

No.7 Subway to Secaucus: A West-of-Hudson Viewpoint

I have been a member of both NARP and ESPA for 31 years, and I have served as a New Jersey Representative on the NARP Council since 2004. Following 14 years of commuting on the LIRR to Penn Station and Hunterspoint Avenue, I have lived in New Jersey and been a member of the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP) for 19 years. I am speaking for myself and several others.

I have seen the benefits of not forcing everyone into a single hub for rapid transit transfers, such as crowd dispersal, more direct routing, and positive redundancy for service failures. I think it is time *ESPA Express* got a fair hearing of the #7 Subway to Secaucus proposal. NJ-ARP has officially endorsed both Amtrak's "Gateway" plan and the #7 extension proposals so as not to throw all its eggs in one basket, and remain open-minded to rail expansion plans, which have some common goals, yet different strengths and weaknesses. Most rail advocates are open-minded to all forms of passenger rail options, whether it is rapid transit, heavy rail, or light rail, and do not restrict their solutions to just "regional rail" or "light rail".

The Facts

To put the North River tunnels in perspective, the numerical facts about weekday public transit Hudson River crossings between New Jersey and Manhattan are these:

- 315,000 (44%) weekday trips are made on 9,000 buses, mostly in the Lincoln Tunnel, and half of that occurs in the AM peak on 1,700 buses on the Express Bus Lane (XBL) to Port Authority Bus Terminal (PABT), which serves overwhelmingly NJT or NJT-subsidized carriers. Both are used beyond design capacity,
- 250,000 (35%) is PATH's approximate daily ridership, which has now achieved pre-9/11/2001 levels, albeit skewed more to the 33rd Street line instead of the World Trade Center line. Most riders go under the Hudson River, but some are also NJT Rail and Bus intra-state passengers,
- 150,000 (21%) is NJT's Rail's average weekday number of trips in and out of New York Penn Station (NYPS), which is 58% of total trips on its rail system,
- 6,000 (< 1%) is the number of daily trips to and from Orange and Rockland counties on the Port Jervis and Spring Valley lines to Hoboken on NJT-operated trains, no more than half of whom transfer at Secaucus for NYPS.

Obviously Penn Station (NYPS) is not the main hub for New Jersey public transit riders to Manhattan. It cannot be and should not be – it's crowded enough, and so are the north-south subways serving it. About 70% of NJT rail riders are headed to within a 10 minute walk of Grand Central Terminal (GCT) at 42nd Street. Manhattan has a cross-town subway along 53rd Street serving NYPS and PABT, the "E" line, and two cross-town subways along 42nd Street, which serve PABT at Times Square. One is the "S" Shuttle, the other is the #7 Flushing line, continuing onto Long Island City, Mets Stadium, and Flushing. No cross-town subways run under 34th Street, so the 7th Avenue subway (#1,2,3) is used between NYPS and Times Square. The navigability of Manhattan for riders from New Jersey, as well as municipal parking restrictions and capacity limitations in the New Jersey suburbs forces ridership to be much higher on bus than on rail. That problem is not easily solved, and all too many

people do not understand it, or the bus market.

Current Situation

Rail passengers heading to GCT now take two subway rides via Times Square. The far more numerous bus passengers take one subway. Others working further north squeeze themselves onto the crowded, narrow, 8th Avenue local platform and take the already crowded "E" train, along with LIRR passengers, which eventually heads across 53rd Street. If the #7 were extended to Secaucus, Newark Division passengers (100,000 out of 162,000 go to/from NYPS) could get off their NYPS-bound train at least 10 minutes sooner. Hoboken Division passengers (49,000 out of 102,000 go to/from NYPS) would not have to enter a crowded NJT Newark Division NYPS-bound train at Secaucus. GCT bound passengers would instead avail themselves of an 11-car #7 train, operating every 3 to 4 minutes, where it begins its run, empty, unlike in Manhattan where you first shoe-horn yourself onto an already crowded 7th Avenue subway train.

The Proposal

Given the ridership, market share, subway routes, and Manhattan destination facts, it makes sense for the #7 line to be extended to Secaucus Junction. It is now being extended to 34th Street and 11th Avenue (not convenient to NYPS) and will be running in several years, well before the 2nd Avenue Subway. While New York City and Parsons-Brinkerhoff study extending it from the end of its tail tracks at West 24th Street to Secaucus via Hoboken, but not stopping at Hoboken, some of us propose instead splitting the line at 40th Street on the far west side, sending a branch directly west to Secaucus Junction with a Lincoln Harbor intermediate stop, which is just north of the Lincoln Tunnel spiral, for Hudson-Bergen Light Rail (HBLRT) and bus transfers from Bergen County.

This is basically the same concept as PATH between Newark Penn and the WTC as a cost-saver, time-saver, and congestion avoidance of NYPS and subways from there to lower Manhattan. We then have:

- Additional Hudson River rail capacity at 18 trains per hour, assuming CBTC signaling, which has started construction on the Flushing line,
- Reroutes rail passengers between Secaucus and Times Square by direct routing on the #7, relieving passenger congestion at NYPS, the 7th Avenue subway station, and subway to Times Square,
- Turnpike buses can discharge/receive some passengers at Secaucus for the #7, or terminate there rather than run to/from PABT,
- Bergen County buses can do likewise at Lincoln Harbor,
- Almost continuous distribution of passengers to their destination along the #7's three stops in Manhattan between 7th and 3rd Avenues,
- Realistic alternative for bus passengers, who are far more numerous than NJT rail passengers, to reduce massive Lincoln Tunnel bus traffic, reduce Manhattan air pollution, and improve air quality,
- Operating advantages and economies to the NYCT by placing a small yard near the Secaucus station eliminating the need to run some trains to Corona for mid-day storage and then back again for the PM rush,

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Saratoga and North Creek (Cont'd from Page 6)

train ride alone costs \$55 for dome and \$30 for coach with breakfast and dinner available onboard.

I had the great privilege of riding the VIP-Press run on Wednesday July 20th as ESPA's representative, having been invited by a friendly official from the Warren County Planning and Community Development Office. This entity sponsors the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor Project which strives to bring economic development to the communities along the Upper Hudson River.

The run was not just to showcase the new service to the press, it was also a "victory lap" for the many politicians and local residents who help make this service possible on a formerly abandoned branch line. Now that the railway has concluded a successful first summer and fall season with more to come this winter, it looks like the beginning of a dream fulfilled.

Benjamin J. Turon

Border Patrol (Cont'd from page 2)

The uniformed Border Patrol agents would generally ask passengers to state their nationality and if they were satisfied with the response they would quickly move on. But for those passengers that raised the suspicions of the agent, formal identification was required. If their ID's were not supplied or found not to be in order, the passengers would be taken off the train for further questioning and possible detention. Passengers traveling in coach were far more likely to be questioned than those in sleepers or business class. Trains were often delayed as the agents did their inspections, though such delays had been greatly reduced in the past couple years, in part due to Amtrak's strong insistence that efficient train operations trumped the authority of the agents.

Increasingly however, knowledgeable passengers who objected to such domestic questioning recognized that they weren't under any legal requirement to answer the agent's questions and many would refuse to do so.

The Department of Homeland Security has made no clear statements regarding the reasons for the stoppage of the inspections, though they have indicated that Border Patrol agents retain the legal authority to make such inspections and that they may resume these activities at any time in the future.

From the passenger's perspective, the ceasing of these routine inspections will make for more enjoyable trips and should help improve on time performance, especially for the *Lake Shore*.

Bruce B. Becker

Governor Cuomo Appoints (Cont'd from page 3)

Chicago Transit Authority and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Karen Rae returns to New York as the Governor's Deputy Secretary of Transportation following service as Deputy Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration since March 2009. She brings three decades of transportation experience at the federal, state and local levels to the Executive Chamber.

Prior to her federal work, Ms. Rae served as Deputy Commissioner of Policy and Planning at the NYS Department of Transportation where she led the effort to develop the first New York State Rail Plan in a quarter of a century. Previous state-level transportation service included Deputy Secretary for

Local and Area Transportation at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and Director of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. Earlier in her career, she worked as director or general manager of transit systems in Austin, Texas as well as Glens Falls and Buffalo, New York.

Anthony Rudmann



No. 7 Subway to Secaucus (Cont'd from page 5)

which could entice MTA's interest in some financing.

- Better ability for New Yorkers to access jobs on the Jersey Gold Coast near Exchange Place, via the #7 to the HBLRT. The PATH 33rd Street line, which actually terminates at 32nd Street & 6th Avenue, simply does not penetrate Manhattan far enough, nor is its service integrated with the MTA's,
- Minimal disruption to Manhattan infrastructure.

It is not just for rush hours. This has utility 7/24/365, more than NJT operations. Hour-long traffic jams toward the Lincoln Tunnel can occur at any time of any day or night, even when NJT trains have empty seats. New rail traffic patterns and routings are called for, and rapid transit can be constructed and run more cheaply while having a greater impact on traffic for the money spent. Amtrak's Gateway plan is primarily an inter-city and New Jersey suburban rail expansion, with seven additional stub tracks up to 7th Avenue between 32nd and 31st Street.

The Realities

These are the only possibilities for trans-Hudson rail expansion. The NYPS - GCT link has been officially dead for eight years. It is, in a word, a fantasy, only in the minds of a decreasingly few advocates. In summary, it cannot be built, financed, equipped, nor operated. Metro North (MN), with growing ridership, now exceeding the LIRR's, will not allow intrusion in the lower level of GCT, the transitioning of 5 tracks to NJT, nor the compression of rush hour operations on 3 peak-direction Park Avenue tracks into 2 in each direction for "thru-running" since it would force an unacceptable compression of 28% of their peak-direction service. Other than the ability of NJT locomotives to cross the Hell Gate Bridge to the New Haven line, no NJT or MN locomotive or MU car is capable of operating on each other's system due to various power distribution and clearance issues, and most of them are new or are being delivered. There are seven NJT and three MN trunk lines. For any "thru-routing" operation, there are 21 permutations possible. You can recite such end-points all you like, but the odds of any such operation benefiting anyone's desire to travel between two specific locations on opposite sides of the Hudson on a single train range from infinitesimal to none. There is, for all practical purposes, no gain, but a lot of pain to engineer, finance, equip, and operate such an affair, to say nothing of the pedestrian conflicts and chaos that would occur in both Penn Station and Grand Central.

Amtrak paid money to get out of Park Avenue and GCT 20 years ago to consolidate their operations, avoid MN track charges, and reduce Boston-Washington running times - they are not going back, and they are not buying 3rd rail-equipped engines that would also risk gapping at interlockings without the back-up of going on diesel.

Rockland and Orange rail passengers are about 4% of the passengers headed to NYPS on NJT. While they are a consideration, they do not get to determine the optimal solution.

Joe Versaggi