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New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers

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NJ-ARP Annual Report

2004-2005

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President's Message

The victories came harder and fewer for NJ-ARP in 2005, as expected. Still, they came. Regardless of energy price fluctuations or state fiscal insolvency, the public continues to demand an alternative -- a choice -- to the auto-first policies that hobble New Jersey's ability to function.

That's hobble, not cripple. For even the rankest, darkest pessimist must face the fact that New Jersey, for all its bumbling and stumbling, is expanding its transportation options, and doing so better than many states elsewhere -- even if it's almost against its will.

Expansion certainly is contrary to the "Back to Basics" mantra floated for political cover just four years ago. NJ-ARP is one of many reasons why "Back in the Box" or the status quo isn't flying. But we *are* one reason why. Thank yourselves for that. NJ-ARP members

make NJ-ARP *matter*.

Indeed, NJ-ARP often is criticized (and sometimes in less than civil fashion) precisely because so many want to discount the "amateurs." Save for our "Paid Staff of One," we are indeed "amateurs" -- that's not the same as "amateurish." And that "Paid Staff of One" -- Government Affairs Director Rose M. Heck -- has succeeded admirably in bolstering NJ-ARP's everyday, weekday visibility during 2005 throughout the state.

True, such visibility doesn't guarantee accord with New Jersey Transit on fare hikes, or T.H.E. Tunnel, or the Northern Branch, or bi-level equipment, or MOM. But (and to NJT's credit, as well), it does mean NJT and others can find us, and discuss or debate with us, on the issues of the day or year. And that also matters.

For those insisting NJ-ARP pull yet "another rabbit out of the hat," we obliged in 2005, in concert with NJ Transit and others. Our 25th anniversary annual meeting October 8, 2005, held in Richland Village, in Tuckahoe, and in Woodbine while traversing New Jersey Transit's Cape May Branch, honors one of our earliest pledges made in 1980s, when NJ-ARP was founded by Anthony C. Perl. New Jersey needs rail transportation -- all of New Jersey, not just the deep, dense, New York metropolitan area. Led by NJ-ARP Cape May Liaison Paul Mulligan, we honor that pledge this year, proudly.

And we also keep setting the table for future passenger potential. Witness our continued efforts to aid Union County, and the *Morristown & Erie Railway*, in re-establishing intrastate rail routes for local freight rail use. Those rights-of-way are valuable in themselves for freight, from Elizabeth to Cranford, from Cranford to Summit, or combined as a package. But NJ-ARP sees passenger "shuttle" potential, particularly between Summit and Cranford, possibly continuing via the ex-Central of New Jersey right-of-way (still owned by New Jersey Transit) to Elizabeth Station (NEC).

Such "upstream" grunt work keeps NJ-ARP optimistic even as "present-day" projects such as Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex (MOM) passenger rail, or HBLRT to Tenafly, or even rail access to Midtown Manhattan morph into ventures verging on the bizarre -- and mostly not in keeping with serving passenger needs, be they intrastate or interstate.

Looking at *Trans-Hudson-Express (T.H.E.) Tunnel*, for instance, can make even the cheeriest rail advocate grimace. NJ-ARP, led by indefatigable Director Albert L. Papp, Jr. has watched the noble *Access to the Region's Core* concept fall short of its goal, even as crossovers, loops, new underground stations, and other bells and whistles promise much less.

T.H.E. Tunnel, enthusiastically heralded by NJ Transit, no longer serves the "core" eastside Manhattan market where so many New Jerseyans work. It now serves Penn Station, where New York City's subway system quite probably can't handle the expected load. It gets worse; T.H.E. Tunnel doesn't even address Northeast Corridor capacity constraints in New Jersey between Newark and the Hudson River Tunnels (old or new). And when might the latter be evaluated? "It's coming," says NJT. When? NJT won't say.

In contrast, NJT considers itself daring for advancing revived rail passenger service on an existing bike/hike rail trail, built with state funds, between Freehold and Matawan; part of the trail opened in June. NJT argues ridership numbers for "**Oops! Where's Matawan?**" beat Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex (MOM) ridership, conveniently forgetting that "Oops!" misses New Brunswick, a rail draw if ever there was one. NJ-ARP, along with Monmouth and Ocean counties, were quick to object.

NJT then conveniently noted that historians object to MOM traversing Monmouth Battlefield Park in Freehold Township, though freight trains operate there today; the historians somehow can't find it to corral or limit "historic auto access" to the site.

To be fair, NJT (and NJ-ARP!) face two problems of more immediate caliber: stable funding for operations, and a reliable counterpart for capital expenditures.

On *these* issues, in NJ-ARP's view, NJT has been a straight shooter. It tells NJ-ARP that fare hikes will be a recurrent reality unless a stable source of operational funding is identified. And it echoes other state officials in noting funding for the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) is critical to any expansion of the public transit network.

Though NJ-ARP quibbles with some details and some NJT presumptions, basically we concur with NJT's assessment, and we hope to help address both issues following the 2005 gubernatorial elections, per NJ Transit's invitation.

Meanwhile, the fruit of past NJ-ARP successes manifests itself visibly (and sometimes less so). Numerous NJ-ARP members contribute in numerous and meaningful ways to numerous issues; the listing below names only some of them, unintentionally slighting others or relegating them to the individual issue reports that follow this message.

Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Transit ridership continues to grow, slowly but inexorably -- and not just because of new mileage and new station stops. NJ Transit this year began two-car consists of the *Bayonne Flyer* service -- putting into effect a request made by former NJ-ARP President Leonard Resto in late 2003.

Critics of the RiverLINE are struggling to keep up the negative "white noise" by hounding on ridership numbers, even as they rise, and as real estate development quickens in Burlington and Camden counties -- development that the developers *attribute directly*, in print, to passenger rail's presence. But success hasn't stopped NJ-ARP Director Carol Ann Thomas from seeking more and better rail/bus options for more riders.

Hounded by NJ-ARP Rockland Liaison Orrin Getz and the "Getz Gang," NJT and Metro-North Railroad continue tinkering, and expanding, "West of Hudson" services to Bergen County (N.J.) and Rockland and Orange counties in New York. Even the oft-delayed passing sidings on the Pascack Valley Line finally are getting addressed, if glacially. Secaucus Junction, hounded as a "boondoggle" for various fiscal (and real-estate) reasons, nonetheless has begun to work as a *rail station*, surpassing 10,000 customers each weekday. (Now, if only NJ-ARP can get NJT to take Secaucus Junction's *intrastate* ridership opportunities seriously.)

We often note NJ-ARP members are, in the best sense, "Not *Just* In My Back Yard." NJ-ARP Bergen Liaison Lester W. Wolff had his hands full with Bergen County issues all year. But it didn't prevent him from volunteering to help get *NJ-3* up and running in the public eye this spring in Woodbury, Gloucester County.

NJ-3 wants PATCO rail passenger service placed on active, existing rail right-of-way -- not in a highway median. Wolff, joined by NJ-ARP's Tom Moran, made sure *NJ-3* knew it had company, and support. It's one more example of planning for the future, and growing options for that future -- a future too many can't find time to contemplate.

Talk about future shock: NJ-ARP's NARP Director trio of James Ciacciarelli, Albert L. Papp, Jr., and Joseph Versaggi had their hands full working to secure a future for a national rail passenger network, even as energy prices (and supplies!) fluctuate. "I'm an Oil Junkie" might well be America's motto -- with New Jerseyans not excused from the label -- as auto-first, auto-only transportation policies continue to hold too much sway in the American (un)consciousness. Thanks in large measure to the NJ-ARP/NARP trio, who tapped NJ-ARP talent and resources, federal officials friendly to passenger rail in turn tapped our knowledge and political input. Once again, NJ-ARP mattered.

All such efforts this year are a reflection of what determined passenger rail advocacy can achieve, given enough time and effort, and regardless of the criticism one inherits while pursuing the goal.

At NJ-ARP, we respect, honor, and remember the past. But our game, as the statewide rail passenger elite corps, is about the future. We can never control it -- but we can help to shape it, as we have so shaped it since debuting as an organization in 1980. Riding the train from Richland Village to Woodbine in 2005 isn't the beginning, nor the end, but part of the continuum. For helping NJ-ARP in that real and symbolic effort, representative of so many others, as always, the Board of Directors, officers, and I thank you all.

-- Douglas John Bowen

Bergen County Developments

2005 saw increasingly complicated developments in Bergen County with, sadly, very little positive to report.

Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Transit (HBLRT)

HBLRT has made some progress in right-of-way construction north of Lincoln Harbor. By this time next year New Jersey Transit (NJT) hopes to have the line open all the way to Tonnelle Avenue, which should increase ridership substantially. On the southern end of the line, NJT has added more *Bayonne Flyer* express service to meet peaking demand.

The bad news is that NJT is trying its best to force Colorado Rail Car-type DMUs to service the Bergen portion of the line from Tenafly to the Tonnelle Avenue station at the foot of the Weehawken Tunnel portal, with a cross-platform transfer at that station to electric LRTs.

In addition to depriving Northern Line customers of quarter-hourly service, NJT will also force those customers into a "three-seat" ride to New York City (or a "two-seat" ride to Hoboken and the Gold Coast. The rationale for this "solution" is that there will be substantial capital cost savings by not electrifying the line north of Tonnelle Avenue. NJ-ARP finds the savings will in fact be marginal at best. Beyond that, of course, in the long term operating costs will eat up any of these so-called savings.

Additionally, NJT has been disingenuous at best in promoting this "solution" by holding out the canard that at some time in the future, Northern Line customers will have the coveted "one-seat" ride into New York City once *T.H.E. Tunnel* has been built. When asked directly about this connection, NJT officials responded that it is not "currently" on *T.H.E. Tunnel*

project plans being submitted for D.E.I.S. approval.

NJ-ARP, aided by Government Affairs Director Rose M. Heck, will be marshalling its resources to hold NJT's feet to the fire to make them deliver to Bergen County what they promised at the inception of the HBLRT project. (More information on HBLRT, inside and outside Bergen County, can be found below.)

Xanadu

The spur from the Pascack Valley Line to serve the Xanadu complex has been approved and will be built. As envisioned, it will bring a new station to Carlstadt and a new combined station in the Meadowlands serviced by both Pascack Valley and Bergen/Main Line trains. DMU shuttle service at half-hour (or greater frequency) between Xanadu and Hoboken with an intermediate stop at Secaucus Junction will be provided.

NJ-ARP supports this plan. We acknowledge that the approach may be imperfect, but the funding from the *Port Authority of New York & New Jersey* is hard to overlook, and NJT has designed the spur for eventual "through running" capability. Real estate interests aside -- and NJ-ARP looks askance at the Xanadu measure overall, much as we do the real estate portion of Secaucus Junction -- the rail spur delivers a public transit alternative to an area that's waited more than 30 years for same.

Secaucus Junction

Passenger counts are still increasing at Secaucus Junction. The latest figures were over 10,000 weekdays and around the 2,000 mark for weekends. NJ-ARP will be recommending elimination of the "Secaucus Loop" (for "one-seat" service to NY-Penn) in the D.E.I.S. study for *T.H.E. Tunnel* in favor of a possible Hoboken track connection to the new tubes, which offers more flexibility to both passengers and for rail operations.

Parking

Sadly, NJ Transit's major new Park & Ride Station, Ramsey-Route 17 with 1,251 spaces is being underutilized. Heavy marketing along the Bergen/Main Line, as well as institution of multi-month rate discounts have, to date, been largely unsuccessful.

Now that New Jersey Turnpike Interchange 15X at Secaucus Junction is about to open, the subject of parking facilities at the station has reared its ugly head. Secaucus Junction was intentionally designed without parking so that the town of Secaucus would not be burdened by any additional traffic. This may turn out to be another promise that NJT fails to keep.

NJ-ARP questions the wisdom of now building parking facilities at this location. We believe it 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. The only way NJT would not lose precious revenue is to operate the garage itself, and sell parking only in conjunction with a round trip rail ticket into NY-Penn. They would have to charge a hefty fee, which should be at least the average fee of a parking garage in midtown Manhattan plus the Lincoln Tunnel toll rate plus the round-trip fare from Secaucus Junction to NY-Penn.

Pascack Valley Line

The long awaited sidings (originally due in 2000) which would allow two-way, all-day service on the Pascack Valley Line have been delayed, yet again -- now with a projected completion date in early 2008. That's eight years beyond the original target completion date.

The positive spin in the latest delay is that the project would be completed in conjunction with the Xanadu spur (see above). NJ-ARP maintains that the sidings are not necessary to, at least, provide some limited reverse service and are totally unnecessary to provide 2 to 2-1/2 hour weekend headway service.

-- Les Wolff

Cape May Developments

Cape May Seashore Lines (CMSL) has completed its *10th year* of passenger operation, and its seventh year of crossing the Cape May canal to serve Cape May City. 2005 has been a year of accomplishments and issues, some new and some ongoing.

The accomplishments:

- The canal bridge we returned to service.
- "Thomas the Tank Engine" visited CMSL, operating to the thrill of children and families over two weekends (six days) -- serving over 18,000 guests.
- A Saturday of excursions between Tuckahoe and Richland will be added this fall through the end of the year following the NJ-ARP annual meeting. A monumental effort to move the bureaucracy was exerted by the Mayor of Buena Vista Township, NJ-ARP and CMSL to make this train service possible.
- Cape May City again had Fourth of July fireworks, and CMSL operated three round-trip "Fireworks Specials." These trains brought passengers into Cape May from Cold Spring Village, and took them back 30 minutes after the show with three quick-turn round trips. The service transported ~400 people with more than 100 cars parked in the Cold Spring Village lot -- cars NOT adding to overburdened Cape May City's congestion.

Some of the issues:

- County college construction though complete, the 4-H/Cape May Zoo station and its great parking lot remain closed by the County of Cape May. In response, CMSL this season reopened the South Cape May Court House station. This hurts ridership with the loss of the zoo as a destination.
- The Gap: Even after the trackwork between Tuckahoe and Woodbine was completed, close to 10 miles of railroad between Woodbine and Cape May Court House still is waiting for funding to be rehabilitated. Such rehabilitation is essential before passenger service can run between Tuckahoe and Cape May City.

-- Paul Mulligan

Hudson-Bergen Light Rail

Which way HBLRT? New Jersey Transit seems bound and determined to "Go West" to the Meadowlands Sportsplex, now partly to be redesigned as the "Xanadu" supermall conglomeration. Costs and environmental difficulties aside, that shortshriffs Bergen County, and particularly Northern Valley towns, one more time.

NJ-ARP, led by Bergen County Liaison Lester W. Wolff and Government Affairs Director Rose M. Heck, has raised the alarm, as has NJ-ARP member and Tenafly resident Al Cafiero, who has worked vociferously to expose NJT's change of heart -- and empty promises.

Of course, Bergen County doesn't get it. It thinks subtracting the "B" from "HBLRT" is just fine because it's been promised a "one-seat ride" to Midtown Manhattan for the Northern Branch. Too bad that's not part of the official *T.H.E. Tunnel* plans -- and that leaves Bergen County left out again.

NJ-ARP notes that other jurisdictions already served by HBLRT want more of it, so it's doubly strange that Bergen County seems unwilling to embrace the very service it demanded 10 years ago -- or that the county won't hold New Jersey Transit to its promise.

All this came into focus in 2005 even as HBLRT climbed over the 21,000 riders-per-day mark in early 2005, bolstered in part by its September 2004 opening of right-of-way linking Hoboken Terminal with Lincoln Harbor in Weehawken. Late this year, another northward extension of Initial Operating Segment 2 (IOS-2), to 50th Street in North Bergen, west of the Palisades, should debut, linking Union City and West New York to HBLRT via an elevator ride through the Palisades to a new station in the Weehawken Tunnels.

The cost of this station is high, but so is the potential ridership offered by two municipalities boasting population densities of 50,000-plus people per mile. That's equivalent to the densities of numerous Asian cities, but even that doesn't silence some anti-rail critics who insist there's "not enough density" to support rail.

NJT's official posture re: light rail now is that it does indeed belong in "cities," but not in suburbs, where (NJT says) "bus rapid transit" and other modes are more suitable. NJ-ARP disagrees vehemently, and wonders whether NJT's linguistic charade classifies Xanadu (or just the Meadowlands) as a "city."

To be fair, NJT isn't driving the process. That comes from Hudson County politicians, aided by their Bergen County brethren who have been -- there's no kinder word, really -- snookered. The irony comes as Bergen County officials blast "others" such as NJ-ARP who "obstruct" their dreams. Those officials should look harder at the "dream" being offered, because it is indeed an ephemeral concept at best.

NJ-ARP Government Affairs Director Rose M. Heck, a veteran of NJ-ARP's HBLRT efforts both within and outside NJ-ARP itself, continues to lead NJ-ARP in this effort. Heck, assisted by numerous other members, has challenged assumptions made by Bergen County and NJT on "cheaper" diesel multiple-unit (DMU) technology proposed for the Northern Branch. NJ-ARP strongly supports DMU technology where it's appropriate.

For *passengers*, DMU is not the answer here, though it does offer *political* grease for NJT, avoiding potential spats with CSX Corp., the owner of the Northern Branch, and NJT's political masters in Trenton, always seeking the "quick, cheap, and dirty" option. NJT's own

numbers, never released publicly but obtained by NJ-ARP this year, show that DMU in fact is not so cheap to put in place. Moreover, it costs *more* to operate on a per-passenger basis, in part because it will draw *fewer* passengers and provide less service frequency.

All this before one questions the dubious "one-seat ride" promise which, as we've noted, isn't scheduled to happen. The Northern Branch (and Bergen County) instead gets at best a three-seat ride to Midtown Manhattan -- DMU to LRT to ferry. It also gets a two-seat ride to New Jersey's Gold Coast. **Put another way, everyone gets demoted.** NJ-ARP has and will defend transfers as a viable concept, but here the transfers are added under the guise of "one-seat ride" that is nowhere in sight.

As for Xanadu? NJT says it's worth the \$1 billion plus to go 3-plus miles to the Meadowlands Sportsplex via Harmon Meadow (Secaucus), cutting across wetlands on brand-new right-of-way. NJ-ARP won't necessarily dispute that -- after all, we're the state LRT champions. But we question why \$1 billion is "just right" for Xanadu but "too much" for 10-plus miles to Tenafly, on existing rail right-of-way with a built-in passenger base.

One can at least be thankful (we suppose) that NJT still talks expansion of any kind for HBLRT. But, as has been historically typical, NJT is not -- repeat, is not -- the prime mover for LRT expansion. That role still is in the hands of others, including NJ-ARP, both indirectly and directly.

Renewed calls for extending HBLRT to Staten Island surfaced in Staten Island newspapers, and even in the Jersey Journal, in mid-September, as U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) addressed the plight of constituents struggling to gain access to Manhattan.

True to form, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), in essence, said a shuttle bus to HBLRT from Staten Island was not within its jurisdiction -- thus continuing to beg the question of how better to serve its customers. To its great credit, the city of Bayonne, the champion LRT municipality in New Jersey, offered to help foster such an idea to the betterment of both Bayonne and Staten Island. NJ-ARP also contacted Sen. Schumer's office, offering to assist.

Bayonne itself continues to maximize light rail on its own. The city is ambitiously pursuing true streetcar operations at the former Marine Ocean Terminal in Bayonne (MOTBY), now the Peninsula at Bayonne Harbor, a mixed-use development. Ex-PCC streetcars from the Newark City Subway would ply the approximately 1.5 mile route on the peninsula, with a cross-highway pedestrian transfer to HBLRT at 34th Street Station. If Bayonne succeeds, it will establish New Jersey's first new *streetcar line* in many decades.

Jersey City also isn't automatically out of the expansion picture either, much though some might wish it were. NJ-ARP Treasurer Leonard Resto, also a trustee of the New Jersey City University Foundation, continues to prod the college to include HBLRT as the university maps out an expansion westward to state Route 440. Resto's insistence comes despite official naysaying by well-known "experts" who continue to denigrate LRT, for reasons NJ-ARP finds hard to fathom.

And the "established" HBLRT segment south of Hoboken continues to grow. The most obvious manifestation of this is two-car *Bayonne Flyer* express trains, as the (truly) express peak-hour trains continue to grow in popularity.

-- Douglas John Bowen

Lackawanna Cut-Off

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, Pa., operating over the fabled 28-mile "Lackawanna Cut-Off."

And in 2005, some good news bolstered the forward momentum toward restoration of this bi-state passenger rail service. On July 29, 2005, Congress voted into law the six year surface transportation bill, the \$286.4 billion Transportation Equity Act - a Legacy for Users (also known as TEA-LU), which contained \$5 million for preliminary engineering work on the Cut-Off, and authorization for another \$120 million more.

Two Pennsylvania Senators, Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum and Congressman Paul Kanjorski, (both Republicans), aided by New Jersey House Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-11), played key roles in the Washington budgetary drama that led to the earmark for this high-profile project.

Authorization permits expenditures but monies are not released until appropriated, a subtle, but important, distinction. In August, Washington did release an additional \$1.97 million for continuing studies. Originally approved by the 2003 (yes, 2003!) transportation appropriations bill, this amount was over and above the \$43 million Pennsylvania contributed and the \$21 million contributed by our state in 2001. Of course, that's when the project was priced at \$200 million (it's now \$350 million) and Washington was going to fund 60% of construction based on the anticipation that about 4000 to 6000 auto drivers would be taken off the road. In January 2004, another \$2.5 million was approved to finance completion of the environmental assessment.

The results of the environmental assessment seem to raise more questions than it answered as detailed below. New Jersey Transit (NJT), nevertheless, is scheduled to submit a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) by the end of this year.

Under the "New Starts" criteria, the Cut-Off needs to receive a "recommended" or "highly recommended" rating in order to start the preliminary engineering phase. Thanks to the Cut-Off being included in TEA-LU, there is now a further \$120 million authorized -- but, again, 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.

And here's where some major trouble has loomed. In June 2004, Edwards & Kelcey (E&K) suggested that initial operation only be inaugurated between Analomink and Hoboken due to the paucity of riders (45) expected to use the train from Scranton. Almost immediately,

Sen. Specter's representative indicated that the Senator would not support the project without the inclusion of Scranton.

Bowing to criticism from local and state officials (including NJ-ARP) that the ridership numbers were unrealistically low, NJ Transit hired another consultant, AECOM, to investigate off-peak and other discretionary travel in order to augment E&K's daily passenger estimates. Frank Reilly, former chair of the Morris County Board of Public Transportation, broached the likelihood of a Scranton to Analomink shuttle train in order to reduce costs and make the Cut-Off more acceptable to the FTA.

On June 29, 2004, NJT held an "Open House Meeting" in Andover to permit interested citizens to listen and discuss their concerns with NJT personnel, the Edwards & Kelcey consultants, and other participants. The format was not one of formal presentations but rather of open discussion.

As presented then, ridership is forecasted at only 2,800 passengers each eastbound weekday by 2025 (with only 45 from Scranton) and anticipates the removal of 800 cars from the road. However, the project couldn't be operational any time before 2009. Construction is estimated at \$350 million and annual operating costs at \$22 million. Those estimates represent quite a change from two years ago and are disappointing to NJ-ARP.

Adding injury to insult, the trip time for the 133 miles between Scranton and Hoboken would be a rather long 3 hours and 10 minutes; trains would operate at a 45 minute frequency during peak periods. Candidate stations are Tobyhanna, Mount Pocono, Analomink, East Stroudsburg and Delaware Water Gap in Pennsylvania, with stops in New Jersey at Blairstown and Andover. Transfers would be available to MidTown Direct trains along the Morris & Essex Lines, but no further specifics were given.

The handout states that "It is anticipated that the project, in and of itself, would spur minimal growth. Regardless of this rail project, significant growth is anticipated in the study area as residential growth continues to move west of the New York City metropolitan area to areas where housing costs are lower. Local growth policies are the primary determinant of growth."

The lengthy running time between Scranton and Hoboken currently advanced is clearly unacceptable in the 21st century, providing an overall speed of less than 44 miles per hour. Automobile partisans would not accept such performance. NJ-ARP -- and potential riders -- shouldn't have to accept it in new rail initiatives, either. NJ-ARP will continue to suggest more "creative solutions" for this rail reactivation.

Such dismal performance estimates are based on using current New Jersey Transit "Comet" passenger cars and soon-to-be-delivered bilevel equipment propelled by new PL-42 4000 horsepower diesel-electric locomotives, as well as existing 3000 horsepower units. Such equipment may be adequate for daily stop-and-go "commuter" operations on densely packed lines, but clearly are not for the varied operational challenges that service to the Poconos presents.

Better equipment for the terrain exists already. Spanish Talgo trains now operate in the U.S. Pacific Northwest on Amtrak, not to mention in Spain, Portugal, Germany, Italy, and France. Computer simulations suggest that this equipment could achieve a 2 hour and 20 minute schedule between Hoboken and Scranton. Another option: the Colorado Railcar Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU), which offers high horsepower and the ability to "make and/or

break" larger or smaller train configurations. It, too, should be evaluated by the consultants and by NJ Transit, so that their assessment of 21st century transportation challenges includes 21st century rail solutions.

-- Albert L. Papp, Jr.

Membership

Between November 2004 and August 2005, eight batches of renewal notices were sent. In comparison to the identical period a year ago, our membership has gone down from 331 to 319, although the renewal rate has gone up from 85% to 88%. The late August renewals are still coming in, so the rate excludes that last batch.

The net loss of 12 members includes 2 deaths and 16 new members. Of those, 9 signed up via the Internet and 7 came randomly through US postal mail from sources such as brochure distribution or membership forms on the Web site. Of the 319 members, 253 (79%) reside in New Jersey, and 66 (21%) do not.

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.

Initial annual renewal notices are sent within two weeks of when the last such notice was sent, or when a new member joined, not when we received the last check. This matters when the prior renewal check comes several months late. A "second chance" notice is sent from the Treasurer two months after the initial notice was sent to those that had not renewed, and that member is dropped two months after that.

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.

-- Joe Versaggi

MOM

We reported during both the 2003 and 2004 NJ-ARP Annual Meetings that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was still ongoing for Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex (MOM) rail passenger service. And, just like in those two past years, one year later that's still the case.

An announcement on any Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) therefore is now at least one year behind schedule, with "talk" placing it for "this winter" -- whether that's December 2005, March 2006, or something else entirely is anyone's guess.

One "reason" for the delay remains consistent. New Jersey Transit once again has announced the need to review its ridership data. To be fair, NJT this time is honoring a

request by Monmouth and Ocean counties, strong supporters of MOM, who doubt New Jersey Transit's *"Oops! Where's Matawan?"* option really is the "locally preferred" anything, let alone a real alternative.

"Oops! Where's Matawan?" is an NJT head-fake of staggering proportions. NJT, in essence, wants everyone to believe a circuitous, one-track stretch of railroad from Freehold to Matawan and the North Jersey Coast Line is faster than MOM via the Northeast Corridor (Freehold to Monmouth Junction, with two-track stretches possible).

NJT also says *"Oops! Where's Matawan?"* is cheaper, somehow overlooking:

- a. the cost in deconstruction of an active, existing rail trail paid for by state funds;
- b. the build-out of Matawan/Aberdeen station by 1/8 mile to reach the "Oops!" route, since the current station is too far south of the "Oops!" route; and, therefore...
- c. undercutting, or negating, any convenient connectivity or synthesis of the routes involved.

Indeed, NJT appears to be the *only* entity arguing that "Oops!" is a "locally preferred alternative." All the locals have objected.

So have Monmouth and Ocean counties. Both question the methods used by NJT for selecting "Oops!" over the other two (real) options, or why MOM is now the least favorable routing in NJT's eyes, and highest in terms of passenger cost.

NJ-ARP in 2005 assisted Assemblymen Michael Panter and Robert Morgan (both D-12th district) in tapping their opposition to both "Red Bank" and "Oops!" options, and endorsing the true MOM route, per the wishes of the representatives' constituent base. (The Assemblymen could have taken the easy route by going negative uniformly; instead, both resisted the easy out, despite pressure from fellow Democrats across the Middlesex County Line. Their support is appreciated.)

The *Central Jersey Rail Coalition* (CJRC) also continues its pro-MOM message. (NJ-ARP is a member of the coalition.) In late spring, CJRC held a "Rally for Rail" in Lakewood, with numerous mayors and county officials asking New Jersey Transit to stop dawdling and commit to the project. Also last spring, CJRC Secretary/NJ-ARP member Daniel Green joined an NJ-ARP contingent, led by Government Affairs Director Rose M. Heck, to sound out a powerful potential MOM ally, the *Alliance for Action*.

NJ-ARP also has worked to cultivate support from House Rep. James Saxton (R-3) and Rep. Chris Smith (R-4). Sadly, MOM is a partisan issue even at the federal level (Republicans generally for it, Democrats generally against it.) Rep. Rush Holt (D-12) is the prime example of a political official claiming "neutrality" while simultaneously moving to block MOM funding, and omit MOM language, from federal legislative efforts. (Mr. Holt has denied such action in responding to NJ-ARP queries, but NJ-ARP knows better, and has some evidence to the contrary.)

In keeping with Mr. Holt's evasive-but-not-really stance, Middlesex County officials still say they're opposed to MOM but, as NJ-ARP began to discern in 2004, some political maneuvering seems to be occurring. NJ-ARP sees increasing signs of resignation amongst MOM opponents, who seem to be maneuvering for room (or cover). We continue to see increased pro-MOM activity and noise, even some who have the line literally in their back yards. **Middlesex County residents in favor of passenger rail are asking, more**

insistently, why their federal, state, county, and local representatives are missing in action.

The county has responded by "discovering" bus service options to New York from Jamesburg and Monroe, two of the "NIMBY 3" municipalities, almost as if it's played a trump card. Middlesex has boasted of one service, funded by federal, state, and NJT dollars, that moves 22 riders per day between Jamesburg and East Brunswick. At the same time, the county says MOM is a waste of tax dollars.

Bus efficiency (good or bad) notwithstanding, NJ-ARP welcomes the county's "discovery" of the need for public transit, and would note that -- as per a local survey conducted in South Brunswick -- many, many residents say they want rail, not bus, and not just to New York or Newark. That means MOM. The real MOM, the one that serves New Brunswick and many other intrastate markets, as well as Newark and New York.

More than any other issue, NJ-ARP makes MOM the focal point of numerous local festivals in Middlesex and Monmouth counties. NJ-ARP Director and Jamesburg native Dan Kerwin spearheads NJ-ARP's community outreach efforts, insisting there's "No Need to Fear the Train" despite the panic-mongers. NJ-ARP volunteers have been assisted in this effort by CJRC volunteers and by The Strategy Group, hired by Monmouth and Ocean counties to advance MOM; our thanks to all.

-- Douglas John Bowen
-- Daniel Kerwin

National Rail Passenger Advocacy

In what appears to be the never-ending struggle for adequate funding, 2005 has proven to be among the toughest in recent memory for Amtrak. It can safely be stated that national rail passenger service, as we know it, came right to the brink of virtual extinction.

Reminiscent of the early 1980s, the Bush Administration had first proposed zeroing out Amtrak's funding. Then, after haughty debate, the administration proposed a meager \$360 million, a mere pittance that would ultimately have bankrupted our national rail passenger service entity. Funding at that level would have the same effect as defunding Amtrak completely, given that the bulk of the money would have to be used for labor and debt payments.

To compound this already dismal scenario the Secretary of Transportation, Norman Mineta, has scheduled press conferences around the United States where he has derided Amtrak and, essentially, national rail passenger service. Indeed, a bleak scenario.

NJ-ARP is proud that it continues to play an important part in advocating Amtrak's continued existence. Originally conceived and set up in the template of the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), your organization has continued its primary task of national rail advocacy as a part of its overall mission. And, even after 25 years, we continue to do so with steady commitment.

Three individuals of NJ-ARP continue to hold prominent positions within the NARP organization. Jim Ciacciarelli, current NJ-ARP Vice President, serves as a NARP Director

representing Region III (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware). Likewise, Albert L. Papp, Jr. serves as an NJ-ARP Director as well as serving as a NARP Region III Director; he is also the NARP Secretary. Joe Versaggi, an NJ-ARP officer representing Raritan Valley interests, is also a NARP Director at-large. As can be seen New Jersey interests are well represented on the level of the national organization. In addition, they also offer New Jersey statewide, regionalized representation due to the fact that Jim Ciacciarelli resides within southern New Jersey, Albert L. Papp, Jr. resides within northern New Jersey, and Joe Versaggi resides within central New Jersey. As such, statewide interests are represented that much more effectively when presented to the national organization.

Our advocacy efforts are well substantiated. New Jersey is in a unique geographic position being situated between two major metropolitan cities both of which are well served by Amtrak. The Northeast Corridor, the spine of New Jersey's rail passenger service, is an integral component of mobility within our already overcrowded state. It is obviously in the best interest of the state to ensure that the Northeast Corridor, which is a major national rail thoroughfare, continues, and that continuance be ensured through improvements and upgrades. Therefore, our activities include advocacy well beyond New Jersey.

We interact with influential policy makers in Washington, D.C., as well as elsewhere in the country. For example, we generally meet with all of the representatives that comprise the New Jersey Congressional delegation on Capitol Hill during the year. Through years of experience we have found that a direct, personal approach is required in this age of impersonal cyberspace. We have found this to be a very effective process towards influencing legislators. This method also allows us to forge personal relationships with staff people that are in key positions to steer their respective legislator in the right direction.

NJ-ARP also directly participates within the public realm. For example, when Congressman Robert Menendez (D-13) scheduled press conferences in support of positive legislation for Amtrak, NJ-ARP's NARP Directors were asked directly by the Congressman's office to directly participate in the event. As such, Al Papp was on hand at New York's Penn Station and Jim Ciacciarelli was at the ready at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station.

These are but a few of the efforts that NJ-ARP has made during the past year in support of America's national rail passenger system. Additionally, we also provide for the dissemination of information and our indication of our position on crucial issues. One such example of our involvement is a document titled *Modern Passenger Trains, A National Necessity*. This is a comprehensive document on future passenger rail policy needs sponsored by NARP and was co-authored by one of our own, Albert L. Papp, Jr.

In addition, constant letter correspondence as well as meeting involvement is ongoing. A national and statewide legislative mailing list is also maintained where the NJ-ARP *NEWSLETTER REPORT* and other pertinent, timely documentation such as reports and press releases are sent. In short, experience has taught us that a constant presence be consistently maintained to be effective.

NJ-ARP also interacts with the various adjacent NARP affiliates such as the *Keystone Association of Railroad Passengers (KARP)*, the *Delaware Valley Association of Railroad Passengers (DVARP)*, New York's *Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA)*, and the *Delmarva Rail Passengers Association (DRPA)*. We are interested in promoting unified advocacy, which can only strengthen our goals. One such example of promoting unity between NARP affiliates was a meeting between several "ARPs" that occurred in Ohio

earlier this year. Joe Versaggi attended representing NJ-ARP where various topics concerning Amtrak and national rail passenger issues were coordinated.

It's apparent that national transportation policy, rail in particular, greatly affects New Jersey. The current, existing national rail passenger system is a skeletal one at best, and must be continued in its entirety. The annual subsidy for a nationwide rail passenger system pales in comparison as compared to other transportation modes, highway being the most glaring example. With gasoline prices at an all-time high (for real this time, even after factoring inflation adjustments), the premise for quality, high-speed rail passenger service is all too apparent. NJ-ARP continues to strive in promoting our goals for a comprehensive expanded and improved passenger rail system A goal that we have consistently maintained over the past quarter century of our existence.

-- Jim Ciacciarelli

Northeast Corridor

The glass is half-full for Northeast Corridor riders concerning the Trans-Hudson Express (T.H.E.) Tunnel, designed to double the number of trains traveling between New Jersey and New York City.

The good news is that plans call for the entire section between Secaucus Junction and New York to be widened from two tracks to four. The bad news is that the current two-track bottleneck between Newark and Secaucus Junction will remain at two tracks, subject to a separate (and undefined) future study.

In May, NJ Transit officials unveiled plans to renovate and expand both the Trenton Station and Newark Broad Street Station. New restrooms, waiting areas, retail shops and dining options will provide customers with an improved traveling experience. Also, Newark Broad Street Station will have high-level platforms with elevators to make it fully accessible to the handicapped. Both stations' upgrades have a 2007 target completion date.

Northeast Corridor riders will be able to connect from Newark Penn Station to Newark Broad Street Station starting in 2007 via a 1.1-mile light rail Newark City Subway extension, the fruits of much NJ-ARP activity during the 1990s. Intermediate stations will be located at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), Atlantic Street behind the IDT building, the Newark Bears baseball stadium, and Washington Park. Construction is now quite visible along the entire route.

In other news:

On Dec 22, 2004, a 524-car, 5-level parking deck opened at Irving & Lewis Streets in Rahway across the street from the train station.

Downtown New Brunswick and Journal Square in Jersey City were officially designated as Transit Villages.

North Brunswick and South Brunswick are looking at the possibility of a station on the Northeast Corridor. Either station would fall within the large gap between New Brunswick and Princeton Junction stations, expanding potential ridership reach (but also perhaps

hindering swift NEC running times).

-- Gary Johnson

PATH/Lex Connection

NJ-ARP's inability to advance the PATH/Lex Connection in 2004 was frustrating and disappointing. But no one can deny that it was a grassroots refresher showing how powerful agencies, such as the *Port Authority of New York and New Jersey* (PA) and the *Metropolitan Transportation Authority* (MTA), can obstruct and "run out the clock" on what NJ-ARP believes was a bold transportation initiative equal to the task of addressing the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center terrorist attack.

If consolation exists for NJ-ARP and our sister organization, the *Empire State Passengers Association* (ESPA), it may be via comments by the New York Sunday *Daily News* on September 11, 2005. The paper published a stinging editorial entitled "Zero Progress," and included the following text:

The Port Authority has already rebuilt a quite nice, perfectly functional \$250 million WTC PATH station, but now the agency plans to blow 10 times that, \$2.2 billion, on a cathedral. Across the street, the MTA is spending \$750 million in 9/11 funds to spruce up the Fulton St. subway station. That's \$3 billion in transit funding, every penny eaten up without adding one inch of new track or a new station - or paying some of the cost of a rail tunnel from downtown to Brooklyn, the Long Island Rail Road and Kennedy Airport.

But in NJ-ARP's view, the newspaper itself contributed to the defeat. With primary input from NJ-ARP, the *Daily News* had prepared a story on the PATH/Lex connection that was "ready to print." But the story was cancelled because (as expressed to NJ-ARP's point man on the effort, Director Albert L. Papp, Jr.) it had no New York City applicability or interest to the paper's readers. Four years after the worst attack on U.S. soil in recorded history, the paper sang a different tune.

The missed opportunity becomes even more glaring given the ongoing downward spiral of "Access to the Region's Core," itself now demoted from the original mission of delivering rail passengers (especially New Jerseyans) to Manhattan's East Side. Again, MTA is a culprit, rejecting a regional rail link between Pennsylvania Station and Grand Central Terminal. (See related report.)

PATH/Lex concept would not have replaced the ARC rail link, but instead would have **supplemented** it until ARC could be built. NJ-ARP notes (and still stresses) that many of the anticipated benefits to be provided by ARC, principally access to midtown Manhattan, could be achieved relatively quickly (within three to four years) and inexpensively (\$800 million to \$1 billion) by the PATH/Lex Connection, given the forthcoming reconstruction efforts at the WTC site.

PATH/Lex was -- and still is! -- an eminently doable transportation plan. But despite the best efforts of NJ-ARP, ESPA, and others working within the *Regional Rail Working Group* (RRWG), the plan never received the attention and traction it so richly deserved. (Having timely media coverage would have helped).

Still, we include a PATH/Lex "obituary" in this year's annual report because NJ-ARP, while acknowledging the defeat, believes the effort was not an exercise in futility. If nothing else, the professionalism of all who were involved on both sides of the Hudson "Ocean" was amply demonstrated. NJ-ARP thanks RRWG Chairman (and NJ-ARP member) George Haikalis, another NJ-ARP member, John West, who serves as the Community Preservation Corporation's and Civic Alliance's charette participant, retired Parsons Brinckerhoff planner Herb Landow (for his detailed CAD/CAM drawings), former LIRR planner Joe Clift, Bill Guild, Phil Strong, and Paul Di Maria.

Years from now, some transportation advocate, not yet born, will unearth an NJ-ARP electronic communication or one of our numerous testimonies and papers wondering in rapt amazement why so simple a plan, at such a propitious point in time, was not seriously considered and implemented. Why indeed?

-- Douglas John Bowen
-- Albert L. Papp, Jr.

Raritan Valley

Most of the news regarding the Raritan Valley Line is favorable. As we know, the overly coveted "one-seat ride" to New York is dependent upon construction of the new tunnels to New York (this project formerly called ARC is now called *T.H.E. Tunnel*). As part of this project, NJT is currently moving ahead with developing the new, necessary dual mode locomotives to be used on our and other NJT lines.

To ease inbound passenger transfers in Newark Penn Station, two new train sets are being assigned to the Raritan Valley Line. This will allow same platform transfers for all rush hour trains.

While plans for a "pocket track" east of Newark Penn are supposedly still in the works, many within NJ-ARP doubt if this will ever be built. Completion of the tunnels will eliminate much of the need. However, sending some trains to Hoboken rather than terminating them in Newark would also help eliminate part of the problem. This would provide a desirable service for some riders heading to the New Jersey "Gold Coast."

Construction of the Whitehouse passing siding is promised for 2006. This will allow for better rush hour service west of Raritan and we hope restoration of midday, late-evening and weekend service.

New Jersey's Department of Transportation plans to build an intermodal station near Annandale where Rts. I-78, 22 and 31 intersect the Raritan Valley Line seem to be falling off the radar because of NIMBY opposition. NJDOT does not seem to be willing to build the support for this desirable project.

Studies on reactivating the West Trenton line are moving ahead ever so slowly. The EIS has just been completed.

Extension of the Raritan Valley Line west of High Bridge has developed a very interesting new wrinkle. Former Gov. Jim Florio, in partnership with a developer/lawyer, had been

granted the exclusive rights to develop the Delaware River frontage in Philipsburg. The plans are for residential and commercial development. (This includes the land that was slated for the N.J. Transportation Museum, apparently now a dead issue). The new plans call for substantial condo development, along with restored passenger rail service and a new passenger station. Political clout may well accomplish what we have been unable to.

At the same time, NJTPA has funded a \$400,000 study in cooperation with NJDOT, NJT and the Lehigh Planning Commission. This 15 month study is of the Rt. I-78 corridor. While it is in its very early stages, we can predict that a major recommendation will be the restoration of passenger rail service to Allentown, PA and possibly the extension of M&E service west of Hackettstown to Philipsburg.

A proposed new gambling casino on the Bethlehem Steel site in Bethlehem, Pa. (same developers as Philipsburg) may also push for moving the western end of the Raritan Valley Line to Bethlehem or Allentown. The rail line goes right through the site.

All in all, ridership continues to grow, the track structure is excellent, and most stations are in good condition, but station parking needs to be expanded at many locations.

One might say things are looking up due to a number of factors.

-- Jack McDougal

Rights-of-Way Legislation

State legislation to protect and preserve rail rights-of-way remains an elusive goal, at best. But in the best of NJ-ARP tradition, the group tackled the issue on its own in bite-sized chunks -- and notched two substantial victories in 2005.

Since July 13, 2005, sporadic test trains -- but trains with revenue cargo -- have been plying the newly reactivated ex-Staten Island Rail Road between Linden's Bayway Refinery and Cranford, where trains access New Jersey Transit's Raritan Valley Line. The moves are freight -- but the victory is for rail rights-of-way restoration (and, therefore, for NJ-ARP as well).

Potential customers now appear willing to explore their options publicly as shippers and consignees contact Union County or shortline operator *Morristown & Erie Railways*. Potential *passengers* in Union County towns continue to ask NJ-ARP if passenger service can be added to the mix. One route saved, with big potential benefits ahead.

But as we've noted before, even reactivation of the Rahway Valley Railroad spotlights the high cost, in time and effort, to NJ-ARP and others as they defend rail rights-of-way one by one. Even this victory has come hard-fought -- and still unfinished. Anti-rail partisans, though on the legal defensive, still vow to block restoration of rail right-of-way linking Cranford and Summit, completing the Rahway Valley Railroad route and bolstering opportunities for *Morristown & Erie Railways*.

Our second triumph in 2005 is also similarly tenuous. NJ-ARP has been second to no one in fighting for a fully restored Cape May Branch, which already is owned outright and in its entirety by New Jersey Transit Corp. Safely secured, right? Well yes, sort of -- but not if a

10-mile stretch between Woodbine and Cape May Court House sinks into the swamps, washed away in the next severe rainstorm.

To that end, New Jersey Transit's heightened interest in passenger operations on the Cape May Branch is welcome news. And the NJT/NJ-ARP jointly sponsored inaugural run Oct. 8 from Richland Village to Woodbine is another victory for NJ-ARP in securing rights-of-way, this time **for passenger purposes**.

But NJ Transit isn't in control of many other rail rights-of-way that need protection, be it through Woodbury in Gloucester County, to Branchburg in Sussex County, or somewhere in between. Even where the state has moved to lock up a route -- Hudson County's ex-Erie Bergen Arches, for example -- the property's fate as a continued rail option remains dubious at best.

NJ-ARP remains committed to find a way to preserve and redevelop our state's priceless rail transportation arteries -- New Jersey's abandoned, disused and underused railroad rights-of-ways. We can note individual attempts and efforts do seem to be increasing. But to our best knowledge no comprehensive statewide approach has yet surfaced.

Per our 2002 Annual Report, NJ-ARP continues to ask members of the State Senate and Assembly to introduce two pieces of related legislation that would:

1. direct the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) to prepare a comprehensive inventory of abandoned, disused or underused railroad rights-of-way suitable for preservation, restoration and/or service initiation to active passenger and freight commerce and to place the lines so selected on the state rail rights-of-way preservation map; and
2. require the publication and dissemination of information regarding the rights-of-way so selected in order to facilitate adequate disclosure to counties, towns, real estate developers and agencies and potential buyers and sellers of said property such that a contract for any property so affected, within a pre-defined distance from a rail line, will, upon being offered for sale or transfer, be required to have a proximity notification embedded within indicating that the price, so agreed upon, reflects the presence of a rail line.

As the Rahway Valley Railroad effort has amply shown, state legislators themselves can exacerbate the problem. Members from the 22nd district in Union County introduced legislation late in 2002, at the urging of and with the backing of NIMBYs, to prevent the Rahway Valley Railroad re-activation. That was and remains ominous because the co-sponsors are generally considered "friendly" to rail and passenger rail interests.

And as we've also already noted, the threat intrudes even on active, existing rights-of-way; witness Oradell's ability to hinder expanded track capacity on the Pascack Valley Line, for reasons that at best can be labeled only as "suspect." The Pascack Valley Line's existence is not in danger, but anti-rail forces can be forgiven if they note such restrictions on active passenger services and facilities, then assume that potential new service (MOM, the Cut-Off) can be easily thwarted.

It gets worse, as dubious "Bus Rapid Transit" proposals continue to pose a direct threat to the Princeton branch (Princeton Junction & Back, or PJ&B). NJ-ARP rejects any BRT plan that cuts back rail (though we'll discuss BRT's role in extending rail's reach at any time). Road warriors continue to suggest more rail surrender at a time when more rail

infrastructure, not less, is requiring for a sound transport future.

For all the angst, there is hope. Even if NJ-ARP is reduced to fighting piece by piece, one railroad right-of-way at a time, 2005 marks a year when not just one but two rail routes were bolstered for current and future rail use. The fight is uphill. But the victories do come.

-- Douglas John Bowen

RiverLINE

With permission from New Jersey Transit (and per last year's precedent), we reprint an NJT report below:

RIVER LINE RIDERSHIP REACHES 3 MILLION

Buoyed by increasing summer ridership, the River LINE welcomed its three millionth customer on September 12, 2005, roughly 18 months since it opened in March 2004. Since then, ridership has increased steadily, reaching a high of 7,600 average weekday trips last month.

"The three-millionth customer milestone for the River LINE punctuates a summer of strong ridership," said Joe North, NJ TRANSIT General Manager of Light Rail Operations. "Many first-time customers are now riding the River LINE on a regular basis after discovering the excellent value and high level of service the line provides."

River LINE monthly sales are increasing faster than any other NJ TRANSIT service, and the line already has the highest group sales within NJ TRANSIT. Major summer events in Trenton, Camden and Philadelphia contributed to the strong ridership results. Adventure Aquarium, which reopened on May 5, and other attractions along the Camden Waterfront brought thousands of new customers aboard River LINE trains.

In addition, major Fourth of July weekend events - including the Live 8 and Elton John concerts in Philadelphia and fireworks at the Battleship New Jersey - resulted in near record ridership levels. Summer marketing efforts attracted even more customers, including a summer promotion with the Delaware River Port Authority that gave PATCO Speedline customers a free transfer to River LINE trains to the Camden Waterfront, as well as ongoing marketing partnerships with the Trenton Thunder, River Sharks, Battleship New Jersey, Madison Pub and merchants' groups in Burlington City and Bordentown.

On Saturday, September 17, NJ TRANSIT hosted its first River LINE "Treasure Hunt" at the Florence park-and-ride. The region-wide yard sale and flea market attracted hundreds of residents and vendors from throughout the Delaware River Valley.

Ridership has also grown as a result of NJ TRANSIT's new fare policy, which took effect July 1. The policy enables customers holding a monthly or weekly commuter rail pass to ride the River LINE at no additional charge. Customers

can park for free at most River LINE stations and connect to Northeast Corridor rail service in Trenton without incurring additional cost. Since the River LINE opened on March 15, 2004, NJ TRANSIT has made several enhancements to the service:

- Introduced 15-minute peak-period service in June 2004.
- Enhanced Capital Connection bus service in Trenton to provide better connections with River LINE trains in June 2004.
- Launched new early morning service to Trenton from Florence and Roebling in September 2004, enabling customers to make earlier connections to Northeast Corridor trains.
- Launched new early morning service from Cinnaminson to Camden in January 2005.

A one-way trip on the River LINE is \$1.25 for adults. Senior Citizens 62 and older and passengers with disabilities and children ages 5-11 can travel at a reduced fare at all times. On weekends and holidays from 7 p.m. on Friday (or the day before a holiday) until 6 a.m. on Monday (or the day after a holiday), up to two children, ages five through eleven, can travel free when accompanied by a passenger paying any valid fare.

All in all, NJ-ARP believes it was a good year for the RiverLINE. It's gratifying to note that NJ Transit apparently believes so, too.

-- Carol Ann Thomas

Sponsorships

NJ-ARP, bolstered by individual members' efforts and finances, has lent its name, time, and financial resources to rail-related activities or public relations efforts, improving the organization's visibility and credibility as the pro-rail voice for the state of New Jersey.

Adopt-A-Station (Mt. Olive Station)

Most of NJ-ARP's Adopt-A-Station activities are focused on maintaining the existing planting area, centered on the two islands located east and west of the plexiglass shelter.

The islands are re-populated with two perennial varieties of buddleia davidii: "Black Knight" and "Harlequin" that feature dark-blue and lavender blooms, respectively. Additionally, a new variety of annual cleome, "Ice Ballet", characterized by pure-white blooms, is installed around the foundations supporting the overhead lighting poles.

The planting area has been expanded to include the section adjacent to the ADA handicap-access ramp. Plant material in this section is restricted to those species native to the eastern and central United States, and also considered beneficial to insect pollinators, including bees and butterflies. It's a symbolic effort by NJ-ARP to counteract the wildlife habitat destruction resulting from overdevelopment and sprawl (due in part to the lack of a rail alternative!).

NJ-ARP this autumn hopes to plant two (2) "Princeton" American Elm trees on the site,

putting a New Jersey patina on the restoration of America's traditional favorite shade tree.

Factors in the selection of plants for this area include the desire to mix varieties that can provide a succession of color from mid-summer to late autumn, as well as the ability of each type to resist drought conditions.

Initial perennial varieties planted thus far are False Aster (*boltonia asteroides*), Goldenrod (*solidago canadensis*), and Northern Blazingstar (*liatris borealis*). Subsequent additions to be installed this autumn will be Common Milkweed (*asclepias syriaca*) and Purple Coneflower (*echinacea purpureum*). A summer annual, Scarlet Sage (*salvia coccinea*), will be seeded in this section next spring for the summer of 2005.

Aided by Lester W. Wolff, NJ-ARP in the past has been forced to provide its own timetables for Mt. Olive Station, showing *all potential service to and from the station* from both the Montclair/Boonton Line *and* the Morris & Essex Lines. NJT recently has begun to address this lapse in its own efforts, but work remains.

NJ-ARP NJ-ARP Sussex County Liaison Tim Apgar heads up NJ-ARP's station sponsorship and maintenance role, assisted by other NJ-ARP volunteers. Mt. Olive Station is located within Morris County.

Light Rail Now!

NJ-ARP, the leading voice for light rail transit (LRT) within the Garden State, continues to provide financial support for *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.

More recently, *Light Rail Now!* also has worked to counter exaggerated claims made by "Bus Rapid Transit" advocates seemingly intent on promising a world of inexpensive transit that's "just like rail, only cheaper." NJ-ARP won't dismiss BRT, but paraphrasing Humpty Dumpty, the concept seems to mean "whatever I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less" all too often, whether those advancing the concept are local planners or the Federal Transit Administration.

NJ-ARP has found that *Light Rail Now!*, in turn, also boosts NJ-ARP's own visibility, and the visibility of New Jersey's own light rail progress. Even with the rapid establishment of the River LINE, and even with the active pursuit of LRT by Union County to access Newark Liberty International Airport, New Jersey's LRT role often is overlooked even by ardent advocates. New Jersey already is No. 2 in number of LRT systems (3) operating, second only to California, and we hope to grow more systems (or perhaps even more optimistically, pieces of an LRT network) in the future.

New Jersey LRT issues are discussed or questioned within *Light Rail Now!*, of course, all too often are done in a negative light. NJ-ARP works hard to listen to constructive criticism. But NJ-ARP also can correct misperceptions or outright fallacies concerning the Garden State. (One example: Observers often believe New Jersey Transit is a constant driving force for LRT expansion; NJ-ARP is quick to counter this somewhat mistaken view.) And we can offer our experience and insights as examples of how to succeed -- or what to avoid.

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'

For the fifth straight year, NJ-ARP sponsored the 'Montclair Connection' softball team to highlight the activation of the actual Montclair Connection three years ago -- as well as remind everyone that more work on the Montclair/Boonton Line needs to be done. Our softball sponsorship aims to keep the rail infrastructure improvement (and the name) visible to local townspeople -- an important item given the township's improving, but still near-schizophrenic, attitude toward the Connection itself.

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."

The team's record was much improved from 2004's dismal performance, and its caliber of play improved dramatically even against older, more established competitors, according to team Manager Chris Isidore. Isidore is a user of both the real Montclair Connection and competitor DeCamp bus services, and a valuable source to NJ-ARP of ongoing local political developments concerning rail passenger service.

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

-- Douglas John Bowen
-- Tim Apgar

Sussex County Area

New York Susquehanna and Western

The project status is unchanged from that of 2003/2004. Namely, no progress is made in efforts to revitalize passenger rail service on the NYS&W. New Jersey Transit and the Delaware-Otsego Corporation, owners of the NYS&W, are currently at an impasse regarding an acceptable price for NJT's purchase of the right-of-way and the associated infrastructure. In addition, it is likely that, in the event that an agreement is reached, the State of New Jersey lacks the capital funding necessary to complete the transaction.

Mount Arlington Rail Station

The US Department of Transportation has granted \$12.8 million to the New Jersey Department of Transportation for funding of the Intermodal Station at Mt. Arlington as well as minor upgrades to the Madison Rail Station. A portion totaling \$11,560,619 is to enable NJT to finalize the engineering design and the construction of the Mt. Arlington facility. The

station is to be named the "Mt. Arlington Station" as part of an agreement reached between the Mt. Arlington Township Committee and NJT. It is anticipated that construction will commence in early 2006 and be completed by the spring of 2007.

County of Sussex Mobility Study

The results of the Mobility Study were released by the Board of Freeholders in September. A list of ten projects is reduced to five in the interest of efficiency. These projects include:

1. The initiation of a shuttle bus between various points in Sussex County and the Dover Rail Station.
2. Expansion of intra-county bus service to include an additional route between Newton and Vernon along Route 94.
3. Expansion of the Blue Heron Park-and-Ride facility in Sparta off Route 15.
4. The re-routing of the NJ Transit Wheels bus route between Frankford Township, Sparta, and Parsippany to encompass more employment centers.
5. The completion of the Lackawanna Cutoff project.

Some statistics on the commuting patterns of Sussex County residents that were generated as a result of the Mobility Study include:

1. 84% of commuters drive alone.
2. 60% of residents work outside of the County.
3. 9.5% of commuters work in Parsippany.
4. 2% of commuters commute between Sparta and Parsippany.

Route 206 Road Widening (Byram Twp)

Construction has begun on the first phase of the Widening Project located south of the Cranerry Lake area on Route 206. The Byram Township Council, working through the office of State Senator Robert E Littell, has managed to secure a meeting with the New Jersey State DOT sometime in November to discuss the potential of modifying the second phase of the project to minimize the impact on businesses and properties in the area of Waterloo Road and Acorn Street.

Vernon Township Bus Service

The Township and the Sussex County Freeholders have passed resolutions expressing a desire for an NJT bus route into Vernon Township. It is unknown if the proposed bus route expansion will include an extension of the bus route that currently serves Warwick, NY in Orange County or an extension of the bus route that currently terminates in Hardyston Township to the east on Route 23.

-- Tim Apgar

T.H.E. Tunnel

On September 12, 2005, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Inc. (NJTPA), in a 16-0 vote, approved as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) construction of two

new tracks under the Hudson River, terminating in a deep cavern twin 2 track over 2 track (8 tracks total, 6 to be built initially) beneath 34th Street in the vicinity of New York's Penn Station adjacent to Macy's department store.

The plan is Trans-Hudson-Express (T.H.E.) Tunnel. **And in NJ-ARP's view, it fails to deliver the original promise of Access to the Region's Core.**

NJ-ARP presented testimony at that meeting, and at the Authority's Planning and Economic Development Committee on August 29, strongly supporting the plan's provision for the two track tunnel to Manhattan. But **NJ-ARP rejected the deep-level station, along with other elements of the plan.**

NJ-ARP noted, "Not only is this plan costly and inconvenient for rail passengers, but constructing a subterranean annex station contiguous to Macy's -- some 125 feet below 34th Street in Manhattan -- will also pose significant risks to passengers in this age of concerns about security. In our opinion, it would be appropriate to sever the deep-level 34th Street Station from this project and terminate the tunnel in a fashion that would permit its future extension once transit planning agencies develop a regional solution for metropolitan mobility in concert with one another. Further, evaluation of other plans to substantially increase Penn Station capacity in the short-run, such as through running between the MTA's New Haven line and NJT's Northeast Corridor, have not been addressed."

NJ-ARP's testimony noted that one option rejected, Alternative G, "is strongly supported by NJ-ARP and transit advocates because it would bring passengers to the East Midtown area, where a large number of NJT rail passengers are headed... Alternative "G" outperforms that other options, and we believe, should be the clear choice. It produces the highest number of peak hour passengers and diverts the greatest number of auto trips from crowded trans-Hudson highways. It is the only option that saves travel time for passengers headed to the East Midtown area. Surprisingly, this superior performance is achieved with the lowest operating and capital cost, and with the highest projected passenger revenue."

NJ-ARP concluded by noting that "...in the Scoping Report for the Draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS), Alternative "G" has been rejected. To NJ-ARP, this is a mistake... Transit advocates have concluded that New Jersey Transit selected an alternative that does not require the full active cooperation of the York State's Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Going it alone results in a costly, but inferior plan."

Indeed, any resemblance of T.H.E. Tunnel to the far reaching, aggressive and overarching goals of the initiative put forth in 1994 are merely coincidental. From the outset, when NJ-ARP began its participation in the Citizen's Advisory Committee more than a decade ago, the hope was that the metropolitan area would finally receive a comprehensive rail improvement project that linked the tri-state region. It was not to be.

Absent the incorporation of a link to Grand Central Terminal, more New Jersey regional rail riders now must ponder being delivered to a destination they don't seek. The reason for its rejection, as has now been widely reported in the press, was that New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has continually objected to Alternative "G" throughout the ARC study period. And, indeed, in March 2002, in its "West of Hudson Quarterly Report," MTA recommended to the ARC Project Director that Alternative "G" be eliminated from further consideration.

The result is that the Port Authority's original goal of getting New Jersey residents to upper

east midtown (where 70% of all jobs [1993] were within a 10-minute walk of Grand Central Terminal, but only 36% from Penn Station) has been whittled away. Instead, the hype is for a project that will simply "dump" thousands of additional riders onto already strained New York City Transit facilities, both subway (at Herald Square - Sixth Avenue and Broadway), bus and city streets.

NJ-ARP -- seemingly alone in trying to voice New Jersey's own interests -- also repeatedly notes the LPA has eliminated previously proposed two-track expansion (to 4) of the Northeast Corridor between "Dock" tower at the Passaic River bridge in Newark through "CP Swift" interlocking, where the Morris & Essex joins the Northeast Corridor (NEC), and Secaucus Junction.

Also missing in action: any new four-track high-level bridge over the Hackensack River (Portal Bridge). NJT suggests this now deleted feature will be dealt with under a separate (but not yet initiated) EIS. Ostensibly the reason for the removal of this element of the project is the continued uncertainty of Amtrak capital funding which would be needed to fund this improvement. But the July Portal Bridge fire, and the cessation of NEC train service, starkly revealed the shortcoming of the recommendation to eliminate the track expansion and bridge construction. With security a paramount national concern, the retention of only a two-track bridge in perhaps the most congested and vulnerable section of the NEC remains, in our view, unjustifiable.

Some hope remains. NJ-ARP and its New York counterpart, the *Empire State Passengers Association* (ESPA), continue to pursue a scheme for through running between Metro-North's New Haven Division via the Penn Station gateway. This affordable and doable proposal has been vetted before New Jersey and New York transit officials and elected leaders and has generated at least a spark of interest.

In a private meeting between NJ-ARP and the Regional Rail Working Group (RRWG) on August 23, Rich Roberts, NJT's chief planner, elaborated on key operational criteria and constructability aspects of the T.H.E. tunnel project. The "Lead Agency" is the Federal Transit Administration, while the "Lead Transit Agency" is NJT, with the Port Authority defined as the "Study Planning Partner." The "Steering Committees" are the MTA, Long Island Rail Road, and Amtrak. Design criteria have optimized 48 trains per hour by 2025 with the proposed two track tunnels, but more capacity is possible. Of the 48 trains, 27 would terminate in the existing New York Penn Station, 21 in the 34th Street annex, assuming only 6 of the 8 tracks of the twin 2 over 2 subterranean station are built and utilized.

When NJ-ARP asked why Alternative "G" was dismissed (referring back to the November 2003 Summary of the Major Investment Study (MIS) and the comparative statistical results between alternatives (as pointed out in our prepared testimony), Roberts explained that it was a "joint decision" by the three partners (NJT, Metro-North and the PA) that "G" would not work, and said that NJT was not enamored of it either. But in NJ-ARP's view, it was clearly MTA's call.

Still, NJT continues to compound the problem, claiming an 11,000-foot "Secaucus loop" is the only feasible way to bring Bergen and Pascack Valley trains onto the NEC. Other alternatives were dismissed for various reasons. NJ-ARP remains unconvinced by NJT's rationale, let alone the need to supersede Secaucus Junction with a problematic loop.

Also unresolved is where the money is going to come from to pay for the \$6 billion

"preferred" alternative. Are there enough federal dollars available in the future to fund all the other metropolitan area projects? (T.H.E. Tunnel will "compete against the likes of East Side Access, \$6 billion; Governor Pataki's JFK link, \$6 billion; New York Congressman Jerrold Nadler's freight tunnel, \$6 billion; Second Avenue subway, full build at \$16 billion). NJ-ARP believes NJT might well sit down with its counterparts on the other side of the "Hudson Ocean" to decide just what does need to be built and in what priority.

-- Albert L. Papp, Jr.

Web Site

Several features were added to NJ-ARP's Web site in the past year, and it all started when our free third-party search engine provider began putting advertisements on the search results pages. It was quickly determined that the ads were inappropriate for NJ-ARP's site and an alternative was necessary. After investigating various paid third-party alternatives, we installed the ht://Dig search engine locally on our Web site. Having a local installation of the search engine also gave us more control and flexibility over its operation.

In order to run our own search engine, we had to upgrade our Web hosting account at pair Networks from an 'FTP' account to an 'Advanced' account. The additional capabilities of an advanced account opened the door to adding other new features to the NJ-ARP Web site. These features include:

- An online calendar, showing all NJ-ARP and rail advocacy events in the area. This can be a handy way to stay informed regarding NJ-ARP activities. Users can also submit items to be included in the calendar.
- An RSS 2.0 feed of the NJ-ARP Hotline, which allows Hotline updates to be automatically delivered to users' computers, along with the first paragraph of each article.
- A feedback form, which allows users to send messages to NJ-ARP without using an email program.
- The Hotline index page is now dynamically generated, resulting in significant timesavings for the Webmaster.

NJ-ARP's Web site has been online for a decade. The Web site contains membership information, position papers, press releases, and the weekly Hotline. NJ-ARP obtained its own domain name, nj-arp.org, in November 1999. In June 2001, an additional domain name, njarp.org (without the hyphen), was obtained to make it easier for people to find the site. Either domain name can be used to access the site. NJ-ARP began accepting credit cards on the Web site for payment of new members' dues starting in March 2004.

Since November 1999, the NJ-ARP Web site has been hosted by pair Networks, Inc., located in Pittsburgh, Pa. Pair Networks operates more than 1,000 servers in its datacenter. NJ-ARP's site is hosted on an Athlon XP2800+ 2.6 GHz computer with 1024MB of RAM and a 80GB disk. (This server is shared with other pair Networks customers.) The Web hosting cost is \$16.51 per month, and the domain names are \$19 per year each. These costs have remained constant during the past year. The service provided by pair Networks is excellent, with no significant outages.

The NJ-ARP Web site is currently averaging more than 38,000 "hits" and 9,800 "page

views" per month. Each Hotline is viewed an average of 320 times. The Hotline Mailing List, which allows people to be notified by e-mail when a new Hotline is available, currently has 172 subscribers.

Bob Scheurle maintains the Web site. NJ-ARP President Douglas John Bowen writes the Hotline.

-- Bob Scheurle

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