



Regional Needs Analysis of SEPTA Transportation Services in the Northern Suburbs

Study Synopsis – As Approved by DVRPC's Regional Citizen's Committee, September 2010

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Regional Citizen's Committee**

Introduction

Since SEPTA was created in 1964, the north-suburban public transportation network has changed in many ways, both contracting and expanding. In coverage and frequency, it is still largely restricted to areas adjacent to the Philadelphia city line, and in parts of eastern Montgomery and lower Bucks counties.

In the latter two counties, three long segments of rail lines with many stations and hundreds of parking spaces are no longer served. Private bus services on routes 29 and 309; between Bristol, Newtown, and Doylestown; and between Trenton and New Hope no longer exist. Generally, taxis have been excluded from train stations where once they furnished well-supported "last-mile" coverage.

The major success stories have been the multiplication of ridership and the longer trips being made on the regional rail lines to Trenton; West Trenton; Fox Chase (just inside Philadelphia and once extending to Newtown); Warminster; Lansdale-Doylestown (once branching to Souderton, Quakertown, and beyond); and Norristown (once branching to Pottstown and beyond). Longer--rather than shorter--trips on regional rail are especially beneficial environmentally because they can eliminate congested road travel to inner stations or to center city.

Purpose and Scope

An optimized multi-modal public transportation network with suitable, reliable, and coordinated schedules, plus some key service extension, is sought by many citizens. A very small step was taken in the Jenkintown parking preferences study, but that study was conducted outside public view and contrived to justify and support a major construction project. It also failed to ask questions that would have produced quantifiable and implementable results. Finally, it was conducted at only a handful of the train stations in the north-suburban subregion and only over a three-hour period.

This study needs to cover all stations in the two counties, plus the two rapid transit terminal stations (Fern Rock and Frankford) to which some residents of the two counties still drive. It needs to be conducted with insightful questions meant to elicit specific data leading directly to



widespread improvements as the goal. Non-transit travelers as well as train and bus passengers need to be surveyed. The study needs to be fully transparent at all stages.

The study will:

1. Map all existing two-county public transportation services, whether SEPTA rail or bus, intercity bus, Transportation Management Association bus, or other. Parking capacities would be included, as would currently-non- passenger rail lines and their former station sites. Also surveyed would be all large non-SEPTA parking lots near stations or near the track(s) where an additional station might be added. Legal on-street parking should be considered as legitimate parking capacity where the passengers might utilize it.
2. Indicate where current rail passengers travel and when they wish service to operate.
3. Determine for park-and-ride passengers, their places of residence and their experiences with parking lot capacity and train service frequencies, intended to lead to expansions of each where and when needed.
4. Determine demand for rail-bus coordinated service with timed transfers at present locations such as Norristown, Warminster, Lansdale, and elsewhere, including new routes for the feeder bus service.
5. Indicate at what stations rail-taxi interchange would be significantly used and specifically how each site would be cost effectively configured.
6. Show what specific low cost physical improvements can increase train route capacities and improve service reliability.
7. Identify cost-effective rail service extensions (a model: Hatboro to Warminster in 1970s).
8. Seek recognition of additional Congested Corridors for the DVRPC Congestion Management process. The Huntingdon Pike-Second Street Pike route 232 corridor is one such congested but not-specifically- recognized corridor, and a disused rail line parallels it.
9. Be implementable and include feedback after implementation. This study should become a model for similar public transportation studies in other sectors of the region.



**Resolution for Moratorium on Regional Rail Parking Garages
as adopted by the DVRPC Regional Citizen's Committee
May 18, 2010**

We believe that the DVRPC Board should seek to avoid concentration of capital expenditures, facilities, service levels, and station-area automobile traffic at a few locations. A larger number of much-lower-cost, interrelated infrastructure and service improvements at diverse locations will sooner bring us a more capable and efficient transportation system.

In the meantime, *we urge a moratorium on construction of regional rail parking garages* in favor of return to just-in-time incremental and economical expansion of the current parking stock.

Data from that study in conjunction with other data show that:

1. Jenkintown and Glenside stations, which have much higher service levels than surrounding stations, have diverted some 400 passengers from those other "home stations".
2. The largest diversion is from stations of the Warminster line, about 134. Since 1976, Warminster line service levels have been reduced from 50 weekday trains to only 43, despite large increases in tributary population. This reduction matches the 14% average cut on all regional rail lines which were operated then and now. As we know, only one line (to the Airport) has been added while five others have been partly or completely discontinued.
3. Peak service levels in several cases do not meet the minimal requirements of SEPTA's service standards, every 30 minutes in the peak traffic direction during peak travel hours.
4. A projected parking garage near the present Jenkintown-Wyncote station would increase the parking supply there to further divert passengers from nearby stations. The cost would approximate \$100,000 per added parking space. Currently, extensions of existing parking lots can cost about \$5000 per space. In fact, some surrounding stations with low service levels have a total of 200 vacant paved spaces which are now available for use.
5. The average number of parking spaces added yearly on four nearby lines has declined, according to a map from the Montgomery County Planning Commission. In the 1993-2009 period, an average of 163 spaces was added annually. Over the last four years, that average has declined to 44 new spaces yearly.