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Lackawanna  
Coalition

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...An independent organization  
advocating for better transit

# RAILGRAM

## NJT Board Approves Light Rail for Northern Branch

*Advocates Claim Credit for Change in Position*

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

The New Jersey Transit Board has approved the extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Transit (HBLRT) Line along the former Erie Northern Branch to Tenafly. This action marked a reversal of NJT's former position, which called for a diesel-powered shuttle from the current terminal of the light rail line at Tonnelles Avenue. Many Garden State rail advocates, including the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP), supported the light rail extension. Some claim that their efforts to convince the towns of northern Bergen County to support the light rail plan finally paid off.

In abandoning their diesel-shuttle proposal, NJT blamed the demise of the Colorado Railcar Manufacturing Company for their decision. Colorado Railcar had manufactured a diesel-powered car that could run on a rail line while freight and other passenger trains are also operating on that line, but the company went out of business last year. Passenger advocate and transportation engineer Philip G. Craig said that NJT had made the right decision, but for the wrong reason. Craig said that the light rail proposal will attract three times as many riders as the shuttle plan, with only about 25% more investment required.

The line, originally known as the Northern Railroad of New Jersey, was a branch of the Erie Railroad that extended north to Nyack, NY. It runs parallel to the current Pascack Valley Line and is located east of it. Full-time service on the line ended in 1939, although a few peak-hour trains continued to run until 1966. There has been no passenger service on the line since that time. The extended light rail line will connect with Morris & Essex and Montclair-Boonton Line trains at Hoboken Terminal.

## NJT Enacts FY 2010 Budget

By **JIM RALEIGH**

The Board of Directors of NJ Transit approved a Fiscal Year 2010 budget shortly after the Governor signed the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget in Trenton. The State Budget has a number different sections and a list of capital projects with proposed budget numbers. The anticipated state revenue sources have been identified. The

NJT Budget follows that part of the Transportation Budget for rail and bus services. It has two parts: operating and capital expenditures.

The NJT Board actions claim to preserve the core services with only routine schedule adjustments and limited new startup services, such as the new rail service to the Meadowlands and new express bus service on Bloomfield Avenue. The capital budget of \$1.39 billion supports purchases of more buses, multilevel railcars and locomotives. More electric and the new dual-powered locomotives are on order and some will be funded with FY 2010 monies.

Other capital monies are dedicated to the ongoing improvements at Metropark, Ridgewood, Somerville and South Amboy and state-of-good-repair projects. Other capital projects are the Hudson-Bergen Light Rails to 8th Street in Bayonne and the Passaic-Bergen rail project.

Funds have been allocated for the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) Project, sometimes referred to as the Trans-Hudson Express Tunnel (THE Tunnel) and now known as the Mass Transit Tunnel (MTT). In the Budget under the Transportation Trust fund Account, the ARC project in various counties was to receive \$70 million and the Portal Bridge in Hudson County was to receive \$15 million.

Under the Federal Transit Administration section of the budget, there is an allocation of \$48 million for the ARC project in various counties resulting in \$110 million for the tunnel project.

These monies are separate from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The ARC has two parts; \$20 million of a \$30.296 million allocation for the Tonnelles Avenue Overpass Construction and \$110 million of a \$220 million allocation for "Professional Services During Final Design." This is a total of \$130 million of ARRA monies of the New Jersey transportation projects NJ Transit has also applied for high-speed rail development funds for "Replacement of the Portal Bridge (part of the Access to the Region's Core project)" in the amount of \$39 million. (There are \$30 million ARRA funds being applied to the Lower Hackensack River Bridge Rehabilitation.)

## Rail Users' Network Votes To Put "Penn Station First"

By **PAUL BUBNY**

The Rail Users' Network (RUN), a national rail advocacy organization, has voted to recommend that any new Trans-Hudson tunnels built by New Jersey Transit be routed to the existing Penn Station, rather than to a separate, stub-end terminal 20 stories below street level. The statement was adopted unanimously by RUN's

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Fourth Monday of the month, 7:15 p.m., Millburn Town Hall.

Board of Directors at its August 29 meeting in New York City.

Concurring with the “Penn Station First” position of the Lackawanna Coalition and other advocacy organizations comprising the Regional Rail Working Group, RUN says that running tracks into the existing Penn Station will assure redundancy and operational flexibility for both NJT and Amtrak. Conversely, building the “deep cavern” terminal proposed by NJT would fail to accommodate future demand for rail service in the Northeast Region.

The RUN statement also recommends that NJT, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Amtrak establish an interagency task force to design and build a rail connection from Penn Station to Grand Central Terminal—which NJT’s own plans called for until that element was removed in June 2004. RUN also recommends that the three agencies, which include the MTA’s Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North operations, coordinate planning and operations to ensure through-running of trains “to the greatest extent possible.”

In addition, the RUN Board says the cost of the “deep cavern” terminal is a concern. “The \$3 billion required to construct this facility alone could be better spent on other rail projects in New Jersey, New York and elsewhere in the region.”

## Report From The Chair

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

Election Day is coming. Usually at this time, we advise you to check on the candidates’ positions regarding transit and consider voting for the candidate most likely to fund and improve our transit, if he or she should be elected.

It is not so easy this year. There is an election coming and, for the first time, we will have the opportunity to vote for a Governor/Lieutenant Governor ticket. While the Senate is not up for election this year (the election in 2007 was for a four-year term), all seats in the General Assembly will be up for election. That could mean some change in Trenton, since the Democrats currently hold a narrow majority in that house.

The Lackawanna Coalition is a non-partisan organization, and we will not endorse any candidate. Still, we are an educational organization, and we strongly urge you to learn all you can about the candidates and their stands on transit and other issues that are important to you.

Checking the web sites of the candidates for governor does not yield much information. Gov. Corzine’s site, [www.joncorzine09.com](http://www.joncorzine09.com), does not mention a specific platform plan about transit, although there is ample evidence on the record that the Governor supports the proposed “ARC” Project with its “deep-cavern” terminal as a means for creating jobs. We also know that, since the Corzine Administration took office, there have been cuts in transit service, and the cuts on the Morris & Essex Line have been particularly severe. Elimination of transit service is not unique to New Jersey; it has happened and continues to happen in many places around the nation.

Republican Chris Christie does not mention transit on his web site, [www.christiefornj.com](http://www.christiefornj.com), either. Neither does independent

candidate Chris Daggett on his site, [www.daggettforgovernor.com](http://www.daggettforgovernor.com). If you can read between the lines on the sites of all three candidates, you may be able to discern a position concerning transit. If not, it may be an inescapable conclusion that the candidates do not believe that better transit is an important issue.

We still urge you to use your vote wisely, if you can. This goes for your selection for governor, as well as members of the Assembly. Having an independent candidate in the race may make things more interesting, although it may not make much of a difference. Time will tell. Of course, there is also the option of refraining from voting if you do not like any of the candidates.

## NJT Celebrates Thirtieth Anniversary Without Fanfare

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

New Jersey Transit celebrated its Thirtieth Anniversary at its July and August Board meetings. Executive Director Richard Sarles noted that the Transportation Act of 1979 was passed and signed into law on July 17. The low-key statement at the July meeting stood in marked contrast to the all-day celebration that marked the agency’s 25th anniversary in 2004. The 2004 event celebrated the anniversary of the Corporation’s first Board meeting, while the Lackawanna Coalition observed the anniversary of the statute as the anniversary of the agency. The Coalition expressed its delight that the “official” commemoration came on the date we also observe.

Sarles honored some of the people who were on the scene when NJT got its start, particularly Princeton attorney John McGoldrick, who was an original member of the NJT Board and continued in that capacity until 2005. McGoldrick earned a reputation as an advocate for better transit in the 1970s, when he fought in court to save the shuttle between Princeton Junction and downtown Princeton, known locally as the “Dinky.”

Former Senator Francis X. Herbert, known as the “Father of New Jersey Transit” for his efforts in sponsoring the statute that established NJT, recalled his efforts to gain passage of the legislation. In his remarks at the August Board meeting, Herbert recalled that Democrats from Hudson County, where several private bus companies operate, opposed the formation of a public transit agency. He praised the courage of six Republicans who voted with the other Democrats for the bill. The transit bill passed by just one vote.

Herbert, who has retired from politics but is now a Lackawanna Coalition member, still considers the founding of NJT to be the greatest accomplishment of his legislative career. “New Jersey Transit was the right idea at the time, and it is still the right idea,” he said. He also told this writer that raising the state’s motor fuels tax to provide more funding for transit is also a good idea. Many of New Jersey’s rail advocates agree, and we wish that someone like Frank Herbert were in the Legislature today to lead the battle.

### Railgram

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**Keep up with the Lackawanna Coalition and transit news from around the region!**

**Regular weekend rail service on the Gladstone Branch resumed at the end of August. Thanks to New Jersey Transit for restoring the rail service on schedule.**