

NJ-ARP Annual Report

2007-2008

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President's Message

Fuel costs rise, as so many rail advocates have predicted or at least expected. Rail and transit ridership rise in response, as is perhaps only natural, be it by personal choice or economic necessity. Now's the time, right? Now is when the state of New Jersey, saddled with misguided, lopsided transport policies spanning at least 60 years, gets the message that it needs to refocus on its current (and future!) transportation needs.

We at *NJ-ARP* didn't think it would be automatic. But neither did we think New Jersey officials or—worse—New Jersey Transit would respond like automatons, assigning its “one-seat ride to New York” mantra with a dollop of “at the rush” to add meatheadedness to myopia. This New Jersey and NJT have done. *NJ-ARP* stands somewhat aghast. The year is 2008, not 1958.

That's forced *NJ-ARP* and its advocacy allies, in the second half of this year, into a defensive role we thought we were long past playing: defending existing rail and transit services from wholesale slashing. Sadly, it's drained our energies needed for pro-active expansion (though we've notched some gains anyway), and for other services (such as our Hotline, currently suspended).

It's likely that such developments have taken a toll on some individual *NJ-ARP* members who are weary of the long fight. I'd be lying if I didn't at times acknowledge such fatigue myself. But if the current low level of transit “planning” is the vision offered by our “leaders,” then it's *NJ-ARP*'s job to point out how frivolous, how foolish, such limited vision is, and how spineless NJT is in carrying out such plans, whether on its own volition or prodded by its political masters in Trenton.

We do have allies offering different and better examples, and not all that far away: New York's *Metropolitan Transportation Authority* has many of NJT's problems, yet it's decided to bite the bullet and increase service options—at the rush hours, during off-peak hours, even on weekends. MTA subsidiary Metro-North Railroad even has done that to the benefit of some New Jersey residents on the Pascack Valley Line, adding a round-trip weekend train during the summer.

Your President got a heads-up call on the philosophical difference during the June meeting of the American Public Transit Association in San Francisco. Gas prices were rising rapidly, and thoughtful transit agencies nationwide (Canada, too) were wrestling with the conundrum of rising fuel costs affecting rail power even as—for those relying on fuel tax revenue—income support dropped.

No one entity had the easy answer. But titan MTA stepped up and said, in essence: We have the capacity. We may have to raise fares. We aren't cutting service.

NJT, seriously underrepresented at APTA due to budget constraints, offered no public response—then or in the months ahead within the state itself. Instead, NJT has embarked on stealth service cuts, during off-peak and weekend times when seemingly “no one” will ride. Cut service enough, and it's a self-fulfilling prophecy; no one will ride. And NJT isn't limiting such slashing to outer portions of weak lines; it's trashed the traditional service patterns on its own prized No. 1 operation, the Morris & Essex Lines, at least when it comes to serving Hoboken and New Jersey's Gold Coast. (The trashing even affects rush-hour users heading there—they appear to count less than those prized Manhattan-bound patrons.) And if you're going to call NJT's toll-free Customer Service number to complain, it's too late. With the latest schedule change, the toll-free number is gone, replaced by a toll 973 number!

That Manhattan-bound bias has been extant in NJT's capital planning for years, of course, highlighted by (but by no means limited to) its insistence on a trans-Hudson tunnel that gets to an inferior Manhattan location, and danged be any other station stop. **NJ-ARP** can and has made a difference on the margins, here; our potent Light Rail Task Force has reshaped the debate in Bergen County, and for the better, as we report in these pages. But the steamroller of "New York only" remains, causing some to question **NJ-ARP**'s right to question.

So be it. We've seldom shied from a fight, be it with NJT or anyone else, over what rail and transit riders need versus what "experts" and "planners" tell us they should have. Whether it was "interim busways" during the 1990s or "Bus Rapid Transit" today, whether it's undercounting ridership for the Lackawanna Cut-Off or undermining efforts to advance rail on the Cape May Branch, if it's counterproductive to passenger rail, **NJ-ARP** can and will speak out. Your membership dollars, our membership efforts, deserve no less.

And those dollars and efforts collectively continue to make a difference, as at least some of the entries following document. Even in a bleak year, **NJ-ARP** members have made a difference, and it would be too pessimistic to insist all has been lost and nothing gained. Rail's role in New Jersey, *and within New Jersey*, has to grow, the state's ham-handed handling to the contrary.

The good news is that some people are asking the right questions. It's up to us at **NJ-ARP** to answer the rail-related ones as best we're able. So many of you have shown the way for your neighbors and local leaders, and that's why, eventually, we prevail. The Board of Directors, and your President, thank you for that effort.

--*Douglas John Bowen*

Treasurer's Report

NJ-ARP ran a significant deficit of \$2,817 during fiscal year 10/1/07 to 10/1/08. As with any organization, we have not been immune to the economic downturn in our country. Given our fiscal reality, we've had to make some painful decisions in order to contain costs.

On a positive note, while net membership was down 10 members (295 versus 305 last year), our net membership dues income increased by \$376. Our Annual Meeting held last October in Jamesburg also generated \$120 more than the prior year. Our major shortfall was in the funding for our Legislative Agent.

Rose Heck had served as *NJ-ARP*'s Governmental Affairs Director for the past two and a half years. We had been able to fund this through donations to the "What the Heck Fund". We carried over \$1,700 from last year fund towards this year's fund and received \$250 towards the fund in this fiscal year. Unfortunately, President Doug Bowen and I could not secure the donations necessary to allow *NJ-ARP* to continue funding for a Governmental Affairs Director. Most of the donors believed their donations had been needed as a one-time expense. In order to pay for two quarters of work by Rose Heck (\$5,000) we absorbed the shortfall out of our treasury. Donations were not forthcoming because previous major donors had either retired, moved or were now unemployed and could not make donations. As a consequence, we had to discontinue Rose Heck's services during the second quarter, 2008. Because a portion of Rose's \$5,000 fee had to come from *NJ-ARP*'s general treasury, this action accounts for the majority of the deficit in this past year's budget. Fortunately for *NJ-ARP*, Rose remains very active as a member of the Light Rail Panel. *NJ-ARP* thanks Rose for her outstanding work on our behalf as Governmental Affairs Director.

On the expense side, the printing expense for our *NEWSLETTER REPORT* and *OBSERVATIONS* increased 3% over last year. We curbed costs by Production Manager Les Wolff's asking members if they would be interested in receiving both publications via e-mail, thus cutting down on printing and postage costs. Enough members opted for this method of delivery which allowed us to contain our printing expenses for 2008.

We also spent 50% less on the annual TransAction Transportation Conference in Atlantic City than we did last year. We did this by individuals absorbing lodging expenses, paying for attendance at the conference out of their own pocket, and by donating the funds needed to duplicate various papers for the Conference. We incurred no cost for the annual Patron's Luncheon as food and drink were donated by President Bowen with an assist from others who either brought food or drink to the meeting.

2008 saw a 7% increase in postage costs. Those costs may continue to rise unless enough members subscribe to our publications in electronic form. When the cost of postage increased from 41 cents to 42 cents, the U.S. Postal Service went to a size standard instead of a weight standard for mail which was larger than the standard envelope. Thus, our *Newsletter Report* postage rose from 41 cents to 80 cents. We will look at ways to streamline the mailing size of the publication to try and get us back to a 42 cents postage expense. We've already reduced the postage expense by having enough members subscribe to our publications in e-mail form.

Our bank balance at 10/1/07 stood at \$5,367. Our bank balance at 10/1/08 stands at \$2,555. For 2008-2009, we will not incur the Governmental Affairs Director expense; so, if our membership dues continue at or slightly above this year's level, we should be able to increase our bank balance.

I would like to thank our members for their generosity. In addition, *NJ-ARP* is, indeed, very grateful for its various Directors, Officers and other members who incur expenses out of their own pocket without ever requesting reimbursement. Thank you all for your contributions.

--Len Resto

Membership

Between November 2007 and August 2008, 8 batches of renewal notices were sent. In comparison to the identical period a year ago, our membership has gone down from 305 to 295 and the renewal rate has declined to 83%. The late August renewals are still coming in, so the rate excludes this last batch. The net loss of 10 members includes 19 new members. Of those, 16 signed up via the Internet and 3 came randomly through U.S. postal mail from sources such as brochure distribution or membership forms on the Web site. Of the 295 members, 233 (79%) reside in New Jersey.

Initial annual renewal notices are sent within two weeks of when the last such notice was sent in the prior year, or when a new member joined, not when we received the last check. This matters when the renewal check comes several months late. A "2nd chance" notice is sent from the Treasurer two months after the initial notice was sent to those who have not renewed, and that member is dropped two months after that. If someone wants to renew at a different time of year, we must be notified explicitly in writing. We will not "take the hint" by receiving the renewal months late. It is also a waste of our volunteer's time and *NJ-ARP*'s treasury money to send out additional renewal notices. We encourage those with e-mail access to get the newsletters as a PDF document to save us postage. "Newsletter PLUS" serves as an added incentive to do so.

We have a \$10 membership category for seniors and students, and can handle an annual waiver on a case-by-case basis for financial or personal hardships.

Membership benefits are cumulative as status is upgraded. Patron as well as Sustaining members get the *OBSERVATIONS* newsletter too. Since Family memberships can be of two or three interested parties in the household, Sustaining and Patron members can be double- or triple-counted, but only if the renewals invoice slip says so in the name area. Our membership count is cautious and conservative.

--Joe Versaggi

Access to the Region's Core (ARC) aka Trans-Hudson Express (T.H.E.) Tunnel

Throughout 2008, *NJ-ARP* has continued to strongly advocate for a regional Manhattan rail connection between New York's Penn Station (NYP) and Grand Central Terminal (GCT), which would tie the three metropolitan rail operating agencies together. Called Alternative "G," vigorous political outreach activities by *NJ-ARP*, the *Empire State Passengers Association* (ESPA), the *Lackawanna Coalition*, the *Regional Rail Working Group* (RRWG) - joined now by the *National Association of Railroad Passengers* (NARP) - continued unabatedly. We are pleased to report that substantial progress is being made that may significantly alter the outcome of this megaproject. That progress seemed to come - suddenly - to fruition last month in September and from an unpredictable quarter - the Governor of New York, David Paterson. And therein lies a truly interesting tale.

Recall that New Jersey Transit (NJT) personnel presented the current configuration of the Trans-Hudson Express (T.H.E.) Tunnel to the Regional Citizens' Liaison Committee (RCLC) on June 25, 2007. That revision had the effect of reducing the previous twin 2 track over 2 track (only 6 tracks would have been initially constructed) "deep cavern" station design to an even deeper one (increasing the lowest level platform to 175 feet below street level and 460 feet north of NYP) with capacity reduced to a 6 track (now 3 over 3 track) bi-level 34th Street NJT only station. The revised station dimensions will no longer extend outside the curb line boundaries of 34th Street, and there will be no physical track connection between the new T.H.E. Tunnel and the existing NYP trackage on the Manhattan side of the "Hudson Ocean." Because of this, Amtrak will be forever precluded from accessing the new tunnels and be restricted to the original 1910 Pennsylvania Railroad bores. The tail tracks, which in the prior iteration extended to Fifth Avenue on both levels, thereby leaving open the possibility of a track connection to GCT, were pared back to only the upper level. This occurred since the lower level tail tracks would have been located too close to the original New York City water tunnel #1 that is located under Sixth Avenue. Now only the upper level tracks will head east and then only to 6th Avenue. But this, too, will "officially" change this coming Monday, October 6th, when NJT will announce to a joint meeting of the RCLC and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that the upper level tail tracks have now been "temporarily" removed from consideration. According to NJT, this project shortcoming will only be in force until the new NYC water tunnel is finished, after which the original Sixth Avenue one will be decommissioned.

Let's examine the year's activities. Arranged by RRWG Chair and *NJ-ARP* member George Haikalis, the region's advocates met with the Moynihan Station Development Corporation's President, Robin Stout, and Project Manger-Transportation, Fred Bartoli, on March 10th to explain our objections to the T.H.E. Tunnel after the June 2007 announcement. We explained the problem with locating an NJT only (excluding Amtrak) station almost 500 feet adjacent to NYP deep below 34th Street and that the Farley Post Office conversion into an edifice "celebrating arrival" in New York City would be negatively impacted by not preserving the ability of all the region's trains (NJT, LIRR and Amtrak) to access it.

On March 26th, a group of advocates attended a New Jersey Assembly Budget Committee hearing in New Brunswick. Speaking for *NJ-ARP*, Director Albert L. Papp, Jr. explained, “In its present form, this once regionally comprehensive plan has devolved into nothing more than a six track ‘deep cavern’ annex to New York Penn Station beneath 34th Street for use only by NJT trains. Additionally, because of the June 2007 deletion of a previous switching facility on the New York side of the Hudson River, Amtrak trains will be forever precluded from using the new trans-Hudson rail tunnels under normal operations.” He stated that, “Despite clear evidence to the contrary in the 2003 Major Investment Study (MIS) ‘Summary Report’ by the study team, NJT decided to reject the long sought after Manhattan Penn Station to Grand Central Terminal rail connection. The MIS concluded that such a rail link would have cost the least to build and operate, attracted the most riders, and diverted the greatest number of motorists of three final alternatives studied. But NJT dismissed (incorrectly in our opinion) this logical choice.”

So extensive were those June 2007 changes from the former proposal that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) required NJT to file a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) and scheduled another round of public hearings which occurred on March 31st and April 1st. All the region’s advocacy groups participated, as did NARP due to its concern about the exclusion of Amtrak from the new T.H.E. tunnels. Papp explained that, “Moreover, and most importantly, the long sought after goal of realizing the hundred year old dream of linking Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal for regional rail interoperability has been quietly shelved. Because of changes in the design of ARC announced in June 2007, the likelihood of this connection ever being constructed is extremely remote. The reduction in station capacity in New York from eight to six tracks will inhibit NJT from adding new routes and expanding current ones.”

On April 9th, NARP Executive Director Ross Capon authored a letter to New Jersey Governor Corzine and New York Governor David Paterson stating that, “As now configured, the (ARC) project will forever preclude intercity trains from using the new tunnels, meaning that intercity service will be paralyzed should the century-old tunnels close for any reason.” Further, that, “loss of those tunnels for any reason would mean the end of intercity service between New York and Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, while crippling New Jersey Transit service by forcing its consolidation into the proposed new station.” He concluded by saying that, “We can get the right solution if you, the states’ governors, agree, and use your considerable influence over the relevant agencies to make sure that the needed track connection is created, for the benefit of today’s riders and those in the decades to come.” As you will see shortly, one of those Governors was listening.

The advocates had been seeking a meeting with FTA officials for some time, without success. That changes due to a serendipitous chance occurrence at the Regional Plan Association’s (RPA) 2008 Regional Assembly on April 18th. At that gathering, FTA Administrator James Simpson approached George Haikalis and a collegial discussion ensued, principally about the trans-Hudson rail tunnels. Haikalis was asked to meet with Simpson in Washington, D.C. and that happened on April 28th in conjunction with the NARP Annual Meeting. Also attending was NARP President George Chilson and its Executive Director, Ross Capon. Previously, NARP’s Executive Committee and its Board of Directors had approved a resolution supporting the NYP - GCT track connection. As luck would have it, the threesome also had the opportunity - immediately subsequent to the Simpson meeting - to talk with Federal Railroad Administrator (FRA) Joseph Boardman who, prior to accepting his FRA post, had been the New York state Commissioner of Transportation. Both meetings were well scripted and the key concerns of ARC and its symbiotic companion proposal, the Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project (PBCEP), were thoroughly vetted by the attendees and an explanation presented as to why Alternative “G” and “through running” would benefit the New York region for decades to come, all for a lower cost than that proposed by NJT.

In a letter dated April 28th, from Amtrak President and CEO Alex Kummant, to NJT ARC Project Director Tom Schulze, Kummant clearly states that, "The ARC tunnels, now providing sole benefit to NJ TRANSIT services, can no longer be considered part of a broader integrated Penn Station terminal system intended to accommodate day-to-day requirements under widely varying conditions and very large train volumes. Consequently, Amtrak has identified certain areas for improvement, including a potential 5th trans-Hudson tunnel, which it believes will become necessary to construct in lieu of the connecting ARC tunnels in Manhattan as region-wide growth exceeds existing Northeast Corridor capacities. Amtrak has requested that NJ TRANSIT's Project designs for ARC not preclude such future improvements."

Set up by *Lackawanna Coalition* Chair David Peter Alan, regional advocates and NARP Executive Director Ross Capon met with New Jersey Commissioner of Transportation Kris Kolluri, New Jersey Transit Executive Director Richard Sarles and Chief Planner Richard Roberts and others on July 9th. In a convivial atmosphere of regional co-operation, we explained how returning to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) proposal of building the new T.H.E. Tunnels with the Amtrak connection restored - but, importantly, without the 34th Street "deep cavern" terminal - would be beneficial to "through running" and, according to Joseph Clift, former Director of Planning for the Long Island Rail Road, would save NJT some \$2 billion. A follow on meeting with Kolluri was scheduled for September 10th but was cancelled at the last moment when the Commissioner had to be in Trenton.

In an August 6th letter to New York Governor Paterson, New Jersey state Senator Jennifer Beck along with 16 other Senators and 15 Assembly members requested that New York contribute a "fair" portion of the trans-Hudson Tunnel expense. Recall that in 2003, New York's MTA withdrew from the tunnel project leaving NJT to be the "lead agency." This change in emphasis was endorsed by former NJT Executive Director George Warrington because he felt he could bolster NYC access for Garden State rail riders with a minimum of impediments thrown in his path by New York State and city political forces. From our "informed sources" within NJT, it has been now confirmed that it was Warrington who led the New Jersey effort to eliminate Alternative "G" from further consideration and, instead, move NJT's new terminal into a "deep cavern" beneath 34th Street.

In early September, the Corzine administration released its plan to finance the state's share of the \$7.6 billion ARC project. The Governor is asking for an increase in New Jersey Turnpike tolls of 150% and Garden State Parkway of 143% over fifteen years to raise some \$11 billion of which \$1.25 billion will be siphoned off as the state's contribution to the trans-Hudson Tunnel plan. Press releases suggest that when both states and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's shares are combined, some \$5.75 billion will be raised in order to secure a sufficient amount of FTA grant funding. Newspaper articles hint that not all motorists are enamored of this proposal. In a statement given before the NJT Board of Directors meeting on September 10th, Director Papp said that, "This discriminatory and predatory pricing proposition is like to trying to place a bandage on a hemorrhage. The solution is to place the Transportation Trust Fund on a pay-as-you-go basis to equitably distribute the financial pain over all of New Jersey's residents as well as those visitors who avail themselves of our state's transportation facilities."

Then on September 12th, New York Governor David Paterson, in an address to the New York Building Congress, suggested certain conditions that are required for New York state investment in the Moynihan Station project. Paterson said that, "If we are to realize our full potential for growth in the 21st century, then we must look to increase our rail capacity." One of the three conditions the Governor enumerated is of interest to the trans-Hudson Tunnel project. He wants co-ordination of

“...the development of Moynihan Station in tandem with other major development projects including New Jersey’s Access to the Region’s Core (ARC) which is the first crossing under the Hudson in 50 years...”

As if to add more uncertainty to the Moynihan station redevelopment in relation to the T.H.E. Tunnel project, an article appeared in the September 16th edition of the “*New York Observer*” suggesting that the Paterson administration’s “...most defining feature of the preferred path would be the expansion of Penn Station’s tracks and platforms southward to the block between Seventh and Eighth avenues, from 30th to 31st streets, which could hold perhaps five or six new tracks.” The article goes on to say that, “...Federal Transit Administration chief James Simpson is pushing coordination with the ARC project; the city supports the plan to expand tracks southward; Port Authority’s executive director, Chris Ward, has told advocates he is extremely supportive of the plan, and his agency has been working on it for months...”

If we assume that Amtrak’s Kummant letter to NJT’s Schulze is still operative in suggesting that Amtrak might well seek to build a fifth - and even a sixth - tunnel under the Hudson River, then the broad outline of a very complex “deal” arises. Since NJT has adopted a go-it-alone posture, then Amtrak has reacted by proposing its own go-it-alone solution. This would seem to be in line with the Paterson plan for a southward expansion of NYP - but for whose benefit will those tracks be built? Logic would suggest that it would be for none other than Amtrak’s usage and the expansion of its intercity operations. This may be confirmed in the “*Observer*” article by a cryptic statement which explains that, “Should ARC be completed, discussions are under way to potentially get New Jersey Transit to cede some of its ‘slots’ at Penn Station platforms, given its planned new capacity in the area.” But are four (4) new trans-Hudson tunnels needed - 2 for NJT and 2 for Amtrak in conjunction with the Moynihan Station project? Alternative “G” suggests not. We are told that, “...plans will likely be better defined by the end of next month (October), when Mr. Paterson’s chief aide on the issue, Timothy Gilchrist (Deputy Secretary for Economic Development, and Infrastructure), presents a new plan for the project.”

--Albert L. Papp, Jr.

Bergen County Developments

Pascack Valley Line

At long last the Pascack Valley Line has returned to a full-time rail line with bi-directional service through the day, seven days a week. As expected, ridership has increased dramatically, helped, no doubt, by spiraling gas prices. What has been really encouraging is remarkable increases (in the 30%-40% range) in weekend riders during the first full year of service. To its credit, NJ Transit has added an additional Hoboken-bound train departing Spring Valley at 7:12 p.m. The increased ridership is also the result of aggressive marketing by New York's *Metropolitan Transportation Authority* (MTA). **NJ-ARP** is further encouraged by both residential and business community activists along the northern New Jersey portion of the line now clamoring for more trains for reverse commuters (a real 180 degree turnaround from days of the "NIMBY 9") as well as investigating shuttle bus service between corporate parks and Pascack Valley and Bergen Line stations.

Meadowlands Sports Complex

On the southern end of the Pascack Valley line, the connecting tracks to the new Meadowlands Station are now in all the way up the station. NJT anticipates service will commence in 2009. In the meantime, it has instituted a new shuttle bus service (#353) between the Secaucus Junction station and the Meadowlands for a \$7.00 round-trip charge. NJT also has eliminated #351 bus service between the Port Authority Bus Terminal and the Meadowlands except for NFL football games. For all other events, passengers will have to take a train from Penn Station to Secaucus Junction for the #353 bus.

Parking

NJT's Park & Ride Station, Ramsey-Route 17 with 1,251 spaces, although more heavily patronized that last year, is still underutilized. NJT maintains that the station will see full use once the T.H.E. Tunnel project is completed, but that at best is still many years in the future. Parking has been expanded at some Pascack Valley stations, including Montvale and North Hackensack. NJT continues to discuss/promote parking facilities for Secaucus Junction. **NJ-ARP** believes that, as broadly applied by NJT, this would only encourage many NJT customers to abandon using the train at outer stations for a car ride to Secaucus and then a short rail trip into NY-Penn.

Hudson-Bergen Light Rail

It's official: LRT in 2008 is back on the table as an option – and now it's the frontrunner -- for Bergen County's Northern Branch, and that's in no small measure to the hard work by **NJ-ARP** members Phil Craig, Jack May, Frank Miklos, and Bergen Liaison Lester W. Wolff, capably led by **NJ-ARP** Government Affairs Director Rose M. Heck.

Study figures released by New Jersey Transit (and republished from wider distribution by **NJ-ARP**) show that LRT not only would carry larger numbers of riders, it beats the alternative diesel multiple-unit (DMU) option for *two* markets. Most DMU-option advocates conceded (with a shrug and a sneer) HBLRT's intrastate market advantage service Hoboken, Jersey City, and other Hudson County points. But those same advocates were tongue-tied when the figures showed **LRT ridership beats DMU numbers for travel to and from New York itself**—a refutation of NJT's “one-seat ride to New York” mantra that **NJ-ARP** has repeatedly rejected as an end-all/be all.

On the county level, **NJ-ARP** continues to meet with municipal officials within Bergen County, and remains open to meeting with officials of Bergen County itself, to explain the LRT. Many municipalities remain cautious, but appear to be leaning toward LRT as long as certain concerns (noise among them) are addressed. Gone from public discussion, however, is the previous assertion by Bergen County that it's “DMU or nothing.” Federal formulas and policies often hinder LRT's growth, but in the case of HBLRT and its extension to Tenafly, federal policy may actually aid the project. NJT officials tell **NJ-ARP** that the Federal Transit Administration considers HBLRT extension proposals “ongoing,” versus a status of “New Starts,” which often faces much harsher FTA criteria.

And HBLRT does keep growing, as this year in Bayonne work began to extend HBLRT to 8th Street in Bayonne, with a new station to recapture the site of a long-gone predecessor. Meanwhile, ridership on the X89 bus, operated by New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority from Staten Island and linking directly to HBLRT at Bayonne's 34th Street Station, has made steady ridership gains and appears to be a permanent bus route addition to provide transfer options for New York residents working on New Jersey's Gold Coast (as well as to Manhattan points).

Permanent, that is, until Staten Island itself is able to secure funding for its own LRT designs, and officials of the “Forgotten Borough” routinely mention not just the reality of HBLRT, and not just a version of HBLRT for Staten Island, but actual linkage to HBLRT—in effect, a bistate HBLRT extension—over whatever replaces or augments the Bayonne Bridge in the future. That may be decades away, but Staten Island has begun receiving study funds for such a prospect.

NJ Transit has been mute on any \$1 billion-plus plan to extend HBLRT three miles west to the Meadowlands Sportsplex via Harmon Meadow (Secaucus), cutting across wetlands on brand-new right-of-way. It's not clear to **NJ-ARP** whether the rising fortunes of a Tenafly extension are in any way linked to that. As long as the Tenafly extension is secure, **NJ-ARP** remains ready to help with any LRT proposal, including to or from Xanadu (and we think we'll be needed, given the admittedly sketchy “plans” we've seen so far.” **NJ-ARP**, pointing to the twin branch of HBLRT in the south, argues that two branches of HBLRT to the north can work with the same success.

Then there's the West Side Avenue Branch, still struggling (at least, relative to the rest of HBLRT) to build ridership; it's nonetheless done well enough to catch the attention of the private sector,

specifically Honeywell International. In January, Honeywell and Jersey City officials reached conceptual agreement on redevelopment of 100 acres alongside Route 440, with plans specifically mentioning (and artists' renditions including) an HBLRT extension. It's a clear victory for *NJ-ARP*, led by Treasurer Leonard Resto, who almost singlehandedly kept the extension concept alive within New Jersey City University when the university—heeding advice from “experts”—asserted more HBLRT wasn't needed.

All this as, back in HBLRT's current sphere of operation, ridership climbs past the daily average of 40,000, with a one-day “spike” of 65,000 during a summer concert series at Liberty State Park. The No. 1 station in 2008? Pavonia/Newport, due to a mix of new residents, transit transfer riders, and shoppers—the latter group disparaged as non-existent by the “experts” of the 1990s.

--Douglas John Bowen

Morris & Essex, Gladstone, Montclair-Boonton

The past year was a mix of the good, the bad and the ugly.

First, the ugly. In addition to losing hourly service to Hoboken on weekends last year, Morris and Essex Lines lost off peak service to Hoboken this year, all in the name of saving money. This means that that off-peak weekday service to Hoboken now resembles what weekend service was like before it was cut back last year – all cut down to just hourly service. The freight railroad mentality that seems to be driving these schedule decisions is detrimental to proper operation of a good regional passenger rail system.

The Gladstone Branch was again all but unusable through the summer on weekends due to "bustitution," and the situation was pretty bad even on some weekdays. This was ostensibly required for repair and upgrade of the track and electrification system on the line. The bustitution as implemented by NJ Transit somewhat better coordinated this year than it was last year.

Now for somewhat better news.

Work on the track realignment and station reconstruction at Newark Broad Street is continuing apace, and still is reportedly on or ahead of schedule. Both new high level island platforms are in place and in service, the island platform serving track 3 and the side platform serving track 2. The roadbed for Track 1 is ready to receive new track with concrete ties over a raised bridge across University Avenue, and the pedestrian underpass is now in service. Once Track 1, the center track is put back in service the rest of the side platform will be completed, and that will signal the end of the project. Interior of the head-house has been restored quite nicely.

Track replacement between Summit and Denville continued apace through the summer with the laying of new concrete ties to replace the old wood ties. Upon completion of this work, the old M&E would

be all concrete ties all the way from Millburn to Dover barring a few short segments here and there. This is expected to improve ride quality and reduce maintenance cost.

Construction activity at the new Mount Arlington Station, located on the Montclair-Boonton Line between Dover and Lake Hopatcong, was completed and the station is now in service. It features 285 feet long platforms and has a parking lot with space for approximately 300 vehicles. It is situated adjacent to an existing park-and-ride lot serving Interstate Route 80 at Exit 30 (Howard Blvd - Mt. Arlington) in Morris County. One can question whether 300 parking spaces will divert any significant portion of daily I-80 traffic; in any event, *NJ-ARP* will watch the station's use with interest.

Another new Park and Ride station that came on line is on the Montclair-Boonton Line in Wayne near Rt. 23 and I80. This station has a much larger parking lot than the one at Mt. Arlington, reportedly with a capacity of 3,000 or so. The station appears to be well patronized in spite of rather sparse service offerings.

Rumors of the imminent commencement of weekend service on the Montclair-Boonton line keep getting more persistent, and *NJ-ARP* lobbying efforts to that effect are playing their part. But we now learn that such service has yet another obstacle, and won't come to pass until the Bloomfield Avenue bridge reconstruction work is completed in another year or two. It is also predicated on the Township of Montclair completing grade crossing upgrades to standards that would meet FRA requirements for a grant of the whistle rule waiver at grade crossings in Montclair. Naturally, when weekend electric service is instituted on the lower Montclair-Boonton Line, it would make sense to institute connecting hourly diesel service on weekends for the upper Montclair-Boonton line running all the way up to Lake Hopatcong, with connections to electric service out of Dover, thus providing predictable weekend service to the two new Park and Ride stations.

Several multilevel consists are now running on the Midtown Direct service. This is a mixed bag. Many riders like the equipment a lot because of their quieter and smoother ride and better air-conditioning and other creature comforts like 2x2 seating. On the other hand the design of the doors causes them to require longer dwell times at stations thus making the trains run somewhat more behind schedule. Though quite often, given the padding in the schedule at both ends they tend to arrive at their final destination within the 6 to 10 minute window of the scheduled arrival. But that does not help those who miss connections at Newark broad Street or Secaucus Junction due to late arrival, something that is not apparently tracked by NJT.

The inexorable slowing down of train schedules continues. The efficiencies and speed achievable with a pure EMU operation is not possible anymore because the schedules are apparently setup to be operable with the least common denominator equipment, exacerbated further by the heavier and slower multi-level trains, and any change in that policy seems unlikely. And all this while the fares keep going up and gas prices keep going up and highways keep getting more jammed up. We can only hope this situation will be remedied with the arrival of the Arrow IV EMUs which have been budgeted for in the current fiscal budget.

--*Jishnu Mukerji*

Lackawanna Cut-Off

West of existing Morris & Essex Lines and Montclair-Boonton Line services, the "New Jersey-Pennsylvania Lackawanna Cut-Off Passenger Rail Restoration Project" (as it is officially called) has as

its goal the restoration of passenger rail service between the New York metropolitan area (Hoboken initially) and Scranton, Pennsylvania operating over the fabled 28 mile "Lackawanna Cut-Off." This remarkable feat of engineering was opened in December 1911 by the then-Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad as a low-grade alternative route from north central New Jersey to the Delaware water gap bypassing its then curving and steeply graded main line.

Some important forward progress, albeit it snail-like, has occurred in the last two years.

NJ-ARP was represented by several members at the Environmental Assessment (EA) hearings held January 29 in New Jersey, with Director Albert L. Papp, Jr. heading up the team in Blairstown. The project's cost is now estimated at \$551 million, with \$13.9 million in annual revenues, \$26.2 million in expenses and a "subsidy" of \$12.3 million.

Of note is that the major push for re-establishing passenger service on the Cut-Off is occurring in Pennsylvania--which is understandable--since of the 6,700 riders (2,850 each way per day), 5,840 will be from Pennsylvania and only 860 from New Jersey, this according to the EA.

There will be only 11 properties that will have to be acquired, with seven already publicly owned. Horn and whistle noise is estimated to impact 448 residences within the FTA defined "Impact" distance and 38 within the "Severe" category. "Quiet Zones" will be established at seven locations in accordance with FRA guidelines. The goal of the EA was to secure a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) from the FTA, after which the Cut-Off could enter into the engineering phase.

On September 13, 2007, U.S. Senators Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), and Bob Casey (D-Pa.) announced jointly that the PNRRA received \$2 million to continue engineering work to prepare the project for bidding and to conclude any outstanding environmental issues. Malski was quoted as saying that \$12 million to \$14 million has already been expended on environmental studies, preliminary engineering and the securing of right-of-way. All track in Pennsylvania is now under the control of the PNRRA. He further opined that contracts could be awarded in 2011 with construction taking nine months. The PNRRA is awaiting a FONSI from the federal office of Environmental Protection (EPA); it was anticipated last summer but was only received last month for the initial segment in New Jersey.

Thanks to the Cut-Off being included in TEA-LU, there is now a further \$120 million authorized, as mentioned above (but not appropriated) for this work contingent on a satisfactory FTA rating. The FTA criteria include five subjective factors: 1.) an improvement in the ability of a rider to reach his/her destination, 2.) environmental benefits, 3.) efficiency of operation, 4.) a satisfactory cost/benefit ratio, and 5.) the ability of the project to support existing land uses. However, despite all the "politicking," this rating has not yet been forthcoming.

On June 4, the *North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority* (NJTPA) gave its approval for construction of the first segment of the Cut-Off, a 7.3 mile stretch between Port Morris and Andover, in the vicinity of U.S. Route 206. Scheduled trains are expected to be run as extensions of the current Montclair/Boonton line.

--Albert L. Papp, Jr.

Raritan Valley Line

It has been a bad year for rail service on the Raritan Valley Line, due to NJT service cuts implemented here (as elsewhere) with little or no notice. Most off-peak service increases secured during the last 10-to-15 years have been erased. In stark contrast to previous NJT procedure, or to this year's approach by New York's *Metropolitan Transportation Authority*, where service cuts at least are weighed in public hearing and with public input, NJT has shown no more consideration or commitment to its passengers, particularly off-peak, than its bankrupt predecessors.

In May, weekend service to Hoboken was abolished, as was the 5:20 a.m. from Raritan and the well-patronized 2:05 a.m. "party train" from Newark. The entire service is now covered with three train sets and operates in and out of Newark's Track 5. Anyone continuing east on NJT or PATH must move to a different platform. In August, all Sunday service before 1:00 p.m. was cut 50% to bi-hourly. This is despite a 10.2% increase in Sunday ridership since last year, and steady ridership gains for many years. NJT's excuse was "extraordinarily low ridership," so it does not stand by its own published numbers. Timetables say to take the parallel NJT bus routes that do not honor rail tickets except monthlies. The cuts are bound to be self-defeating as ridership will decline and conductors will get overwhelmed with cash fares being that there are very few stations with Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs).

It also goes to show that NJT has little grasp of its operating costs and how to become more efficient. Both MTA railroads (Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road) have TVMs at virtually all their stations,

and Metro-North conductors have hand-held devices to collect fares via cash, debit, and credit cards. Perhaps if this were done on the RVL, trains could make do with two collectors rather than three. But NJT appears uninterested, instead banking \$12.5 million dual-powered locomotives to provide 39% of Raritan Valley Line riders with a “one-seat ride to Manhattan.” Ironically, cross-platform transfers at Newark, long a staple for North Jersey Coast Line riders, about to be made easier with completion of the pocket lay-up tracks east of Newark.

--Joe Versaggi

Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex (MOM)

The Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex (MOM) passenger rail project continues to languish as a mere proposal, with still no assurance that it will be approved or constructed. The publiclyfunded draft environmental impact study for MOM, originally scheduled to be completed in 2003, still goes on with no definite conclusion date. Despite widely accepted figures which validate the need for restoration of passenger rail service via the Monmouth Junction alignment, several politically connected factions persist in actively opposing that route. Red Bank, the second route option, is viable but not as desirable, while Matawan, the third option, is unrealistic and next to impossible. Yet the DEIS continues to treat all three alignments with equal commitment and detail.

Ridership Study

The comprehensive report on MOM issued by the *NJ-ARP* one year ago is just as timely and valid today. However, a number of noteworthy developments have occurred since then. The close of 2007 saw a new MOM ridership study by NJ Transit’s consultant, which resulted in even more forceful opposition from officials and news media in Middlesex County. The study, released in mid-December, once again compared projected ridership on all three MOM alignments. It was designed to take into account the proposed ARC rail tunnels and dual-mode locomotives that would allow MOM trains to travel directly into New York’s Penn Station. According to the new study, service on the Monmouth

Junction alignment would attract 27,450 riders per day; the Matawan route would attract 24,050 riders; and the Red Bank route would attract 16,800 riders. A previous ridership study by NJ Transit, done in 2005 and assuming a Newark terminus, projected that the Matawan route would have the most riders at 10,900 daily trips, followed by Monmouth Junction at 9,000 trips and Red Bank at 7,900 trips. The change resulted in the Red Bank and Matawan routes roughly doubling their ridership, while the Monmouth Junction route projection tripled. NJ Transit, like Monmouth and Ocean Counties, projects a large increase in population in the area around the Monmouth Junction route. The new population estimates go to the year 2030, while the previous study projected out to only 2025. The projections for growth used in the study were approved by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority.

Predictably, local officials in South Brunswick, Monroe and Jamesburg dismissed the new figures as invalid, as before. Officials in all three towns used the new study to re-emphasize their opposition to the Monmouth Junction route, repeating past comments that the rail line would not serve their residents, would cost more than the others, would disrupt lives and would pose a danger to pedestrians. "I don't believe the study, I don't believe it is accurate," said Jamesburg Mayor Tony LaMantia. Monroe Mayor Richard Pucci and Councilman Irwin Nalitt made similar statements. South Brunswick Mayor Frank Gambatese vowed to continue fighting the MOM line, saying "We'll have people laying (sic) on the tracks if we have to." The *Cranbury Press* and *South Brunswick Post* also continued to oppose MOM: "The new calculations...have not forced us to change our mind about the MOM line. For residents in southern Middlesex County, the Monmouth Junction alternative still makes little sense."

Renewed funding for DEIS

Nevertheless, the DEIS itself needed to continue advancing slowly but surely to its eventual completion, and that required more federal money. New Jersey congressmen Chris Smith and Jim Saxton announced that on December 19, 2007 the U.S. House of Representatives passed additional funding for the DEIS. They said they had worked throughout the year to have the money included in the 2008 federal budget, and the MOM Alternatives Analysis will receive nearly \$1 million in the U.S. Department of Transportation budget.

As 2008 began, support for MOM and its Monmouth Junction alignment continued from Monmouth and Ocean Counties, major daily newspapers and *NJ-ARP*. Elected officials and weekly newspapers in Middlesex County restated their opposition to Monmouth Junction as before, although more and more individual residents and commuters in Middlesex spoke out in support of MOM. But the playing field remained essentially the same as before.

Public opinion poll

Before the end of January, 2008, however, there was a new development. Monmouth and Ocean Counties had engaged a consultant, McLaughlin and Associates, to conduct a public opinion survey by telephone on how residents of all three counties felt about the three proposed alignments of MOM. The results of the survey were announced at a well-publicized press conference in Toms River on January 23.



MOM Rail line press conference with Monmouth and Ocean County Freeholders: (R) Monmouth Freeholder Director Lillian Burry speaks as (L-R) OC Freeholders Jack Kelly and Jim Lacey and pollster John McLaughlin look on. Ocean County's Kathleen Edmond is visible at far left.

TOM SPADER/ASBURY PARK PRESS

The poll had questioned 500 residents of the three counties and found that 78 percent of those polled in Middlesex County supported the Monmouth Junction alignment, as did 79 percent of those surveyed in Monmouth County and 81 percent in Ocean County. Poll taker John McLaughlin described the results as a “supermajority” in favor of the Monmouth Junction alignment. Predictably again, the opponents in Middlesex County rejected the survey, believing that the results were pre-planned. South Brunswick Mayor Frank Gambatese exclaimed, “These surveys are crazy; they all depend on who orders them and who pays for them. If Middlesex County had ordered that survey, you can bet that the results would be completely different.” The *Home News Tribune* doubted the validity of polling only 500 people in such a large geographic area. In an editorial it stated that, although the paper is a longtime fan of MOM, this was “a politically motivated survey concocted to reach a predetermined conclusion....It isn't worth much, if anything at all.” The *Asbury Park Press*, on the other hand, expressed satisfaction and excitement that such a large majority of the public supports this important and worthwhile project and agreed with poll taker McLaughlin that we now have a “mandate” to move forward on MOM.

Corzine gives support to MOM ...

Scarcely a week later, a new controversy erupted when Governor Corzine expressed himself favorably toward the MOM project for the first time. He had previously been silent on the matter despite repeated attempts to gain his support. Governor Corzine—even at this writing—has been studying and advocating various fundraising plans to restructure the enormous debt of the State of New Jersey and to find money for important state projects. During the first week of February he announced a plan to raise tolls on major highways, the proceeds of which would pay for MOM and four additional transportation initiatives. The *Home News Tribune* quoted Corzine as saying that he would designate \$250 million of the anticipated new revenue toward the study and preliminary engineering for the MOM project. MOM advocates were heartened, although the *Tribune* declared that MOM was too

important to be dependent upon toll increases. Moreover, it urged selection of the Monmouth Junction route at once, for “there seems little purpose for the state to rehash the viability of two other routes.”

... but cuts Monmouth Junction out

Initial satisfaction among supporters of the Monmouth Junction route was quickly extinguished when, on February 10, Corzine seemed to abruptly change his mind about MOM at a public forum in East Brunswick. "It will be the MO line, not the MOM line," he declared to rounds of applause from an audience of 500-700 county residents, and he then firmly stated that the MOM rail line will not run through Middlesex County. As reported in the *Home News Tribune*, Corzine explained that “it would not be fair to burden the people of Middlesex County with the proposed rail line because it would essentially benefit residents of Monmouth and Ocean counties.” This news story prompted many reader comments against Corzine’s elimination of the Monmouth Junction route. One reader summed up the outrage of many in this letter to the *Asbury Park Press*:

“Corzine tells the angry mob of legislators in Middlesex what they wanted to hear, that if you back my plan, I’ll re-route the trains through Matawan or Red Bank, remove the tolls I was about to put on your head, and ignore all of the research done in favor of the MOM Line through Middlesex.... Funny, he was just in Monmouth and Ocean County, but didn’t have the stones to tell them...he made up his mind to have the MOM Line become the MO Line. Corzine the Coward.”

Another wrote:

“The only thing that makes sense to Champagne Jonny is pandering to North Jersey Democrats. Wake up, Jonny, it’s time to actually do something besides grandstand and pander.”

Corzine's comments were decidedly premature, said Monmouth County Freeholder Director Lillian Burry, adding that "It was improper for the governor to have commented on the alternatives being studied in the draft environmental impact statement before the study is completed and before a locally preferred alternative is chosen." The *Asbury Park Press*, in a February 12 editorial, called Corzine’s decision a “shameful, transparent attempt to placate Middlesex County officials opposed to the western route....Using the Middlesex County meeting to announce a long-awaited decision on a route—one not expected to have been made until all the environmental and other studies were completed—was a disgrace. Corzine demonstrated long ago that he had earned the distrust expressed by several residents at his town meetings in Ocean and Monmouth counties....Corzine has taken his arrogance to new heights.”

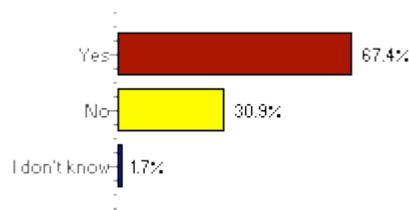
Damage control

Only two days later, both NJ Transit and the governor’s office rolled out their damage control teams to “clarify” Governor Corzine’s comments and soften the wave of anger overflowing from Monmouth and Ocean Counties. Lynn Bowersox, spokesperson for NJ Transit, confirmed that the Monmouth Junction route will continue to be analyzed as planned. In a letter to the *Home News Tribune*, she wrote: “Transportation Commissioner Kris Kolluri and NJ Transit Executive Director Richard Sarles said at an NJ Transit board meeting last week that NJ Transit will complete the DEIS process including all three alternatives as required to avoid jeopardizing future federal funding or triggering a

requirement to start the process over.” At the same time, Lilo Stainton, representing Corzine, said that what the governor expressed was his personal preference and that he believes that all planning should be transparent. She added that, while the governor's opinion will be counted, it won't be the only factor in making the decision. Nevertheless, South Brunswick Mayor Frank Gambatese lost no time in praising Corzine for removing the Monmouth Junction option. "The governor has the authority to stop that kind of thing," he said. Monroe Mayor Richard Pucci agreed, saying that without the governor's support, no project in New Jersey can go forward.

Online poll confirms support for Monmouth Junction

The *Home News Tribune* thereupon decided to run its own opinion poll with the question “Do you support the proposed Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex rail line through South Brunswick, Jamesburg and Monroe?” The poll was found in the newspaper’s online edition and ran from February 14-16. The outcome of the poll corroborated the McLaughlin poll, showing support for the Middlesex route by more than two to one with a total of 460 responses:



MOM advocates react

Governor Corzine’s outspoken rejection of the Monmouth Junction alignment was met with varied reactions among pro-MOM advocates. *NJ-ARP* leaders did not even blink, realizing that MOM was not doomed by the governor’s ill-planned words. Others took the governor’s words in stride also. "I'm taking it with a grain of salt," said Benjamin Waldron, Monmouth-Ocean Development Council executive director. "I don't see how that statement made by the governor in that kind of forum will derail the Draft Environmental Impact Statement." The MODC for some years had taken a proactive role in promoting MOM and its Monmouth Junction route, working closely with Monmouth and Ocean Counties and their consultant. However, after co-sponsoring a May, 2007 press conference that yielded questionable results, the MODC MOM Rail Committee seemed to have run out of steam and is still dormant as of this writing.

So, too, for the Central Jersey Rail Coalition, which was for ten years a high-profile activist group that rescued the MOM concept from oblivion and persisted in conducting rallies, lobbying elected officials, writing letters, circulating petitions and much more. The Rail Coalition had long championed Monmouth Junction and was an ally of *NJ-ARP* and MODC, although its leadership sought to have a dual-pronged MOM route with the other fork going to Red Bank. But Corzine’s opposition to Monmouth Junction seemed to be the last straw for Salvatore Petoia, vice president of the Rail Coalition. Writing in the *Asbury Park Press*, Petoia pointed out that Ocean County remains the big loser in the never-ending route dispute. Both Monmouth and Middlesex already have the luxury of substantial passenger rail service elsewhere, so they can afford to keep arguing with each other for years to come, But Ocean County still has no trains except to its tiny northeast corner. Petoia therefore argued once again for interim passenger rail service along a four-mile segment of existing track from Eatontown to Red Bank.

More support for MOM and Monmouth Junction

Toward the end of February, Congressmen Smith and Saxton sent a joint letter to Governor Corzine reminding him that federal funding for any MOM route would be jeopardized unless the DEIS is properly completed, and they urged him not to interfere with the process. This seemed to be the end of the loud public controversy—for the time being. Also in February, Monmouth County announced that it had submitted requests to Senators Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez for \$1.5 million from the federal government for a Final Environmental Impact Statement on MOM, and that it continues to support the Monmouth Junction alignment. "Monmouth County favors the Monmouth Junction route, which would deliver much needed passenger rail service to western Monmouth County and into Middlesex and Ocean counties. It is the route that will provide the best relief of our congested roadways," Monmouth County Freeholder Director Lillian Burry said in a press release. Bonnie Goldschlag, assistant planning director for Monmouth County, said the money would be given to NJ Transit to help pay for the environmental study.

DEIS funding continues

By April 9, 2008 the \$1.25 million for the MOM project's ongoing Alternatives Analysis Program was in the federal budget. The funds were secured by Congressmen Smith and Saxton, who said the U.S. Department of Transportation will issue the grant. The money was included in the federal DOT's budget as a result of the two lawmakers' efforts to fund the project in 2005 as part of the federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act—A Legacy for Users. That act authorizes federal surface transportation programs through the end of 2009. Smith and Saxton announced the grant in a prepared statement. "The MOM line is a critical project aimed at relieving congestion and its related health problems in one of the fastest-growing regions in New Jersey," said Smith. "The federal government's continued commitment and funding will help move the MOM line forward."

More from Monmouth County

The Monmouth County freeholders initiated the next newsworthy MOM item of 2008 on June 10 when they passed a resolution and forwarded it to NJ Transit. The resolution made several statements, and among them were: (1) In the current DEIS, the figure of \$2.50 a gallon was used for the price of gasoline and should be increased in the model to at least the current gas price of \$4.00 a gallon and maybe considerably higher for the 2030 year projection; (2) Monmouth Junction is the only one of the three alignments that will help to alleviate traffic congestion in all three counties by providing superior access to jobs, universities, medical centers, and cultural and recreational facilities. The freeholders called on NJ Transit to use "improved assumptions in the DEIS ridership projection model such as using up-to-date, realistic gas prices and providing needed commuter parking spaces." With regard to the Monmouth Junction route, the freeholders stated that NJ Transit staff and consultants "should spend extra time and make a concerted effort to help make this alternative receive a medium to high rating from the Federal Transit Administration to allow this project to advance."

Monmouth Battlefield State Park

As of this writing, there was one additional major issue faced by MOM supporters in 2008: renewed and more vocal opposition to the Monmouth Junction route by Friends of Monmouth Battlefield and by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection. Feature articles in the *Tri-Town News*, the *Sentinel* and the *Asbury Park Press* detailed a complicated problem that has reappeared after many thought it was forgotten three years ago. On May 19 Jeanne A. Mroczko, acting director of the DEP's Division of Park and Forestry, sent a letter to David Koenig, principal historic preservation specialist for NJ Transit, listing a series of concerns about the predicted impact of the MOM line on Monmouth Battlefield State Park. The state park is a national historic landmark that marks the site of the Battle of Monmouth which was fought on June 28, 1778 between British and American forces during the American Revolution. In her letter to NJ Transit, Mroczko cited seven issues relating to the battlefield in Manalapan that could prove difficult for supporters of the MOM alternative to overcome. These issues appear trivial and even invalid at first, but the DEP and the Friends of Monmouth Battlefield are very serious about preventing the development of MOM.

Monmouth County spokesman William Heine issued a detailed rebuttal strongly supporting the Monmouth Junction line as the preferred alternative, while respectfully debunking each of the DEP's issues one by one. The May 19 letter from Mroczko to NJ Transit is not the first time that supporters of the MOM line have been notified that the battlefield could be an issue. In 2005, Kristen Stevens, an archeologist and grant manager with the American Battlefield Protection Program, stated her concerns about the MOM passenger rail line, and a written response was made at the time by former Monmouth County Freeholder Director Thomas J. Powers. Both Powers and Heine explained that the county freeholders treasure the battlefield as a historic site, but reassured them that commuter rail service would not damage its integrity.

The DEP letter from Mroczko was praised by James T. Raleigh, president of Friends of Monmouth Battlefield, who also believed that the battlefield needed protection from MOM. Yet another objection to MOM came from Garry Wheeler Stone, Monmouth Battlefield State Park historian. He was quoted by Larry Higgs of the *Asbury Park Press* as saying "The effort to upgrade the Monmouth Junction line across the preserved battlefield could be prevented by federal officials, now that the DEP has rendered an opinion about the effects. They can't proceed without the permission of the New Jersey Historic Sites Council, and if they approve, the National Park Service would not approve."

Responses to Battlefield objections

All of the above is worrisome to advocates of MOM, for the battlefield issue was earlier thought to be trivial but has now become a seemingly major obstacle. The *Asbury Park Press* wrote: "Whether Corzine's fingerprints are on the DEP's letter to NJ Transit or not, officials in Ocean and Monmouth County should not allow it to go unchallenged. The choice of the best rail route should be driven by cost, potential utilization and environmental impact — not whether it will interfere with annual Revolutionary War re-enactments."

Monmouth County officials immediately accepted the challenge and are not backing down from their previously pledged support for a passenger rail line through the western portion of the county. "The significant history of our county did not end with the Battle of Monmouth," Monmouth County Administrator Robert M. Czech wrote in a letter to DEP Commissioner Lisa P. Jackson. "The railroad predates park development by more than 100 years and would not be expanded beyond the single track in this area," Czech said in the letter. "When the park's Visitor Center was built on top of historically significant Combs Hill to overlook the historic houses and fields below, the railroad was already part of the landscape." The Monmouth Battlefield National Landmark Planning Guide prepared by the Friends of Monmouth Battlefield cites the compatibility of passenger rail service with park development and, in fact, recommends development of the Monmouth Junction alternative. The guide states: "This line, originally constructed in 1852 through central New Jersey, links southern Middlesex County with eastern Monmouth County, including Allaire State Park. The Planning Guide recommends the development of passenger service from Middlesex County to Allaire State Park, with a stop at Monmouth Battlefield."

County officials noted that rail service has been compatible with other "first rank battlefield parks," including Gettysburg National Military Park. "Access via rail can enhance park development, access and use," Czech wrote. "The historic Monmouth Junction alternative (formerly known as the Freehold and Jamesburg Agricultural Railroad) exists and should be used to this park's benefit, following the recommendation of the master plan (Planning Guide). "Furthermore, we feel that passenger rail service on the existing tracks is actually less intrusive than the proposed internal loop road..." County officials said if the Monmouth Junction alternative is selected for the MOM line, it would provide people from the entire Northeast with public transportation to the park. "This will enable daily attendance to increase at the park and make the historic battlefield and surrounding area an easily-reached destination and available to all," Czech said in the letter. "It is our belief that it is quite advantageous for the railroad and the park to continue to coexist."

Yet, Czech's letter to the DEP has already been challenged by Daniel M. Sivilich, president of the Battlefield Restoration and Archaeological Volunteer Organization, who informs the public that the author of the Planning Guide quoted by Czech in his letter was sentenced to a year in jail in connection with his theft of \$32,500 from the Friends of Monmouth Battlefield, among other crimes. Sivilich also challenges other points made by Czech and says his organization will continue to oppose the rail line unless it is built in a tunnel beneath the battlefield.

Latest DEIS news

At the September meeting of the Ocean County Transportation Advisory Board, Tom Clark of NJ Transit reported that the DEIS has been quietly but methodically continuing despite all the negative headlines in the news. The MOM "working group" will meet again in October, and it is expected to make its latest findings public afterward. It has been studying the ridership figures and the capital costs of the three alignments, which have changed substantially. It also has been working on how MOM falls within the thresholds set by the federal government, based on ridership forecasting and costs. As noted above, Monmouth County has requested

taking into account the recent high cost of gasoline. The working group has looked into that issue, and it will probably discuss that again at their October meeting.

Future of MOM still in doubt

In conclusion, it appears that obstacles to MOM and the Monmouth Junction route have continued to multiply during the past year. It is no wonder that the pro-MOM *Tri-Town News* sees little hope for success. Its June 19 editorial asked, "Why should anyone believe a passenger rail line in central New Jersey will become a reality at any time in the next 25 years? New Jersey can't seem to make progress in any other area, so why should public transportation be any different? If all of this sounds pessimistic, it is because the evidence all points to a pessimistic outlook on life in the Garden State. New Jersey has been stuck in neutral on public transportation issues for years, and now, with traffic choking its roads and gas at \$4 a gallon, there is still no movement toward real long-term progress. It all points to a new motto for the Garden State: New Jersey: Going nowhere fast." *NJ-ARP* nonetheless presses on.

--Daniel Green

RiverLINE

The River LINE continues to see increased ridership, with an average of 10,000 daily weekday riders reached for the first time this summer. This is an increase of 2,000 riders per weekday since January. The majority of the travel is to/from the end points at Camden's Walter Rand Transportation Center (40 % of travel) and Trenton (35%). Travel at intermediate stations is strong with 25% of overall travel.

Enhancements made to The River LINE during the past year include:

- Limited Station "Express" Service to Trenton in the morning with connections to the Northeast Corridor.
- A 3:45pm new Trenton departure.
- Reduced trip times.
- Two-car consists are noted on the public timetables.
- The installation of new Ticket Vending Machines at all River LINE stations.
- The installation of a Variable Message Sign at Trenton with a scrolling marquee.

--Carol Ann Thomas

Cape May Branch

The end of 2007 came with mixed news. The December Richland-to-Tuckahoe Santa excursions run by *Cape May Seashore Lines* were more popular than ever. The Cape May Canal Bridge was repaired and returned to service. But a Nor'easter on April 13, 2007 damaged the track in Dennis Twp. rendering the line severed.

This year, good news came in February when NJDOT agreed to fund the track repair in Dennis Township. NJDOT passed the funds to New Jersey Transit (NJT) to administer; NJT wrote contracts; and CMSL awarded the work to a contractor. Regrettably, construction was only completed in late August.

Late August was too late to operate a Cape May schedule for 2008 but June 23, 2009 (Tuesday) has been selected to start the Cape May schedule for 2009. The reopening of the line has allowed CMSL to move the valuable stored passenger cars out of Rio Grande (Middle Township) and protect it from the vandalism and theft those cars suffered while there.

The northern end of the Cape May branch had its own challenges. The new Richland siding construction was completed, but it prompted NJT and Conrail to require a new operating agreement to be created. This new agreement included numerous restrictions on the use of the siding, rendering it awkward to use.

The positive north end the news was, that the negotiations were completed and on Saturday, September 13, 2008, excursions resumed.

Cape May Branch milestones:

- 1996 CMSL starts Cold Spring – 4H passenger service.
- 1999 CMSL expands operation Cape May City -- 4H passenger service.
- 2005 October CMSL adds Tuckahoe – Richland passenger service.
- 2005 December CMSL suspends Cape May City passenger service, due to bridge trouble.
- 2006 November CMSL hosts Downtown New Jersey reception, Atlantic City station.
- 2007 November CMSL hosts Downtown New Jersey reception, Atlantic City station.

--Paul Mulligan

Sponsorships

Light Rail Now!

As the leading voice for light rail transit (LRT) within the Garden State, ***NJ-ARP*** continues to be an "underwriter" to *Light Rail Now!*, a Web site and organization dedicated to aiding pro-LRT supporters in the United States (and often elsewhere). *Light Rail Now!* disseminates information, political strategy and options, and news to LRT supporters as they move to initiate or expand LRT systems.

NJ-ARP has received valuable input from *Light Rail Now!* sources as the push for Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Transit (HBLRT) into Bergen County makes real progress. Both allies and adversaries of ***NJ-ARP*** in the HBLRT drive have learned to tap and/or trust ***NJ-ARP*** data on light rail, in no small part due to LRN's assistance. Ironically, often ***NJ-ARP*** critics will pan *Light Rail Now!*, citing a "pro-rail bias" – a charge ***NJ-ARP*** will readily vouch for!—and accusing the site of being anti-bus (which it certainly is not).

Indeed, while *Light Rail Now!* endorses bus improvements, it is highly critical of subversive efforts to "substitute" LRT "Bus Rapid Transit" proposals, which claim to be "just like LRT, but cheaper." It's a dubious (and dated) concept that, alas, New Jersey Transit itself has bought into. While we await results of NJT's BRT experiment along Springfield Avenue in Newark, we can say at least the BRT bandwagon didn't catch ***NJ-ARP*** off guard

In turn, ***NJ-ARP*** is pleased to relay to *Light Rail Now!*'s members our own experience with LRT, especially on a political level, has been available to the numerous communities across the United States seeking to establish LRT and/or streetcars. We've stressed the need to be political but not partisan -- friends and foes of LRT can be found on "both sides of the aisle" -- and we try to answer whatever queries for informational assistance come our way. We've also stressed that even LRT isn't a "one-sized" package, defending and/or touting our work for the River Line -- "diesel" LRT -- at any opportunity.

NJ-ARP's sponsorship of *Light Rail Now!* is funded by contributions from individual ***NJ-ARP*** members, and not from the ***NJ-ARP*** treasury.

'Montclair Connection'

NJ-ARP sponsored the 'Montclair Connection' softball team for its eighth year, as weekend service for the Montclair/Boonton Line remains elusive, long after the actual Montclair Connection made its own debut. The need for such service options -- for all rail passengers, not just "commuters" -- is one reason why ***NJ-ARP*** has continued its softball sponsorship, even as the organization, under ***NJ-ARP***'s George Musser of Glen Ridge, increases its visibility in lobbying for such service. ***NJ-ARP***'s softball sponsorship helps the organization gain access to township officials and other supporters.

The team uniform incorporates *NJ-ARP*'s white logo on the green baseball cap, and black *NJ-ARP* logo against a green and white dress shirt. The shirt logo also includes the words "New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers" in small letters -- large enough for the rail-curious but small enough to remain unobtrusive to those interested in baseball only.

The team's main shirt art includes a baseball diamond, with bases linked by railroad tracks, underpinned by the slogan, "The Fastest Way Home." Still at the helm as manager is Chris Isidore, a user of both the real Montclair Connection and competitor DeCamp bus services.

NJ-ARP's sponsorship of the 'Montclair Connection' is funded by contributions from individual *NJ-ARP* members, and not from the *NJ-ARP* treasury.

Adopt-A-Station (Mount Olive Station)

NJ-ARP Sussex Liaison continues to oversee *NJ-ARP*'s sponsorship of the Mount Olive Station, located on the Montclair-Boonton Line just across the county border in Morris County. Apgar, at times assisted by other *NJ-ARP* volunteers, keeps the station platform and surrounding area clean, and continues to add new plantings as part of *NJ-ARP*'s commitment to offer a welcome environment at the station.

--Douglas John Bowen

Miscellaneous

TransAction Conference, Atlantic City

Through the good efforts of *NJ-ARP*'s Frank Reilly, *NJ-ARP* routinely enjoys good positioning as an exhibitor during TransAction, and the 2008 conference proved to be yet another ideal location. As in 2007, *NJ-ARP* continued to ask everyone to focus on the flaws we find apparent in Trans-Hudson-Express (T.H.E.) Tunnel, which continued to morph even as we questioned previous assumptions. The feedback was muted and whispered—but it was there—even as NJT's cross-Hudson tunnel plans continued to morph into something ever-less.

Beyond that, *NJ-ARP* continues to remind New Jersey transport powers of needs near Atlantic City itself, including passenger rail service on the Cape May Branch (provided by Cape May Seashore Lines. *NJ-ARP* President Douglas John Bowen moderated a session devoted exclusively to the Cape May Branch, with *NJ-ARP* Cape May Liaison Paul Mulligan doing the PowerPoint honors for the organization; CMSL President Anthony C. Macrie also was on the panel.

NJ-ARP members Carol Ann Thomas and Frank Miklos rounded out the *NJ-ARP* squad at TransAction, with Miklos doing yeoman work staffing the *NJ-ARP* table.

Planning for the 2009 Conference is already under way. If you have a topic you believe should be discussed as a theme, please contact *NJ-ARP*.

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

NJ-ARP representatives, led by Director Carol Ann Thomas, attend regular meetings of the *Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission* (DVRPC), a bi-state metropolitan planning organization (MPO) that includes four New Jersey counties: Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Mercer.

DVRPC was one of the earliest MPOs in action when Congress enacted the first ISTEA bill for federal ground transportation in the early 1990s, and at that time it was considered (by *NJ-ARP* and others) to be one of the more professional MPOs.

Weighted down by budget constraints in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and (in *NJ-ARP*'s view) beset with the "SEPTA bug," DVRPC appears unable to initiate any large-scale public and/or rail transportation project, instead reacting to events as they unfold. It makes grand noises about rail improvements for New Jersey, but (per the efforts of Princeton University) appears to have bought into Bus Rapid Transit as a transportation savior, along the federal sales pitch of "just like LRT, only cheaper."

NJ-ARP continually reminds all that the River Line in its conception was actively shunned by DVRPC, and as 2008 progressed we found DVRPC absent from any meaningful role on any

Gloucester County rail passenger service. One can question the focus of the *Delaware River Port Authority* on its proposed "PATCO extension" into Gloucester County, but to its credit DRPA at least made noise about advancing such an effort. DVRPC nominally has shown interest in Gloucester County, but little leadership

North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

NJ-ARP's access to the 13-county *North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority* (NJTPA), one of three (3) metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) covering New Jersey, has seldom been better; NJTPA's director of regional planning, Lois Goldman routinely seeks out *NJ-ARP* input and feedback. However, *NJ-ARP*'s influence on NJTPA is still weaker than desired; the MPO remains slow to grasp, or at least react to, *NJ-ARP*'s continued insistence on addressing the flawed design, and limited focus, of T.H.E. Tunnel despite the high cost—limited bang for the taxpayer dollar. On other matters, however,

NJTPA's awareness of public transit, and even rail transit, appears to be growing. Independent efforts by Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley to tap into passenger rail (most likely via the Raritan Valley Line) have been encouraged and augmented by NJTPA, despite the uncertain and long-range prospects of such interstate service. As noted elsewhere in this Annual report, another hopeful sign is NJTPA's endorsement last June of a Minimum Operable Segment (MOS) for the Lackawanna Cutoff service restoration, extending the Morris & Essex Line 7.3 miles from the NJ Transit Yard in Port Morris along the ex-Cutoff right-of-way to a new terminal station in Andover Township.

Southern New Jersey Transportation Planning Organization

Though *NJ-ARP* still requires a permanent liaison with the *Southern New Jersey Transportation Planning Organization* (SJTPO), *NJ-ARP* Cape May Liaison Paul Mulligan has covered that gap with some success, first challenging the "road first, road only" concept directly in 2007, presenting *NJ-ARP*'s PowerPoint presentation to the SJTPO board in the summer months, stressing the economic importance and potential of rail freight and passenger service on both the Atlantic City Line and the Cape May Branch. *NJ-ARP* will keep building on Mulligan's efforts to firm up our communications with this four-county MPO, responsible for transportation issues in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem counties.

Ocean County Transportation Advisory Board

NJ-ARP Ocean Liaison Daniel Green sits on the *Ocean County Transportation Advisory Board* (TAB) as the state's second-largest county (by area) wrestles with ever-mounting traffic congestion and transport problems. Green is one of many on the TAB attempting to advance rail transit -- particularly Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex (MOM) rail passenger service -- but the

board still focuses mostly on road and bus projects, often relegating rail to a secondary or "back-seat" issue.

Union County Transportation Advisory Board

NJ-ARP Director William R. Wright in 2008 continued as Cranford's official representative to the *Union County Transportation Advisory Board* (TAB). The Board focuses on all transportation modes and alternatives within Union County. Bill has supported the reactivation of the Rahway Valley Railroad as a short-line freight railroad to be used by the Morristown & Erie; that project began stumbling forward once more during 2008, but only the segment between Cranford and Elizabeth is likely to be activated in the foreseeable future. We still believe in the great potential to connect Cranford and Summit, for both freight and passenger rail -- a goal of *NJ-ARP* for at least two decades, and one that anti-rail forces continue to obstruct with some skill. Bill, in numerous letters to local print media, continues to counter challenges by anti-rail voices within the county (opposed to both freight and passenger improvements), and stresses Union County's need for intrastate transportation options.

Web Site

NJ-ARP's Hotline was suspended early in 2008 as its chief writer failed to keep pace with weekly events, due to career conflicts, and as *NJ-ARP*'s Webmaster of 12 years resigned, apparently for reasons unrelated to content flow. *NJ-ARP* member George Musser has acted as interim caretaker for *NJ-ARP*'s Web site, and some updated information has been added during 2008, but the organization still seeks a full-time Webmaster to assume overall site responsibilities. Should we secure such a person, resumption of the Hotline is planned subsequently.

In part to make up for the diminution of information services to our membership, *NJ-ARP* Production Manager Lester W. Wolff this year added to *NJ-ARP*'s traditional publishing package the *NEWSLETTER PLUS*, available to *NJ-ARP* members who receive their *NEWSLETTER REPORT* online.