



NJDOT to re-route 105 a.m. express buses onto SIE beginning April

goethals.jpg

(Staten Island Advance photo)

Judy L. Randall | randall@siadvance.com By **Judy L. Randall | randall@siadvance.com**

on February 21, 2014 at 4:15 PM, updated February 21, 2014 at 10:39 PM

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- More than a hundred Manhattan-bound New Jersey express buses will use the Staten Island Expressway via the Goethals Bridge during morning rush hour beginning mid-April, New Jersey Department of Transportation chief Jim Simpson confirmed to the Advance Friday.

The big-time re-route is NJDOT's response to the planned partial Pulaski Skyway shutdown in Jersey City.

"It won't be a problem," said Simpson of the impact on already-beleaguered borough motorists dealing with the massive Staten Island Expressway overhaul amid construction barriers, vanishing lane line designations and the onslaught of winter potholes.

"You can't shut down the Goethals Bridge to anyone," said Simpson, a former Island businessman and GOP fundraiser here. "They have a right to take the roadway. It is 105 buses, over a four-hour period, which is nothing."

The plan -- first revealed to the Advance exclusively by Rep. Michael Grimm Thursday -- calls for express buses from the Academy and Suburban bus companies to transport commuters between 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. over the Goethals, through Staten Island and Brooklyn and into Manhattan "to see if it helps them with transit times," said Simpson.

If it doesn't, Simpson said, another option may be devised.

But College of Staten Island professor Dr. Jonathan Peters, co-director of the Center for the Study of Staten Island, disagreed with Simpson's won't-be-a-problem assessment, noting: "He is saying, 'I am using New York roadways to solve my traffic problems.'"

Added Peters: "You are already asking a lot of the Staten Island Expressway on a daily basis. Buses are worse than cars because they accelerate and decelerate slower, they take up two to three spots on the road and then mix in the extra load into an already bad situation. It will take a ride on the expressway from really bad to extra-really bad, and getting worse. Any time you add extra traffic to the Staten Island Expressway is not good."

Simpson said Academy and Suburban came up with the number of buses that would use the SIE. He could not say what percentage that number represents of the morning express bus run from Jersey to Manhattan.

Spokesmen for the two bus companies did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

New York State Department of Transportation spokesman Beau Duffy said NJDOT did not inform NYSDOT of the bus re-route through Staten Island.

Duffy could not immediately say what the impact will be on Island drivers or timeline of the SIE reconstruction project. Both, he said, will be assessed.

Grimm (R-Staten Island/Brooklyn) told the Advance he was livid when he learned of the "sneaky" plan -- which he said could include "thousands" of motorists who might opt to drive through Staten Island over the eastbound toll-free Verrazano-Narrows Bridge if NJDOT's designated alternatives become over-burdened.

Grimm said he called Simpson to express his outrage, telling the Advance: "This plan is a complete and total slap in the face to Staten Islanders, who are once again getting the proverbial shaft."

The NJDOT alternatives for motorists include using the Route 1 & 9 truck route and the New Jersey Turnpike Eastern Spur and Turnpike Newark Bay-Hudson County Extension. They were devised by NJDOT in response to the multi-year \$1 billion Pulaski replacement project, slated to begin sometime in March, that will close the Skyway's northbound lanes.

Borough President James Oddo and Assemblyman Michael Cusick hunkered down in Oddo's Borough Hall office Thursday to, as Oddo put it, "assess the true nature of what is headed to Staten Island and what the impact will be."

For starters, they said they ascertained from relevant government agencies that no permitting for such an inter-state bus commute is needed.

"I can see no legal means to stop it," said Oddo.

"It's concerning whenever you talk about more traffic going through Staten Island," said Cusick (D-Mid-Island).

But Oddo said he believes the Pulaski shutdown will lead New Jersey Transit to look into fast ferries as an option, something Staten Island "could leverage," including a South Shore fast ferry "at an appropriate site" to speed Island commuters into Manhattan.

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