

March 28, 2006

Mayor Offers Plan to Ease Traffic Congestion on Staten Island

By [SEWELL CHAN](#)

With the population of their borough the fastest-growing in the city, Staten Islanders have persistently complained that a single problem — traffic — is harming the quality of life in a place that has experienced booming growth ever since the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge opened in 1964.

Moving to tackle the problem, Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) yesterday presented a package of transportation improvements that seeks to make Staten Island's car-based culture a bit more dependent on mass transit, and to let traffic flow more smoothly. The plan would expand bus service, increase police enforcement of traffic rules and reactivate railroad freight lines — which is supposed to reduce truck traffic by 100,000 trips a year, starting this summer.

In announcing the plans, which fulfilled a pledge Mr. Bloomberg made during his State of the City address in January, the mayor acknowledged that many ideas for improving traffic flow had been proposed or tried over the years, with little success.

"They have failed to move forward in part because of the lack of community consensus," he said. "The result has been ever-worsening traffic congestion and delay as the borough has become more heavily developed, negatively affecting the high quality of life that has made Staten Island the fastest-growing of our five boroughs."

With 465,000 residents, Staten Island has only 6 percent of the city's population, but it is expected to add 20,000 in the next five years. From 2000 to 2005, the borough ranked fifth of the state's 62 counties in the rate of population growth, according to the most recent Census Bureau estimates.

The mayor presented six categories of preliminary recommendations to the Staten Island Transportation Task Force, a panel of city officials, politicians, community board members and representatives of other agencies. He said some of the changes were already in the works, including some that have the potential to wean Staten Islanders from their cars.

One of those recommendations would rely on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which has agreed to increase bus service on the South Shore, add limited-stop service on the North Shore and increase the frequency of Staten Island Railway service. Last September, officials announced that the authority would spend \$110 million to build a third bus depot on the island, fulfilling a longstanding goal of many riders.

Other recommendations would seek to improve traffic flow. For instance, the city's Department of Transportation would adjust the timing of traffic signals, designate some lanes only for left turns and alter parking regulations at or around 10 major intersections. It would also begin a broader examination of traffic flow, identify intersections where right turns at red lights might be permitted and analyze the frequency of left turns, which slow traffic, on Hylan Boulevard, a major artery that runs along the island's southeastern shore.

The mayor also said the city would crack down on "poorly designed private construction" operations that block streets and sidewalks.

And two other recommendations represent indirect strategies for reducing traffic. The city's Economic Development Corporation would reactivate eight miles of rail track around the Arlington Yards freight terminal, which is expected to reduce the number of truck trips on the island by 100,000 a year, and the Police Department would increase its overtime budget for traffic enforcement on the island by 20 percent.

"This is a tremendous step in the right direction," said Jonathan R. Peters, an associate professor of finance at the College of Staten Island and the co-author of a 2004 study of the borough's transportation needs.

Dr. Peters, an economist, said that Staten Island was essential to the city's continued growth. "If we want to build and house more people, we have to provide the infrastructure to make that work," he said.

However, Dr. Peters said he was worried about inaction. For example, he said, replacement of the Goethals Bridge, listed yesterday as a long-term goal, was recommended in a 1987 study by the [Port Authority of New York and New Jersey](#), while a 1996 study by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority urged the construction of an Arthur Kill station on the Staten Island Railway, now listed as a medium-term goal. "We have a problem of paralysis by analysis," he said.

The announcement gave Mr. Bloomberg, a Republican who received significant support from Staten Island voters during his mayoral campaigns, an opportunity to surround himself with other Republican politicians during a news conference at the Sea View Hospital Rehabilitation Center and Home, a former tuberculosis sanitarium that now treats patients with Alzheimer's disease, dementia and brain injuries.

"I stand in amazement, having been in politics for so many years, that something could develop so quickly, in 60 days," said the borough president, James P. Molinaro.

Councilman Andrew J. Lanza, who suggested the creation of the task force, said traffic was "the most pressing quality of life issue" in the borough. James S. Oddo, the Council's minority leader, said, "Driving on Staten Island often leaves you with the sense of wanting to pull out your hair."

