



Editorial: Time for Cuomo to call NJ out for plan to 'sabotage' New York Container Terminal

Staten Island Advance Editorial By Staten Island Advance Editorial

on September 17, 2012 at 6:47 AM, updated September 17, 2012 at 10:00 AM



Staten Island Advance photo

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Like a stubborn student who is caught in class with contraband and confronted by a teacher who demands he

surrender it, the Port Authority has been turning over its long-awaited analysis of the effect of increased tolls on business as little as possible at a time.

Do you get the feeling really doesn't want the public to get a look at the findings of the study it jointly commissioned with the New York Container Terminal?

For the better part of a year, the P.A. had claimed that it could not say anything about the study because it was not finished. Then, more recently, the agency claimed that though the research had been completed, it could not release the study because it was still in "draft form." It's been in draft form for months.

Finally, in response to a lawsuit filed by the rightly impatient Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis, a state Supreme Court judge ordered the P.A. to turn over the study to the lawmaker and to him, so he could decide whether or not to make it public.

The agency has been complying, grudgingly. For example, at first the authority gave Ms. Malliotakis raw data from a survey of thousands of truckers, but no indication of exactly what questions were asked to prompt their responses to the survey questions.



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So Judge Joseph Maltese had to specify that he wanted to see the Port Authority's conclusions as well as the raw data from the study.

But even with the findings arriving piecemeal, the assemblywoman, who has a background in statistics, and Staten Island transportation guru Dr. Jonathan Peters of the College of Staten Island have been able to mine some interesting facts from it.

For one thing, they found that 95 percent of the truckers doing business at the New York Container Terminal pay Port Authority bridge tolls, whereas just 20 percent of the truckers who use Global Container Terminal in Jersey City pay the same toll. The implications of this

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Gov. Andrew Cuomo needs to get involved before it's too late to save the New York Container Terminal and its hundreds of Staten Island jobs.

disparity for NYCT are profound.

Professor Peters said that means “nearly every single trucker going to the port on Staten Island is hitting that toll. . . . That is clearly an extra cost on their businesses.”

And at \$10 an axle (with E-ZPass at peak times) and heading up to \$18 an axle by 2015, that’s quite an extra cost.

In the meantime, on the other side of the ledger the Goethals Bridge, with \$86 million, and the Outerbridge Crossing, with \$75 million, have been highly productive cash cows for the P.A.

“It’s a lovely business to be in,” Professor Peters cracked.

Especially now that tolls are already way up and are going to get higher every year for the next three years.

Of the disproportionate effect of P.A. tolls on Staten Island businesses, Ms. Malliotakis said “This is a massive impact on our business community. This is a huge disparity.”

Indeed, NYCT, which partnered in the study, has said that without toll relief, it could be forced to close in a couple of years, costing Staten Island 550 jobs.

It’s galling that the data for this study was gathered in February and during the spring, yet the P.A. had not gotten around to fully releasing its conclusions as of last week.

Mr. Peters, who had no such trouble arriving at conclusions, said, “I don’t understand why a research report that has this kind of economic impact on the community can’t be released. This is a well-known dodge used by agencies.”

What’s the reason for the foot-dragging? Well, when the study comes out and it shows that the Port Authority’s high tolls put New York Container Terminal at a significant disadvantage, the P.A., whose mission is boosting the regional economy, will have no choice but to provide toll relief for NYCT.

Without the complete study to provide hard evidence of that need, the P.A. can stall.

Why?

Reportedly, the P.A. , the container terminal and various Staten Island elected officials, acting with Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s blessing, have reached an agreement to give discounts to trucks going to NYCT.

But it seems officials from New Jersey, which has an inordinate influence on Port Authority matters, have refused to go along with the agreement. And we can only conclude that P.A. officials don’t want that showdown to be made public. Hence their reluctance to make the study public.

Of course, if NYCT goes under because of high tolls that affect its business disproportionately, container terminals in New Jersey stand to pick up all that extra business. The New Jersey faction wouldn't mind that at all, we suspect.

It's time for Gov. Cuomo to come out from behind the scenes and call New Jersey officials on their quiet plot to sabotage NYCT.

And it's time for New York officials to reconsider the wisdom of having to rely on a large public authority that, by definition, is required to serve two masters. Clearly, that's not working out.

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