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Lackawanna  
Coalition

July/August 2015

*...An independent organization  
advocating for better transit*

# RAILGRAM

## Riders Protest Poor Service, While Objecting to Fare Increases and Service Cuts

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

As part of its preparations to raise fares and cut service, New Jersey Transit (NJT) held nine hearings around New Jersey during the week of May 18. The Lackawanna Coalition was represented at the hearings in Secaucus, Newark, Morristown and Hackensack.

Riders seemed resigned to the coming fare hikes and service cuts, but they still voiced their objections. Many complained about the existing service, whether they rode the trains, buses or light rail. A few said that they would be willing to pay higher fares, if the service were better. Some complained that only transit riders will be required to pay more for mobility; the state levy on gasoline and diesel fuel reached its present level in 1988. The coming fare increase will be the eighth since then. Others complained that the members of NJT's Board of Directors, who will approve the fare hikes and proposed service cuts, were not present to hear what the riders had to say about their transit service. Board Member Flora Castillo attended a hearing, although no other voting Board Members did.

There was also opposition to the fare hikes from a new source: elected officials. Assemblyman John Wisniewski, Chair of the Assembly Transportation Committee, complained about the Christie Administration's transportation policies at the May 13 meeting of the NJT Board. Senators Loretta Weinberg and Bob Gordon, Democrats from Bergen County, made similar complaints at the hearing in Secaucus, where commuters stopped off to have their say for three minutes on their way home.

Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop hosted a news conference on Thursday, May 14, where he stated his opposition to the proposed fare increases and service cuts. Hoboken Mayor Dawn Zimmer, Paterson Mayor José "Joey" Torres, and Senator Sandra Cunningham, a Hudson County Democrat, joined them. Also on hand was Ray Greaves, State Chair of the Amalgamated Transit Union, which represents NJT's bus drivers. Greaves also complained about the fare hikes and the Christie Administration's labor and transportation policies, as a contingent of his drivers cheered him and the other speakers.

The busiest hearing was held at NJT headquarters in Newark on Wednesday, May 20. About 60 speakers expressed

their opinion in a non-stop, three-hour hearing. Greaves and his drivers were on hand and, every time a speaker complained about the service or objected to paying higher fares, they cheered and chanted "Fight the Hike" at the conclusion of the speaker's statement.

Greaves is the labor representative as a "non-voting member" of the NJT Board. At the Board meeting on June 10, he again objected to the proposed fare increases and service cuts, for the record. His public objection is irrelevant, because he is not permitted to vote. Nobody doubts that the Board will approve the final proposal, which was unchanged from the original one. Nobody doubts that the vote will be unanimous, because every vote taken by the NJT Board since 2003 has been unanimous. Still, there was vocal opposition to the fare hikes and service cuts from elected officials for the first time in many years. The ones this writer saw were all Democrats, although there have been reports that some Republicans objected, as well.

## Moving People Across the Hudson River Until We Get Another Tunnel

Opinion By **JESSE SCOTT GRIBIN**

The constraints on trans-Hudson capacity have been troubling this region ever since the Mid-Town Direct connection opened in 1996, and what little capacity now exists is potentially threatened by a need to undertake deep maintenance on the existing tunnels. While building additional tunnel capacity and additional platform space would be an obvious and mechanically-simple solution to this problem, it is also extremely expensive and many years away from fruition.

In the interim, we clearly need solutions. First of all, I suggest we reconfigure the existing Penn Station to utilize the kind of pass-through loading and unloading that Vancouver's SeaBus ferry and amusement parks have been using for years. Passengers disembark on one side, while other passengers board on the other side at the same time. While this modification would result in an overall reduction in the number of tracks, the massive decrease in turnaround time would more than make up for that.

But the main problem isn't so much direct trans-Hudson capacity, but a system that has made too much use of one gateway, while not directing people to other gateways. The PATH system currently runs half as many trains as they used to. That means it can carry twice the passengers. Through the use of pricing structures, increased movement to Hoboken with PATH and ferries, and more PATH passengers at Newark, currently-unused trans-Hudson capacity can be filled inexpensively. *(Article continues on reverse side)*

**HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

**Come to a Lackawanna Coalition meeting!**

Fourth Monday of the month (except holidays), 7:00 p.m., Millburn Town Hall. Next meetings: July 27 and August 24.

## Moving People Across the Hudson *(Continued from reverse side)*

If we were to separate New York bound trains from Hoboken bound trains, thus removing Newark and Hoboken bound passengers from New York bound trains, more capacity into New York could be freed up—thus effectively increasing trans-Hudson capacity.

It is through intelligent management of existing resources and capacity that we can survive until additional tunnels can be completed. Do not misunderstand—new tunnels should and **MUST** be built. But we can survive economically until they are built by better managing what scant resources we have.

*Publisher's Note: While we recognize that reconfiguring Penn Station would be expensive and disruptive, that is also true for building new tunnels. The other ideas expressed in this commentary are easier and less expensive to implement. We believe that the economic and mobility future of the region requires a thorough discourse about making the best use of existing capacity and infrastructure. The ideas presented in this commentary were presented at the Coalition's meeting on June 22 by Jesse Scott Gribin, who is Treasurer of the Lackawanna Coalition.*

## Report From The Chair

By **DAVID PETER ALAN, Chair**

Fares on New Jersey Transit will increase about 9% this October. There will also be some service cuts, which will become effective in September. That will include the proposed elimination of the last trains on the Boonton Line and Pascack Valley Line, which leave Hoboken shortly after 12:30 at night. Everybody seems to expect that the Board will unanimously approve whatever they are asked to approve, because that is what they always do.

In NJT's 36-year history, only two management initiatives have been voted down; one in 1995 and the other in 1996. Twice in 2000, once in 2001 and again in 2003, somebody on the Board voted against a proposal. There has never been a dissenting vote cast by any Board member in the twelve years since. This long record of ironclad unanimity, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, leads to the inference that dissent is not permitted in any vote of the NJT Board.

It is deeply saddening and troubling that the governance of our transit system, supposedly by representatives of the public and the Governor, has come to this. One Board member attended a hearing, and she deserves credit for that. The other six voting Board members did not bother to show up and hear what the riders had to say, despite the fact that they approve the rules by which we as riders are bound.

One Board member berated this writer for saying these things at the Board meeting in June, and then permitted no response to this criticism, stating: "You've had your five minutes." The clear inference is that he considered public comments to be a nuisance. Unfortunately, members of the public, whether they ride, or whether they represent other riders, have no other opportunity to be heard.

Good governance requires honest and frank dialog, a chance for people who do not possess political power to be heard, and respect for the public by the decision-makers. These factors do not exist at New Jersey Transit and its Board at this time. We have called for reform, both publicly and privately. Only when significant structural change comes to NJT will riders be taken seriously.

## Advisory Committee Chair Calls for Stable Funding for Community Transit

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

Stephen E. Thorpe, Chair of the Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee (SCDRTAC) at NJT, has called for stable and sufficient funding for the state's community transit. He made the call for the first time in a statement at the NJT

Board meeting on June 10 in his report for the Committee.

Funding for transit has been a political issue in the State lately. Transportation Commissioner Jamie Fox and some members of the Legislature have been pushing for renewal of the Transportation Trust Fund, which funds highway construction and capital projects for NJT. Rider advocates and environmentalists have called for the addition of sufficient funding for the operating side of NJT, from a stable and dedicated source. Thorpe's statement called for community transportation, most of which is sponsored by the counties, to have a dedicated and stable funding source, too. At its June meeting, the Coalition expressed its agreement.

Much of the funding for county-sponsored transportation, which serves mostly seniors and persons with disabilities, comes from the Casino Revenue Fund, a tax on revenue from the casinos in Atlantic City. With gambling on the decrease during the past several years and some of the casinos closing their doors, grants to counties from the Casino Revenue Fund in 2015 are only half the level of 2008.

*Stephen E. Thorpe is also Technical Director of the Lackawanna Coalition. This writer is also First Vice-Chair of SCDRTAC.*

## Vintage Trains Roll to Celebrate the BMT Centennial in New York City

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

On June 22, 1915, trains ran between downtown Manhattan and Coney Island for the first time on the Brooklyn Rapid Transit (BRT). The BRT became the Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit (BMT) in 1923, which in turn became part of the unified subway system in 1940. The subway under Broadway including the 34th Street station on the "N" and "Q" subway lines, one block east of Penn Station, is part of the historic BMT.

The subway system celebrated the event on June 27 and 28 by running recently-restored vintage BRT/BMT trains that included the "Standards" (1914-1969) and the articulated "Triplex" units (1925-1965) for short rides on part of the BMT's original Brighton Line ("B" and "Q" trains) in Brooklyn.

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### Coming Attractions for Meeting Presentations

- Steven R. Fittante, Director of Local Services at NJ Transit, is advocating for more use of community-sponsored transit, which would make scheduled transit useful for more people. He has presented his ideas at national forums, and he will present them to use at our meeting on Monday, July 27, with his talk: Community Transit: Extending the Reach of Rail in New Jersey.

- The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) represents NJ Transit's bus drivers, and has fought hard against the upcoming fare increases and service cuts at NJT. On Monday, August 24, ATU State Chair Ray Greaves, who is also the Labor representative on the NJT Board of Directors, will give us his views on labor's new role in fighting for better transit.

We meet on the fourth Monday of the month at 7:00 at Millburn Town Hall. We hope you will join us for these interesting and informative presentations, stay for the meeting, and become a member.