



## Traffic: A bleak future

**By Staten Island Advance Editorial**

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Traffic congestion on Staten Island couldn't get any worse than it is these days, right?

Wrong.

If you think it's bad now, just wait until all the (mostly young) people who are now lining up to take their driver's test get their licenses — and inevitably, their own cars.

And don't forget all the people who move here from other boroughs and other countries. They'll be out on the roads, too.

Traffic here, bad as it is now, is going to be an absolute nightmare in coming years, and there's not much anyone can do about it.

That's the only conclusion you can draw from an Advance analysis of Department of Motor Vehicles data, as reported in the Sunday Advance.

Driving schools' classes are packed with aspiring drivers and there's been a corresponding increase in the number of car registrations.

Officially, Staten Island has 487,400 people living in 174,000 households. But there are 263,600 vehicles registered in Richmond County — about 1.5 cars per household.

That represents a jump of 10 percent in registrations over a decade ago and the trend shows no signs of slowing down. Even with the worst recession since the Great Depression, the population of the borough continues to swell.

Some 13,200 new drivers got their licenses in the last year alone. Yes, the number includes some people who live in other New York counties who come to the more user-friendly Staten Island DMV office to get their licenses, but the growth in the rolls of licensed drivers here is still significant.

Experts are predicting a population growth of 35 percent over the next two decades, and, unless there's a massive investment in mass transit over that time, a high percentage of those people are going to have to drive to get around the borough.

Jonathan Peters, the College of Staten Island's resident transportation expert, said, "Picture Victory Boulevard with 35 percent more cars on it. Picture the Staten Island Expressway with 35 percent more cars."

He added, "This is one of the ones that haunts me. This is the reality we're heading toward, and we have to be prepared."

Professor Peters said that with the borough's current, sketchy mass transit system failing to meet people's transportation needs, the road net here simply won't be able to absorb the massive increase in traffic.

And still, the city encourages new residential development, including in areas such as the West Shore where local mass transit to take residents to stores and to visit relatives and friends is practically non-existent.

Make no mistake, there is no magic bullet to cure this looming problem, much as many people would like to believe a new expressway or wider streets might help. And the local improvements undertaken by the Department of Transportation at the urging of borough officials will help in the short term, as will the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's recent expansion of such traffic-alleviating measures as park-and-rides. But these won't solve the fundamental problem: Too many cars in a finite amount of space.

Professor Peters forecasts a bleak future, traffic-wise, absent a "radically different" approach to getting people from one place to another around here.

Unfortunately, the long-running saga of the far-from-certain North and West shore rail lines, which should have been in place decades ago, suggests that whatever is done to meet this challenge will be too little and too late.

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