

WEEKEND SERVICE ON THE MONTCLAIR-BOONTON LINE
How it Came About – A Personal Recollection
by Jack May

As Montclair-Boonton Line Liaison of the *New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP)*, George Musser of Glen Ridge assembled a group of rail transportation advocates to try to bring about the operation of weekend service on the Montclair-Boonton Line of New Jersey Transit. Among the methodologies to be employed was the creation of a petition urging the inauguration of such service, signed by members of the public who live along the route. This document would be circulated for signatures at various public venues in the area, including the Farmer's Market, held each Saturday at the Walnut Street railroad station in Montclair. Because Phil Craig and I are residents of Montclair and active members of *NJ-ARP*, George contacted us, and we, along with other *NJ-ARP* members, agreed to staff the table and seek signatures.

On June 22, 2008, during my tenure at *NJ-ARP*'s booth at the Farmer's Market, the Mayor-elect of Montclair, Jerry Fried, came by and we struck up a conversation regarding the goal of reducing automobile traffic to benefit the environment and why good passenger rail service was one of the ways to accomplish that goal. As a result of that meeting, and further conversation about my interest in improving Montclair's public transportation system for the benefit of its residents, I was appointed to the Township's Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC) during the summer of 2008.

Meanwhile, George wanted to move the project along and we had several meetings of *NJ-ARP* advocates regarding strategy. Because of the experience Phil Craig and I had working with former Assemblywoman Rose Heck on *NJ-ARP*'s Light Rail Panel, and the success we were having on the issue of extending the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Transit system to Tenafly, I suggested we take a lesson from the knowledge we acquired. Basically I indicated that our efforts would have a greater chance of success if we try to get active participation from public officials who were sympathetic to the cause. This would generate widespread support for the project, which would also make a credible impact on the media. I indicated that I would suggest such an approach to the PTAC and see if I could obtain the assistance of the committee.

A SHORT HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE RAIL LINE

New Jersey Transit (NJT) operates nine (9) rail lines in New Jersey and only one had no weekend service, the Montclair-Boonton (M-B) line—in essence, the last “commuter line” run by NJT. When the highly contentious Montclair Connection (linking the former Montclair branch with the Greenwood Lake-Boonton line) was built, NJT agreed to the wishes of community leaders to postpone the operation of weekend service for several years, as many in the town felt that it would take some time for residents near the tracks to get used to the large increase in number of trains on weekdays. [Weekend trains had not operated in Montclair for over 40 years, except for experimental Saturday service between 1972-81, well before the inauguration of through, one-seat rides directly to New York City had begun.]

The connection immediately became a great success, allowing passengers from the six (6) stations within Montclair, plus two in Bloomfield, one in Glen Ridge, and another in Little Falls a one-seat ride to the heart of Manhattan, via the Midtown Direct route. As a result many residents along the line increasingly began to press for weekend service.

Year after year, NJT was contacted about weekend service and the *Montclair Times* duly reported the reasons NJT claimed that such operation could not be accomplished at the time. Among the reasons were reconstruction of the Broad Street station in Newark, closure of one of the two tubes of the existing Hudson River tunnels for repairs every weekend (thereby reducing trans-Hudson capacity), the planned weekend reconstruction of the Bloomfield Avenue bridge over the electrified tracks, and finally, a serious budget crunch. The startup date (actually year) was continually getting pushed back further and further.

Local Forces Coalesce

The Montclair PTAC was supportive of my suggestion, and invited New Jersey Transit to address this and other issues. I listened as NJT representatives indicated that no solid date could be promised, not even a specific year. At the next meeting I expressed my extreme disappointment, stating NJT's stance was unacceptable. A consensus of the committee agreed that we should try to enlist aid from Trenton. The PTAC set up a meeting with Montclair resident Amy Rosen, a transit advocate and former member of the NJT Board, to discuss how best to accomplish this goal. But with only generalities and no specific course of action planned, I decided to take the reins and draft a viable approach to pressure NJT to take action on the issue--through the media and its political base. With this concept in mind another meeting of the M-B committee of *NJ-ARP* was organized, and we decided that because NJT appeared to have little or no interest in commencing weekend service it was time to try to use political pressure to move them. In addition to me, among the *NJ-ARP* members at this meeting (and previous and subsequent ones) were George Musser, Joe Hearn, Geoff Anderson, Jishnu Mukerji, Phil Craig, and Len Resto.

We spent a great deal of time gaining a consensus for the length and breadth of the service we would propose. Among the options discussed for the western terminal were Hackettstown, Dover and Montclair State University (MSU), and we all had opinions about whether we should push for Midtown Direct service or be content with operation to Hoboken. After much discussion we decided to concentrate on getting weekend service started on the lower, electrified portion of the line, as far as Montclair State University station in Little Falls. We would press NJT to extend the existing bi-hourly (every other hour) shuttle trains that ran between Hoboken and Newark to Montclair State University, and increase their frequency to hourly. We felt that this was the least expensive option for meaningful service, and believed that once these trains began operating there would be a demand to extend them further west to Dover, and perhaps all the way to Hackettstown.

I suggested we enlist the aid of Mayor Fried to spearhead the movement and line up support at all levels of government. Recognizing the value of weekend service for the residents of Montclair (and the entire region) and approving of the general strategy to be employed, Mayor Fried readily agreed after I approached him by email (Appendix 1). As a result members of our group had several meetings with the Mayor, developing a comprehensive strategy and assigning specific tasks. We decided to develop a list of public officials in the area, from the local level (mayors) to the state (assembly members, state senators) to the federal level (congressmen and U. S. senators), plus the county executive and the president of Montclair State University, to gain their support for this initiative. In order to diffuse as many NJT arguments against inaugurating such service, we created a document so that all participants would stay on subject and would present a solid, unified message, without any deviation. This "Talking Points" document (Appendix 2) identified the exact

scope of the service (rather than a general proposal) and outlined the principal reasons why weekend service was needed by the residents of the communities along the line.

We believed we could get good media coverage and obtain serious consideration for this initiative by having a small group of stakeholders appear in front of NJT's Board of Directors at one of its monthly meetings (Appendix 3). To prepare for this Mayor Fried would send the public officials the document and would ask them, via email, letter and/or telephone, to write to the NJT Board to inaugurate weekend service, selecting their arguments from the bullet points. The Mayor would then present these letters to the Board and the media. George Musser and I wrote a press release describing the content of the testimony and letters to be presented, which also specified the reasons for the creation of weekend service (Appendix 4).

Mayor Fried was able to obtain letters from the public officials. The Board Meeting was held on June 10, 2009. In addition to Mayor Fried, a commuter who wanted weekend service and a Montclair State student spoke eloquently in favor of the project. We got great media coverage and the Executive Director of NJT, Richard Sarles, responded by offering to work with the Mayor to see if weekend service could be created, but emphasized the fact that there was no money in the budget.

A meeting with NJT personnel to work out what could be accomplished occurred on July 13. Representing the advocates were Mayor Fried, PTAC chairman Don Zief, George Musser and me. At that meeting NJT agreed to extend the operation of its bi-hourly (every two hours) weekend shuttle service between Hoboken and Newark to Bay Street rather than hourly to MSU, as that could be accomplished at virtually no additional cost to the agency, since only a small amount of fuel would be needed (as the trains would be electric) plus the wear and tear to equipment and track would be minimal. We pressed for our plan and asked NJT for costs of the additional crews that would be required for implementation of service to MSU. We also indicated that Don would poll the PTAC to determine whether we thought the NJT proposal would benefit the town.

[In addition, there was a discussion about operations once the Bloomfield Avenue bridge project got underway. We felt that diesel trains could be substituted for the electric multiple units during this period, but NJT indicated that all power would be cut, including what was needed for signals and grade crossing protection. Even though there are no crossings between Bay Street and Newark, NJT still indicated that trains would have to proceed slowly and stop at every dark signal, where the train operator would then telephone for permission to pass them. This would more than double the amount of time it would take to operate the service. NJT indicated that because of the way that the Montclair line had been electrified, it was impossible to break the power supply in two: below Bay Street and above. That was very discouraging, but we decided we would try to find a solution for that later, since no date for construction to begin had yet been decided.]

The major point in favor of accepting NJT's offer was that it would be a start and at a later date service could be appreciably expanded. The points against it included: It would not serve most residents of Montclair; it would not serve MSU, a major source of ridership; most weekday M-B passengers came from the other 5 stations in town, which for many are in walking distance--thus these residents would have to drive to Bay Street if they wanted to take advantage of the service; and if, because of these reasons, patronage would turn out to be low, NJT might indicate that there is no demand for weekend service and oppose extending the service to MSU in the future. While agreeing that there were negatives, the consensus of the PTAC membership was that this was a

major breakthrough; that we shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth and do our best to make it work.

Concurrent with this, Phil Craig and I reached out for help to prove that the service plan Mayor Fried submitted to the NJT Board could be accomplished at a reasonable price and to determine its actual cost. With some *pro bono* consulting services from an expert in the industry with vast knowledge of NJT operations, we came up with a timetable and crew schedule for its implementation. The result indicated that with the addition of only one more crew, hourly service (except for a single midday two-hour gap) could be operated on Saturdays, while bi-hourly service could run on Sundays. We estimated that this would cost around \$270,000 per year, which included our estimate of payroll benefits.

Mayor Fried met with representatives from Congressman Pascrell's office; Susan Cole, the President of Montclair State; Richard Sarles and Bill Duggan of NJT; and Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo on September 23 in Joe D's office, for one last effort to try to get NJT to agree to implement service to Montclair State. But that did not happen, despite an impassioned plea by Ms. Cole. According to the Mayor, Rich Sarles was very persuasive, indicating there was absolutely positively no money available for any new services or service improvements, and this was accepted by all the public officials present. (At this meeting Rich Sarles stated our original proposal would involve the addition of 2 crews with a total cost of \$500,000. We felt this vindicated our computations, as the NJT Executive Director based his estimate on having service run every hour on Sundays, and his estimate for costs ran some \$20,000 per crew per year below ours.)

On Sept. 30, 2009, New Jersey Transit held a short press conference at Bay Street announcing that bi-hourly weekend service between Hoboken and Bay Street would begin on Sunday, November 8. Rich Sarles made the announcement on camera and Mayor Fried plus the mayors of Glen Ridge and Bloomfield spoke about the importance of this initiative. The NJT press release also included a statement from Governor Corzine, almost mimicking our documents, indicating that weekend rail service "will take cars off the road, increase travel access to shopping, recreation and entertainment venues and create economic opportunities for our citizens." Mayor Fried was quoted as stating that "this is a great step forward, laying the groundwork for complete service that will link Montclair State University to the rest of the city and points east." He further stated that "eventually, we are going to get full service. Once funding becomes available we're pretty close to the top of the list."

This victory could never have been accomplished without Mayor Fried. He carried the ball and provided credibility to the entire proposal. There was no way that NJT could have ignored him. He worked very hard for the initiative's acceptance by contacting Steve Dilts, New Jersey Commissioner of Transportation and Chairman of the Board of New Jersey Transit, as well all the other public officials who supported the initiative, and arranged face-to-face meetings with New Jersey Transit.

But it is also true that this would not have happened without our group of dedicated transportation advocates, who devised the methodology and provided the impetus to move the idea along, and then created all of the supporting documentation, which included the detailed reasons why weekend service was important to the health of the communities. And it was we who brought forth the concept of extending the existing Hoboken-Newark shuttles to Montclair. (It also didn't hurt that this is a statewide election year.)

COMMENTARY

I am optimistic that weekend service will come to the entire Montclair-Boonton Line eventually. Our immediate goal was hourly service between Montclair State and Hoboken with a user-friendly timed transfer at Newark for passengers heading to and from Manhattan. We did not get this. While our accomplishment may be a great victory for the people of Bloomfield and Glen Ridge, plus some in the lower part of Montclair, it is definitely not very useful for the vast majority of current users of weekday rail service in Montclair, many of whom walk to and from the other 5 stations in that town.

Could we have gotten service to MSU at this time? We will never know. It is unfortunate that Jerry Fried's last meeting with New Jersey Transit did not end differently. I would have preferred that a persuasive case would have been made to continue the dialog and allow Phil Craig and me to present NJT and the political leaders with our analysis. This would have shown how MSU Saturday service could be operated hourly (with Sunday service bi-hourly) by the addition of only one crew, resulting in a maximum out-of-pocket expense of only \$250,000--less fares collected. For 104 days of service, this would mean that in order to break even revenues averaging \$2,500 per day, or an average of approximately 250 fare-paying round-trip passenger fares (as opposed to monthly ticketholders) would have to be collected per day. I believe this might be possible and would definitely have been arguable. On the other hand, NJT kept emphasizing it could not provide any funding for the service, but they would have had to answer us. Unfortunately we lost the chance to make that proposal at this time.

We made it possible for Governor Corzine to get credit for this "rump" weekend service without having him expend state funds. It was a win-win situation for him. Public dissatisfaction with a Bay Street solution might have given his advisors second thoughts, but it is difficult to see how that could have been arranged. When I look at the decision to extend Hudson-Bergen LRT service to Tenafly I see a parallel. The press conference in that case indicated (at least to me and Phil Craig) that the right decision was made, but based on the wrong reasons. Nowhere was it mentioned that the electric service would provide good public transportation for 3 to 5 times as many people as the diesel shuttle alternative. Clearly this was irrelevant to the politicians. Correspondingly, this was also true for operating service to MSU rather than Bay Street, as the Governor would gain no further political advantage by instituting weekend service along the full line. The public need was largely ignored. We must remember that in the future and keep our minds on the political implications of all possible scenarios.

However, our ultimate goal is the operation of Midtown Direct service on the Montclair-Boonton line, as history has shown that only a one-seat ride to New York will attract a large amount of ridership. This will depend upon another round of discussions with a recalcitrant group of NJT officials, recalcitrant because I don't see weekend reconstruction work on the Hudson River tunnels coming to an end in the near future. But on the other hand, I do believe there is sufficient capacity for an additional train in each direction through the tunnels each hour. I suspect this argument should wait for the completion of the Bloomfield Avenue bridge project and the creation of the Quiet Zone in Montclair.

The fight will have to be continued in 2010 or 2011.

I hope this document will provide some impetus to a MOM campaign. Particularly, perhaps one of the alternatives should be adopted by ***NJ-ARP*** and an alliance be made with credible politicians that truly want the service and will fight for it.

Appendix 1
LETTER TO MAYOR FRIED TO GET THE BALL ROLLING

Dear Jerry:

I attended a New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers meeting yesterday, where the subject of weekend service on the Montclair-Boonton line was featured. There is a committee, headed by George Musser of Glen Ridge, that feels now is the time to push hard for such service, specifically hourly trains between Montclair State University and Hoboken, each connecting at Newark with Midtown Direct service to and from Penn Station, New York. The reason Hoboken is being chosen as the end point rather than New York City is because of the forthcoming Bloomfield Avenue bridge reconstruction. NJT has repeatedly indicated that electric power will have to be shut off during weekends to protect construction workers, and diesel locomotives cannot run through the tunnel to New York City.

As you probably know *NJ-ARP* has accumulated a petition supporting this with over 1,000 signatures, gathered from many civic and commercial events, like the weekly Farmers Market in Montclair. I think we all agree that there is a great deal of grass-roots support for weekend service.

As a result *NJ-ARP* wants to accomplish this by obtaining a certain amount of pressure on the NJT Board of Directors from elected officials. And it feels from its own experience that the formal board meetings held each month by NJT's Board is an excellent venue for the inauguration of such a process. These meetings are normally held in NJT's Newark headquarters on the second Wednesday of each month; thus the next meetings will be on May 13 and June 10.

At each such meeting NJT allows members of the public to address the board on items of interest. In the near past such presentations have been made by such disparate organizations as: representatives of various casino hotels have addressed the Board on the need for luxury train service to Atlantic City; the rail unions, UTU and ATU, have addressed the Board on safety issues; various associations, such as committees supporting the needs of Senior and Disabled passengers, have addressed the Board on the need to improve access to transit for their constituencies; and the NAACP and minority trade associations have spoken to the need for diversity in awarding construction contracts for the ARC Trans-Hudson Tunnel. In the last case Assemblyman Green spoke and received assurances from the Board of that it will obey all statutes regarding this, including adherence to "the spirit of the law." In each of these cases a multiple number of different executives and spokespersons addressed the Board on different aspects of the programs they wished NJT to support and/or inaugurate. In other words these were not any isolated comments, but a well-planned assault on the issues by a plethora of supporters.

Thus, to stay in this vein, *NJ-ARP* plans to try to get the Mayors of Bloomfield, Glen Ridge, Montclair and Little Falls to speak in favor of weekend service to and from Hoboken, each from a slightly different prospective, such as:

- Fairness to constituents and riders (the Montclair-Boonton line is the only one of NJT's rail service that does not have service on weekends--riders pay the same weekly and monthly rates as those on other lines, but only get five days of train service each week.)

- Economic desirability to the communities (to get increased activity at leisuretime locales, such as parks, restaurants, entertainment venues, etc)
- Environmental reasons (offer the public an alternative to the automobile for their journeys, thereby reducing traffic, both in their own communities and through the underwater road crossings to and from New York City. Also, bringing down the carbon footprint.)

In addition, a small number of MSU students and current regular commuters could weigh in after the mayors, also asking NJT for weekend service. One or two rail advocates could also speak, to address issues of a more technical nature, such as the feasibility of such service, relating the fact that weekend service to Hoboken with diesel locomotives is currently being maintained on other NJT lines that are undergoing current major bridge construction, including the reconstruction of Route 46 over the mainline railroad tracks in Clifton.

Directly after the board meeting, our State Senators and Assemblypersons in Trenton, such as Nia Gill, would contact Stephen Dilts, Chairman of the NJT Board and State Commissioner of Transportation, urging the implementation of weekend service.

I volunteered to write this letter to you in order to give you the opportunity to organize the political portion of this effort. Montclair has always been perceived as a community in the forefront of environmental and “people-oriented” initiatives, and the publicity would be very beneficial to us. We have always been a green community creating green initiatives, and there are more users of Montclair-Boonton rail service in Montclair than in any other community on the line. Thus before **NJ-ARP** members living in the other communities contact their mayors, I’d like to determine if you would like to spearhead this movement.

If you want to pass on being the leader of this project, I would still urge you to agree to appear before the NJT Board on either of the two Wednesday morning dates. **NJ-ARP** believes having at least 3 of the 4 mayors making short statements supporting the operation of weekend service would make a very great impression on the members of the Board. The specific day would be decided by a consensus of your mayoral group.

NJ-ARP has indicated that it could prepare drafts of the statements, which you and the other Mayors would then modify to suit your own style and needs. The organization would also try to have members of New Jersey’s media present at the Board meeting (usually only reporters from Gannett--Asbury Park Press and the Bergen Record attend, but representatives from New Jersey 12, NJM and WBGO could be invited as well, as a news story showing cooperation on a specific issue between various municipalities in would be a good news story.

NJ-ARP is holding off on having some of its members contact the other mayors until you let me know if you wish to be the driving force behind this initiative. I would like to discuss this with you soon, as I will be leaving for a 10-day vacation in Arizona and Texas on Tuesday morning. So please let me know about any questions you may have and perhaps we can discuss this further before then.

Jack

Appendix 2 TALKING POINTS

WEEKEND SERVICE ON THE MONTCLAIR-BOONTON LINE

First Speaker: Today we, a delegation of public officials from the town and counties on the Montclair-Boonton line between Newark and Little Falls, have come before you to ask for the implementation of weekend rail service. We and our constituents would like New Jersey Transit to begin operating trains between Hoboken and Montclair State University every hour on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays. This service would be operated using diesel locomotives and push-pull trains, and would make convenient connections with Midtown Direct electric trains at Newark Broad Street station.

For the last five years the public in our towns have been awaiting the start of weekend rail service. During that period New Jersey Transit has told us to be patient, “service will begin next year as soon as construction projects, like Newark Broad Street, are completed.” The latest excuses are due to 1) the lack of slots in Amtrak’s Hudson River tunnels because of ongoing weekend maintenance, and 2) the dangers involved with electrified catenary during the forthcoming construction project on the Bloomfield Avenue bridge.

We have come up with a proposal that obviates each of these objections, as the weekend service we propose NJT operate will not run through Amtrak’s tunnels, and diesel locomotives would be used, allowing power to be shut off during construction. Thus the weekend bridge construction will be no different than many other DOT bridge projects, for example, the reconstruction of the Route 46 bridge over NJT’s mainline to Paterson, where frequent weekend service is maintained.

Assorted Reasons for Weekend Service:

The regular commuters from our towns want it.

Many do not work from Mondays to Fridays. The work schedules of many of our residents who are employed in New York or on the Hudson River waterfront are not the traditional Monday to Friday, for example, Saturday to Wednesday.

Many want to use their Monthly tickets more than 5 days per week. Commuter tickets are expensive. Many of our residents want to use their Monthly tickets to travel on weekends at no extra cost, just like their compatriots who live in adjacent communities, like Clifton, Passaic, East Orange and Orange, as well as in the rest of the state. On occasion, workers have to go to their offices on a Saturday or Sunday.

The health of our towns require it.

Discrimination. Many people in our towns believe they are being discriminating against, as ALL other New Jersey rail lines offer weekend service. They feel they are just as entitled to weekend service as other people in New Jersey.

Real Estate Values. Real Estate Brokers in our towns believe they can sell homes more easily if 7-day-per-week rail service is offered.

Environmental Benefits. Weekend service will remove automobiles from our streets on Saturdays and Sundays, when people are outside. The reduction in polluting automobiles will allow for a greener atmosphere, as well as provide more safety for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Improved Quality of Life.

Leisure Time travel. Weekends are generally leisure times. Many of our residents have friends and relatives who live in New York City or along the Hudson River Waterfront and would like to visit with them. Weekend service will make it easier for travel to and from these venues without the bother of using automobiles.

Spur of the moment traveling. Trips that could be made as opportunities present themselves. When residents have to worry about automobile congestion or parking, they become limited in their opportunities to make the best use of their time.

Business Benefits for Local Merchants. Weekend service will attract more people to shopping and entertainment locations in our towns, including restaurants, theatres and retail stores. Venues such as the Wellmont Theatre and its surrounding services would benefit from weekend service. This would also benefit those without automobiles, which include many who reside at schools, colleges and universities in the area.

Montclair State University. *The appeal of Montclair State University would be enhanced if it could indicate that it has full time access by rail to New York City and connections throughout the State. This is especially important on Sundays, when students who go home for the weekend return.*

Favoring Connecticut residents over those from New Jersey (new addition). New Jersey Transit has announced the inauguration of service to the Meadowlands from Connecticut on certain Sundays. This rail service will operate directly to the Meadowlands from Hoboken and/or Secaucus. Why will train riders from Connecticut, who will change trains at Secaucus, be able to ride to the Meadowlands for Sunday events, but residents of Bloomfield, Glen Ridge, Montclair and Little Falls will not?

Appendix 3
E-MAIL MESSAGE TO PREPARE FOR BOARD MEETING

If we were to draw a PERT chart for this project, the confirmation of the date based on the mayors' schedules would be the most important item. Jerry will find that out through conversations with the other mayors and other political leaders. Once that is established, and it is determined who will attend, then we can move ahead with other speakers, media, etc.

OTHER SPEAKERS:

Commuters (Nick Lewis or Jerry Fried)
 People who want to use the train on weekends
 People who want equity
Business People (Nick Lewis)
Montclair State Students (Joe Hearn)

As Nick indicated we don't want too many people saying the same things.

MEDIA: (George Musser)

Montclair Times, Bloomfield Independent Press and Glen Ridge Paper
Newark Star-Ledger (Bergen Record) Tom Davis
Gannett Newspapers (Asbury Park Press) Larry Higgs
WBGO (88.3) Doug Doyle
News 12 New Jersey
NJN (Channels 23/50)
Local New York City Channels (2, 4, 5, 7, 9 and 11)

POLITICAL LEADERS (Jerry Fried)

Mayor of Montclair	Jerry Fried
Mayor of Bloomfield	Ray McCarthy
Mayor of Glen Ridge	Peter Hughes
Mayor of Little Falls	Michael DeFrancisci
Essex County Executive	Joseph DiVincenzo
President of Montclair State	Susan Cole
Mayor of Newark	Corey Booker
Assembly Member	Thomas Giblin
Assembly Member	Sheila Oliver
State Senator	Nia Gill

George will be *NJ-ARP*'s [stealth] point man in my absence (with Geoff as backup), but we should all try to stay in touch with progress information.

We've got a good story to tell, so I hope we don't have to deal with unanticipated events.

Jack

Appendix 4
PRESS RELEASE – MAYOR FRIED’S TESTIMONY AT NJT BOARD MEETING

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

George Musser: (201) 936-0396 (973) 746-0757

**OFFICIALS AND RESIDENTS CALL FOR WEEKEND TRAIN SERVICE ON
MONTCLAIR-BOONTON LINE**

NEWARK, June 10 — Montclair Mayor Jerry Fried spoke before the NJ Transit Board of Directors this morning to advocate weekend train service on the Montclair-Boonton train line to serve the communities of Newark, Bloomfield, Glen Ridge, Montclair and Little Falls. He presented letters in support of weekend service from the local congressional delegation, state legislators, and mayors of towns along the line.

Among the supporters are U. S. Senators Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez; Congressional Representatives Bill Pascrell and Donald Payne; State Senator Nia Gill; Assembly Representatives Sheila Oliver and Tom Giblin; Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo; Bloomfield Mayor Raymond McCarthy; Glen Ridge Mayor Peter Hughes; Little Falls Mayor Mike DeFrancisci; and Montclair State University President Susan Cole. Newark Mayor Cory Booker has also provided verbal support.

“This important step has been ‘coming soon’ for over a decade and the time for it is right now,” Fried says. “We have many residents who work on weekends, students who would use the service, and others who would love the convenience and cost savings of leaving their cars at home to travel into New York and Newark.”

The Montclair-Boonton line is the only train line in the New York Metropolitan Area that does not operate on Saturdays and Sundays, causing widespread inconvenience. NJ Transit initially promised to begin weekend service in 2007 but, citing a shifting set of reasons, has continually pushed back the initiation of service.

Fried presented a proposal that calls for the inauguration of hourly weekend service between Montclair State University and Hoboken using diesel trains, thereby circumventing all of NJ Transit’s stated reasons for indefinite postponement of the service. To address the concern that electrical power has to be shut off on the line on weekends during upcoming work to replace the Bloomfield Avenue rail bridge, he proposed that weekend service would initially use diesel locomotives. In addressing the concern that Hudson River Tunnel capacity is limited on weekends because of an ongoing reconstruction project, the proposed service would initially operate to Hoboken with timed connections at Newark Broad Street station so that riders could easily transfer to Manhattan-bound Midtown Direct trains.

In a letter to Richard A. Sarles, Executive Director of NJ Transit, Senator Lautenberg urges that the operator of New Jersey's rail passenger service "positively consider requests to institute [weekend] service." He notes that "this service would offer important options for area residents to utilize mass transit for various activities such as work or entertainment and help us meet our goals of getting cars off the road."

The lack of weekend service has proved to be a major nuisance for commuters working on the weekend; residents visiting cultural attractions in Manhattan and Newark; Montclair State University students; and city residents doing the reverse trip to visit friends, family or attractions in area towns. And by encouraging driving, it is more difficult for the state to meet its environmental goals.

"My work often necessitates me to meet with clients on weekends in the city," says Kevin Allen, a graphic designer living in Montclair. "It would dramatically increase my productivity if I could commute in on NJ Transit on weekends."

Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. writes: "Having the service will be of benefit in plethora of ways – from allowing visitors easy access to the communities to visit friends or family, to attend a Montclair event or sample a Township restaurant." He adds: "The ongoing delays of weekend service must be addressed, for it also impacts the overall value of the Townships' real estate – especially when other County towns do have these upgrades."

In her supporting letter, Oliver writes: "I am besieged by correspondences and calls from constituents urging me, as their legislative representative, to strongly urge NJ Transit to institute a limited form of weekend service on the Boonton line as soon as possible."

Summarizing the proposal, Donald Payne, who represents the Tenth District in the U. S. Congress writes, "Everyone wins with the expansion of service and this plan should move from discussion to action."

[Attached is the proposal in detail and a comprehensive discussion of the issue. Permission can be given for it to be used as an op-ed article.]

Appendix 4a
ATTACHMENT TO PRESS RELEASE

WEEKEND SERVICE ON THE MONTCLAIR-BOONTON LINE

Mayor Fried's Proposal for the Implementation of Weekend Rail Service: New Jersey Transit to begin operating trains between Hoboken and Montclair State University every hour on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays. This service would be operated using diesel locomotives and push-pull trains, and would make convenient connections with Midtown Direct electric trains at Newark Broad Street station.

Background: For the last five years the public in our towns have been awaiting the start of weekend rail service. During that period New Jersey Transit has told us to be patient, saying (to paraphrase) that "service will begin next year as soon as construction projects, like Newark Broad Street, are completed." The latest excuses are (1) the lack of slots in Amtrak's Hudson River tunnels because of ongoing weekend maintenance, and (2) the dangers involved with electrified catenary during the forthcoming construction project on the Bloomfield Avenue bridge.

We have developed a proposal that obviates each of these objections, as the weekend service we propose NJT operate will not run through Amtrak's tunnels, and would use diesel locomotives, allowing power to be shut off during construction. Thus the weekend bridge construction will be no different than many other DOT bridge projects, for example, the reconstruction of the Route 46 bridge over NJT's mainline to Paterson, where frequent weekend service is maintained.

Summary of Arguments in Favor of Weekend Service:

Need and Desire of Residents and Communities

- It is more than a convenience
- Many commute to jobs on the weekend
- Equity: Monthly commuters already pay for it
- Easier to host family members and visitors from other communities
- Better to have teenagers take the train rather than drive
- Allows pre-teens to go to New York safely
- Access to Newark Airport and both Amtrak and other New Jersey Transit trains
- Access to Meadowlands events and commercial offerings
- Access to Newark attractions: e.g. PAC, Bears & Eagles Stadium, Library, Prudential Center

Health of Community as a place to live (Quality of Life)

- Increase in Home Values
- Environmental Benefits
- Retain Empty Nesters and Seniors who need easy access to New York and other venues
- Mobility for Senior Citizens
- Mobility for people who cannot drive or afford autos
- Reduce traffic on local roads and highways leading to New York

Increase safety for visitors returning home after meals and drinks

Promotes the health of Community's tax base (restaurants, entertainment, retail businesses)

Convenient access by patrons from other towns and cities
Encourages residents of New York to come out
Encourages students at Montclair State to utilize offerings of nearby communities
Supports Bloomfield Center Redevelopment
Among the venues accessible by rail
 Montclair Art Museum
 Farmers Market
 Wellmont Theatre
 Montclair State theatres and stadiums
 Bloomfield entertainment venue
 Large number of restaurants and clubs

Equity

Monthly ticketholders already pay for it
It's the only line in the entire New York Metropolitan area that lacks weekend service
We were promised that weekend service will begin 7 years after the Montclair Connection
built

Miscellaneous Points

Increase use of MSU and Bay St. parking lots
NJT currently moves equipment along the line on weekends

Detailed Expansion of Certain of these Items:

The regular commuters from our towns want it.

Many do not work only from Mondays to Fridays. Many work on weekends. Many of our residents who are employed in New York, Newark or on the Hudson River waterfront do not work on traditional Monday-to-Friday schedules, for example, Saturday to Wednesday. And many of those who work on a traditional schedule have to go to their offices on a Saturday or Sunday.

Many want to use their Monthly tickets more than five days per week. Commuter tickets are expensive. Many of our residents want to use them to travel on weekends at no extra cost, just like their compatriots who live in adjacent communities, like Clifton, Passaic, East Orange and Orange, as well as in the rest of the state. On occasion, workers have to go to their offices on a Saturday or Sunday.

Many would like alternatives to expensive airport taxis. Weekend train service would provide convenient access to Newark Airport and Amtrak trains on Saturdays and Sundays.

Many people reverse-commute from Newark and New York on weekends. Note how crowded the buses are on Saturdays and Sundays.

The viability of our towns require it.

Equity. Many people in our towns believe they are being discriminating against, as ALL other New Jersey rail lines (and indeed all other rail lines in the Tri-State area) offer weekend service. They feel they are just as entitled to weekend service as other people in New Jersey.

Real Estate Values. Real Estate Brokers in our towns believe they can sell homes and rent apartments more easily if 7-day-per-week rail service is offered.

Environmental Benefits.

Traffic. Weekend service will remove automobiles from our streets on Saturdays and Sundays, when people are outside. The reduction in polluting automobiles will allow for a greener atmosphere, as well as provide more safety for bicyclists and pedestrians.

State environmental goals. Our towns would like to contribute to New Jersey's goals for reducing our carbon footprint, and mass transit provides one solution.

Improved Quality of Life.

Leisure Time travel. Not only do our residents want to avail themselves of leisure opportunities in New York and Newark, they have friends and relatives who live in New York City or along the Hudson River waterfront who would like to visit them. Weekend service will make it easier for travel to and from these venues without the bother and danger of using automobiles.

Spur of the moment traveling. Trips that could be made as opportunities present themselves. When residents have to worry about automobile congestion or parking, they become limited in their opportunities to make the best use of their time.

Access to Meadowlands. NJT has announced service to the Meadowlands from Connecticut on certain Sundays. This rail service will operate directly to the Meadowlands from Hoboken or Secaucus. Why should train riders from Connecticut, who will change trains at Secaucus, be able to ride to the Meadowlands for Sunday events, while residents of Bloomfield, Glen Ridge, Montclair, and Little Falls cannot?

Access to Newark cultural institutions. Many people would like to patronize Bears games, Prudential Center, NJ-PAC, and the Newark Museum without driving.

Travel by teenagers. Local parents would be grateful if their teenage children had good travel options other than driving. Weekend trains at night on other lines are frequently crowded with young people.

Business Benefits for Local Merchants. Weekend service will attract more people to shopping and entertainment locations in our towns, including restaurants, theatres and retail stores. Venues such as the Wellmont Theatre and its surrounding services, as well as the emerging businesses in the downtown Bloomfield redevelopment district, would benefit from weekend service. This would also benefit those without automobiles, which include many who reside at schools, colleges and universities in the area.

Benefits for Montclair State University. The appeal of Montclair State University would be enhanced if it could indicate that it has full time access by rail to New York City, Newark Airport and other locales throughout the State. Many Montclair State students live in dormitories near the line and would like to leave the campus on weekends, both for entertainment and for family visits. This is especially important on Sundays, when those who go home for the weekend return to their student housing.