

EDITORIAL

A huge boost to build transit

Region needs MTA to properly manage new billions from tolls and other sources

History might remember this as a revolutionary time for the region's transit and transportation system.

After months of uncertainty, the agreement pushed for in the new state budget by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to bring congestion pricing to New York City's busiest streets could revamp public transit and vehicular travel. If all goes well, the concept of tolling drivers who travel south of 61st Street in Manhattan could provide a stable source of revenue to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and reduce traffic in the central business district, while also reducing air pollution. Improvements to the commuter rails and the subway system would boost the city's economy, which, in turn, would be a boon for the region.

With other new revenue sources — like a real estate transfer tax on multimillion-dollar home purchases in New York City, a portion of internet sales tax, and added money from the state and city — the MTA's next five-year capital plan could be flush with as much as \$40 billion. And 10 percent of that could go to the Long Island Rail Road. On the wish list of what those funds — as much as \$4 billion — might bring: more than 200 new train cars, remodeled stations, added elevators, signal upgrades, and the holy grail, the full electrification of the Oyster Bay and Port Jefferson lines.

But this is still the MTA, and the first concern is that the bureaucratic behemoth will gobble up the money with little improvement. The MTA must shed its dysfunctional ways and become a streamlined, well-run agency.

Step one toward real change happened Friday: Cuomo announced that MTA President Pat Foye will become the authority's chairman. Foye is an innovator and a big proponent of reform at the authority. But beyond the new face at the top, the new state



LIRR could reap \$4 billion. Above, riders board a train at Penn Station.

LINDA ROSIER

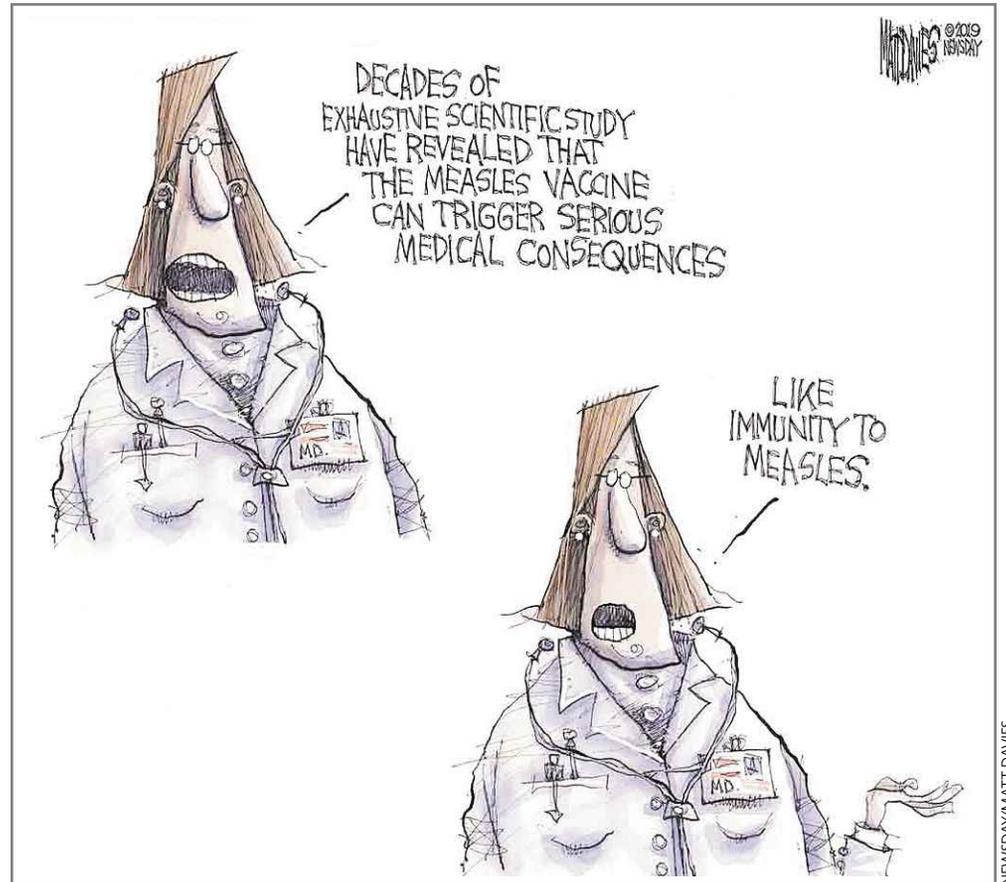
budget contains big operational changes. By June, a reorganization plan must be in place that should bring fresh faces to the organization and remove unnecessary layers of middle management. The ability to bar contractors who are over budget or delayed in their work from doing business with the state again is quite an incentive to keep things moving. So is the design-build requirement, a more streamlined contracting process. A review unit to take a harder look at big projects could help Cuomo and Foye in one of their most important tasks: pushing East Side Access, the LIRR's path to Grand Central Terminal, to completion as quickly as possible.

Step two, of course, is making sure the tolling will work. Some details, such as how much the tolls will be and whether there will be exemptions or changes to the pricing on weekends and overnight, are being left to a new board to figure out. That's so no one politician can get stuck with the blame, but it also makes no one accountable. The point of a restricted transit zone is to change behavior; it has worked in major cities around the world. The board must analyze the demand for exemptions but keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to reduce traffic and raise revenue.

This is a big moment. Make it a game-changer.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

No driver licenses for people here illegally

Driving is a privilege, not a right. The March 24 news article "Pushing for driver's licenses" cited the Siena College poll in March in which 61 percent of New Yorkers oppose granting driver's licenses for immigrants in the country without permission.

Let voters decide by placing the issue on the ballot in the next election. This would eliminate pandering to certain groups by politicians.

Alan Newman,
Bellmore

Offering a New York State driver's license to people in the country without authorization defies all logic and would aid and abet an illegal activity. If you are not allowed to be here, how can you be al-

lowed to legally drive here?
Ronald Enners,
West Babylon

Debate over new pipe for natural gas

National Grid's shameful fearmongering about gas supply shortages flies in the face of the facts ["National Grid gas warning," News, March 28].

We don't need to increase our reliance on fossil fuels, nor should we. The proposed Williams Transco pipeline would ship fracked gas through New York Bay, endangering our communities and worsening climate change.

The science is clear: We must move away from fossil fuels. By investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy, we can. The Cuomo administration should use its authority to block this dangerous and

unnecessary project.
Eric Weltman,
Brooklyn

Editor's note: The writer is an organizer with Food & Water Watch, an advocacy organization.

Environmental groups argue that expansion of fossil fuel-based energy sources would buck a statewide trend toward renewable sources. That "trend" was legislated, mandated and funded by the government.

Do these environmental groups have a viable alternative to natural gas right now? Or are they doing what they do best: making lawyers richer with litigation, making costs greater and delaying progress of gas expansion?

We need gas now and energy suppliers are willing to invest \$1 billion. Let them build!

Tommy Gregoretti,
Oceanside