



College of Staten Island computer program could have averted 'Bridgegate'

bridge.JPG

College of Staten Island offered Port Authority a computer traffic-study program following the Easter 2011 traffic debacle at the Outerbridge Crossing. (*Staten Island Advance/William Lyons.*)

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- GOP New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie may have been able to avoid the whole Bridgegate mess if the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey had listened to the College of Staten Island (CSI).

The college in 2012 offered to work with the Port Authority on a computer traffic-modeling project that would simulate traffic flow at the authority's bridges and tunnels, said Jonathan Peters, finance professor and chair of CSI's Accounting and Finance Department.

The program simulates how lane closures due to construction, accidents or other disruptions will affect traffic flow. It eliminates the need to physically shut lanes down in order to study outcomes.

Christie administration officials are accused of closing lanes on the George Washington Bridge in September in a bid to punish the Democratic mayor of Fort Lee, who would not endorse Christie for re-election.

As **the Bridgegate scandal mushroomed**, the Port Authority said the lanes were closed in order to conduct a traffic safety study.

"The software is out there," said Peters. "You shouldn't have to close bridges to do modeling. Do it on the computer."

Peters said that CSI approached the Port Authority about computer modeling after one of the Island's own traffic disasters: The **infamous 2011 Easter nightmare**, when a paucity of open toll booths caused gridlock at the Outerbridge Crossing.

Peters said that CSI had already developed simulations for the Island's three Port Authority bridges -- the Outerbridge Crossing and the Goethals and Bayonne bridges -- and said that other facilities, including the George Washington, could have easily been included.

Peters said the computer modeling program can also be used for other purposes, such as event planning for things like the recent Super Bowl.

The price, according to Peters: Between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

But after two meetings with CSI in July 2012, the Port Authority said thanks but no thanks, Peters said.

"We got a very cold shoulder," he said. "It speaks to the agency's arrogance. They didn't need our help."

Peters said CSI was told that the Port Authority had its own internal computer modeling systems in place.

If that's the case, Peters said he "can't fathom" why the Port Authority would close lanes for a traffic study.

"Why would you disrupt people's daily lives and commuting when you can do it on a computer?" he said.

He added, "So it makes you question their motivations if they could have done it with computer simulation."

Port Authority spokesman Steve Coleman said authority planning staff took the proposal to the Traffic Engineering staff "and was told that we already had similar simulation models and capabilities in-house for toll plazas where there was a need for such modeling."

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