving on a less congested roadway, while allowing buses and carpools at no additional cost.

Recommendation: Expedite the completion of the Lincoln Tunnel High Occupancy Toll Lanes study and replace a general purpose lane with a High Occupancy Toll Lane at the Lincoln Tunnel.

Another option is the creation of a westbound Lincoln Tunnel exclusive bus lane during rush hour. Using Port Authority data, a TSTC analysis found that the number of cars, buses and trucks leaving New York City via the Lincoln Tunnel in the evening rush hour nearly rivals the number of vehicles coming into

***It’s time to stop
treating bus
riders like 2nd
class citizens***

I Just Want to Get Home!

Evening rush hour traffic from New York City into New Jersey nearly rivals the morning rush hour into New York. During the average evening peak period (4-8 pm), nearly 17,000 vehicles travel westbound into New Jersey; by comparison, around 19,100 vehicles enter New York City during the morning rush (6-10 am).

the city during the morning rush. Yet, the Lincoln Tunnel Exclusive Bus Lane is only in effect into New York and only during the morning rush hour. Buses headed back to New Jersey during evening peak times must contend with the same gridlock conditions that cars do (see box above). Port Authority officials have said that traffic moves faster without lane restrictions, but bus drivers say that delays leaving the city are substantial and designated lanes may help.

Usage of a New Jersey-bound XBL (which would either replace a New Jersey-bound general purpose lane or be a contraflow lane carved out of New York City-bound traffic) would almost certainly rival that of the morning XBL, providing real benefits for the largest share of trans-Hudson commuters and creating further incentives to commute by mass transit.

Recommendation: Establish a westbound XBL during the evening rush hour.

The agency should also immediately commence a High Occupancy Tolling study for the Holland Tunnel and George Washington Bridge, as demand for trans-Hudson service will only increase in coming decades.

Port Authority is already examining this option for the Lincoln Tunnel.

Recommendation: Study the potential for High Occupancy Tolling on the Holland Tunnel and GW Bridge.

Fix Terminals and Formalize Bus Parking

Although it hosts over 53 million passenger trips and over 2 million bus movements per year, the Port Authority Bus Terminal has not been renovated in over twenty years and lacks a modernized appearance and technology based information. The website VirtualTourist.com rated it the 5th ugliest building or monument in the world in 2008.

Plans for Port Authority Bus Terminal expansion have languished for years and

need to be expedited or they will never happen. The most recent redesign, announced by the Port Authority in July 2008, includes 18 new bus gates and upgrades to existing gates allowing for an additional 70 buses, carrying about 3,000 passengers, to travel through during peak commuting hours (the terminal currently has 223 gates). This is an increase in peak-hour bus capacity of 18 percent — a significant boost. However, at the center of the redevelopment plans is the sale and development of the air space above Port Authority Bus Terminal which will be developed into 1.3 million square feet. Given the current economic situation, there is no guarantee these plans will come to fruition in the near future without increased attention from the agency.

A related plan to build a \$545 million bus garage near the PABT would help alleviate neighborhood problems with bus layovers. The garage could be made available to commuter buses, private intercity bus services, and charter buses.

Recommendation: Move forward plans to renovate and add capacity to the Port Authority Bus Terminal with community input, and to construct a bus garage on the West Side.

Information, Please!

The Port Authority makes a point of not providing bus information to customers, beyond the phone numbers for carriers. The agency needs to do a much better job of communicating with riders.

Building on the mapping and online work done by the Campaign for this report, (see page 4 of the Executive Summary) the PANYNJ should create a single website that provides bus information for riders. This should include routes, schedules, and maps for regional and longer distance private carriers, as well as for NJ TRANSIT (see www.tstc.org/bus).

Recommendation: Create an online portal for regional bus riders, with maps, route schedules and carrier information.

The way bus arrival, departure, and route information is made available to bus commuters is outdated. A new contract with NJ TRANSIT will provide some needed communication upgrades but



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects rendering of new PABT office tower.



Gate assignments for NJ TRANSIT are listed on small, dispersed bulletin boards despite the availability of more modern display methods. Photo by Becca Homa

more can be done.

Recommendation: Improve communications technology for buses and update signage.

Use NYC Street Space for Buses

Bus riders should not have to continue to wait for improvements while the Port Authority Bus Terminal is modernized or a new facility is built. And clearly, with bus ridership rising, the need for more loading and parking space is immediate.

New York City does provide designated bus loading and unloading areas throughout Manhattan: South Street Seaport, Penn Station, Battery Park and the Jacob Javits Center. But the demand for space exceeds this supply, and no space is formally provided in popular bus destinations such as Chinatown.

Designating additional street space for bus parking, loading and unloading can help improve service in the near term. This effort must be done with community input and must be tailored to reflect local concerns and particular needs. Better enforcement of current New York City anti-idling laws can help allay community concerns about air pollution and noise. And charging for the privilege of loading and unloading or parking on New York City streets could help offset the costs of enforcing the parking restrictions and anti-idling laws, and maybe even pay for amenities such as bus shelters.

Possible arrangements could include “bus priority streets” with vehicle restrictions in place during all or part of the day. Those streets could be used for bus layovers and loading and unloading of passengers. Tri-State has advocated for restricting vehicles from 32nd Street between 7th Avenue and Broadway to allow for more buses to use this already-crowded MTA layover area.

NYCDOT is already addressing community concerns on the West Side of Manhattan by establishing more “bus layover” areas. Such efforts need to be expanded and formalized, particularly to accommodate private carriers, to ensure buses aren’t creating havoc all over New York City streets.

Another option could be to set aside more curb space as bus loading and unloading zones. This approach is currently utilized with great success in several locations throughout the city for New York City buses (see photos, right).

Additionally, the PA should coordinate with NYC to create a bus parking garage

on the West Side of Manhattan. Proposals to address bus parking have faced significant opposition from community members, but concerns are not insurmountable. For example, the siting of a bus garage under the World Trade Center memorial, where an existing parking lot once existed, along with a more recent proposal to move 18 commuter buses to West Street in lower Manhattan, has raised significant community concerns. Such examples highlight the importance of incorporating community input into any proposal aided by the suggestions proposed by community leaders.

In fact, some elected officials have strongly supported additional bus parking and loading zones around the PABT. For example, Senator Thomas K. Duane has noted the traffic congestion, health, pedestrian safety, and quality of life impacts stemming from the lack of additional bus facilities to accommodate the increasing number of buses. In a October 2008 *New York Times* letter to the editor, he called for the construction of a West Side parking garage to protect his constituents.

Recommendation: New York City should develop, with community input, strategies for formalizing bus loading/unloading and bus parking areas in neighborhoods across the city.

Create Bus Connections into Westchester County

There are no bus connections from the George Washington Bridge Bus Station into Westchester County. Such connections could provide job access into lower Westchester County, such as Yonkers and White Plains, for people using the lower Hudson river crossings into New York. For example, Bee-Line's MxM4c could provide service from White Plains directly to the GWBBS.

Recommendation: PANYNJ should coordinate with MTA and Westchester County's Bee-Line to create and/or expand existing bus service between Westchester County and GWBBS.



A variety of ways to accommodate buses on NYC streets

Top: Outside the Prospect Park subway station in Brooklyn, parking has been removed to make room for the three NYC Transit bus routes which begin there. The bus stop has helped local businesses and made the street safer for pedestrians. Middle: Bus layover area near the South Street Seaport station. This layover area accommodates both public and private bus carriers. Bottom: With more than 20 local and regional buses serving the area, as well as the LIRR and several subway lines, the Jamaica Bus Terminal has been designed to accommodate dozens of buses. Photos by TSTC staff.

Conclusion

Bus ridership is growing significantly. The trans-Hudson corridor supports significant numbers of commuters of all modes using three points of access that are already at capacity. To tackle the environmental and physical challenges of the existing infrastructure brought on by this large volume of commuters, bus service should be given greater priority and expanded provisions to better serve all commuting populations.

Bus service is a convenient, expedient, and cost effective alternative to driving, but the levels of transit growth across these crossings will compromise these benefits. In order to encourage more drivers to leave their cars at home, expanded and increased bus service in the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels and across the George Washington Bridge must become a priority of the transit agencies serving our region. This coordination can result in fewer car trips, improved air quality, increased mobility, and time savings. It can also be the catalyst for a more robust regional bus network with the potential to serve millions more.



The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit policy and advocacy organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly, and equitable transportation system in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut.

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