

## **Regional Rail Working Group**

**Meeting Date: August 17, 2005**

**Attendees: George Haikalis, Bonnie Braine, Joe Clift, Jeff Gerlach, Herb Gormley, Paul DiMaria, Richard Harrington, Phil Strong, Bill Guild, James P. O'Shea, Robert Toth, Ron Carroll, Christopher Wasiutynski**

Topics discussed:

1. *Access to the Region's Core / Trans-Hudson Express Tunnel.* A tentative position from the ARC subcommittee was reached at an August 3 meeting.
  - a. An important point is that we believe that the deep level 34<sup>th</sup> Street station should be severed from the first phase of the tunnel project; a bellmouth could be put in place for future expansion.
  - b. Through-running, with the New Haven Hell Gate route being first, should be included in the project.
  - c. The Secaucus Loop concept is a poor way to connect Bergen County routes to the main corridor.
  - d. The Portal Bridge needs to be improved because its poor condition is a potential bottleneck for the whole Northeast Corridor.

At the August 17 meeting, we also noted that more track capacity is needed between Newark and Secaucus. NJ Transit seems to be looking at this separately rather than as an integral part of the tunnel project.

Al Papp and other advocates were to meet with NJ Transit officials on August 23.

2. We had a Power Point presentation involving some further details about ARC issues. One concept is that the present single-track tunnel connecting Amtrak's West Side line to Penn Station (it opened in 1991) could be replaced by a new double-track tunnel about a half-block to the east.

We also looked at issues involved with connecting PSNY to GCT (the now dormant Alternative G from the original ARC study.) One way to do it would be to build an extension from Penn's tracks 1-6 under 31<sup>st</sup> Street and then north on Park Avenue South. The local track of the Lexington Avenue subway would have to be shifted, but that seems to be a doable project.

3. *Hoboken – Penn Station tunnel.* We examined more details of an alternate two-track tunnel than would cross the river diagonally between these two points rather than parallel to the existing Amtrak tunnel. Some features of this plan include:

- a. There would be no need for expansion of the Northeast Corridor across the Meadowlands and no Secaucus loop. Trains from Bergen County and probably some from the Morris & Essex would run into Hoboken and then use the new tunnel.
- b. There would be a new underground station at Hoboken; few or no trains would terminate there. The yards could be redeveloped and the existing historic station could have a new use.
- c. We considered the utilization of the MTA's MU fleet as might be done in any through-running operation to New Jersey. It might be possible to have "triplex" combinations of two M-7s and one M-8 that could operate between the states. The M-8 cars will have pantographs allowing service on NJT's electric routes. The M-7 cars are becoming the mainstay of MTA's operations; the triplex concept maximizes the utility of the fleet by allowing them to operate throughout the region.

NJT has been concentrating on locomotive-hauled cars in recent years, but it might develop its own new fleet of MUs.

4. *New Jersey Transit Board Meeting of July 27.* George and Al spoke at this meeting, and their comments were reported in the New York Times and, indirectly, the Star-Ledger.

They presented some of the points mentioned in the ARC subcommittee position above, mainly that, 1. A new station under 34<sup>th</sup> Street is not necessary and, 2. The connection to Grand Central should be emphasized again.

5. *Freight issues.* I know we've considered this before, but we talked about the possibility of using one of the new Trans-Hudson tunnels for freight. Presumably it would be the southern tube, and it would be extended under the East River. It would have larger dimensions than the other tube so that it could handle container trains. The advantage of this plan is that it would be more efficient to have one multi-purpose tunnel instead of having to build a separate freight tunnel a few miles to the south.
6. *Lower Manhattan/JFK Airport.* We listed some of the options available for the scoping process, including subway, LIRR, or PATH based options. We hope to have a Lower Manhattan subcommittee meeting in order to have a proposal or proposal to submit to the process.
7. The upcoming New York State transportation bond issue will not come close to providing for the \$7.7 billion cost of the LIRR East Side Access project, but it would probably be good for the alternatives using one the existing levels of Grand Central. We hope that at least \$5 billion could be saved using a cheaper option.

8. *Farley / Moynihan Station.* On September 12, the NY Times reported that the owners of Madison Square Garden are considering building a new arena west of Ninth Avenue and redeveloping the site of the existing 37-year old building. The report mentions that a new glass canopy would be built over Penn Station. This brings up the question: why should an additional station be built within the Farley building? Perhaps that building should be redeveloped for a non-transportation function. Is there a compelling reason why any public funds should be spent there? Does it make sense for NJ Transit to operate the new station now that Amtrak has withdrawn from the deal?