

For Immediate Release
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Tunnel Vision

Photo Op Versus Transit Needs

Today, as the ground is broken for the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) Tunnel, the Sierra Club believes this tunnel project is wrong its current form. This is more about a photo op than transportation policy. This project is more about looking like we're doing something than getting people where there need to go. Instead of developing a regional transportation network, all we got was a tunnel to Macy's Basement.

"The purpose of this tunnel was to get to region's core but now it doesn't even come close," NJ Sierra Club Director Jeff Tittel said. "We're spending \$9 billion when we could do it better, cheaper, and more effectively. This is more about a rush to get stimulus money than commuters at rush hour."

The tunnel in its current alignment misses the four major objectives the ARC tunnel was set out to do in the first place. The purpose of the tunnel was to give New Jersey commuters access to the Grand Central Station and the East Side of Manhattan, create a backup tunnel for Amtrak that would service Penn Station or the new Moynihan Station, and enable trains to travel from one area of the metropolitan region to another. This would allow New Jersey passengers to have easy access to the Long Island Railroad, for example.

"The tunnel doesn't meet any of the major goals other than the fact that we'll have another tunnel," Tittel said. "Instead of connecting to Penn Station or the new Moynihan Station, the tunnel dead ends 180 feet below the ground, two blocks from Penn Station. It cannot even be expanded to the east because it dead ends at a water tunnel."

As proposed, to get to ground level, passengers will have to travel the equivalent of 20 stories via a series of escalators that will be longer than two football fields. "This labyrinth of tunnels will be more reminiscent of a corn maze than a train station," Tittel said.

Because the tunnel is so deep underground, the cost of the project has escalated from \$6 billion to \$9 billion due to the fact that NJ Transit has to build another separate station. Riders on the Jersey Shore Line, the Northeast Corridor, the Morris & Essex Line, or the Raritan Valley Line will still go into the decrepit Penn station. Since the tunnel is not connected to Penn Station and is so far underground, NJ Transit is planning for only its Bergen Lines to use the tunnel.

"The average New Jersey train rider should be outraged that billions of dollars will be spent and their commute to their jobs in New York won't be one bit easier. They'll still be stuck going to Penn Station

with no access to the East Side,” Tittel said.

NJ Transit has said one of the benefits of the project is that it will result in 1.6 million cubic yards of rock, clay and sand that can be used to cap sites in the Meadowlands for development, proving this project is more about development in the Meadowlands and pay to play than actually meeting the transportation needs of the people of New Jersey and the region. “So this project will basically be the railroad from Xanadu to Macy’s basement,” Tittel said.

1.6 million cubic yards is the equivalent of 900,000 dump trucks. Those trucks will be clogging the streets of Manhattan, Hudson County and the Meadowlands, creating a traffic nightmare from the West Side to the Meadowlands.

The bill for the project will be entirely footed by the taxpayers of New Jersey and the federal government. “New York State isn’t paying a dime for this tunnel because, in its current form, it doesn’t help New Yorkers get anywhere,” Tittel said. “The reason the tunnel is being put at this depth is so NJ Transit could rush its approval without having to do a thorough Environmental Impact Statement or getting approval from the city or the state of New York.”

There are presently five major proposals for the expansion of train service in and out of Midtown Manhattan. Mayor Bloomberg is working to extend the 7 Train, which will go right above this NJ Transit tunnel. The Long Island Railroad wants to provide access to the East Side. Sen. Chuck Schumer is pushing for the new Moynihan Station in Midtown. Congressman Jerry Nadler wants to establish a freight rail tunnel to displace traffic from the roads. Then there’s this NJ Transit tunnel proposal. Each project is expecting, and actively seeking, federal dollars.

“The fact that all of these projects are within a few blocks of each other demonstrates the lack of collaboration that exists in improving the region’s transportation. Instead of a cohesive plan, we have created a mishmash of disjointed ideas. Each organization is acting like a bunch of children who don’t want the others to touch their train set,” Tittel said.

Some of the options that should be considered to allow for East Side access would be to have a train station enabling passengers to connect with the Seven Train or to design the tunnel so the 7 Train goes right through out to Secaucus Junction. This alignment would cost about half the money. “A coordinated plan is the first step to improving public transportation access,” Tittel said. “The Sierra Club believes we need another tunnel, but we believe we have to do it right.”

“Even though they are breaking ground, it’s not too late to have the tunnel do the job it is supposed to do,” Tittel said. “This is a photo op today; they won’t even begin construction for months. It will take 10 years to complete.”

“Until the tunnel is halfway across the river, there is still time to have it go to the right place, instead of 180 feet underground,” Tittel said. “There’s still time to fix it but they need to act now. It took us 50

years to get to this point; we can't wait another 50 years for an effective solution.”

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