



**Testimony of Janna Chernetz, NJ Advocate for Tri-State Transportation Campaign
DEIS Hudson Bergen Light Rail Extension
Public Hearing January 26, 2012**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Janna Chernetz and I am the New Jersey Advocate for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit policy organization working for a more equitable and environmentally sound transportation network and sustainable land use policy in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. Tri-State applauds the efforts of NJ Transit to move forward with plans to extend the Hudson Bergen Light Rail. The purpose of my testimony today is to highlight the benefits of Light Rail for the municipalities that would be served by this extension.

The Tri- State Transportation Campaign supports NJ Transits efforts to extend light rail into Tenafly, or at the very least Englewood Town Center and Englewood Hospital.

Extending light rail into Bergen County will be effective in reducing traffic congestion. There is no denying that traffic congestion plagues many of New Jersey's roads and it is not going to be alleviated unless we pursue transportation alternatives that get people out of cars like the proposed light rail project. Bergen County roads are already hard hit with traffic and as the DEIS correctly points out, trends show traffic congestion will worsen in the area where the project is proposed if nothing is done. Extending the light rail will allow access to the PATH and ferry service which take tens of thousands commuters into Manhattan as well as connect commuters to other NJT lines in Hoboken. This integrated transit network reduces auto dependency for those who choose to go without a car and for those who are not financially able to carry the burden of car ownership in New Jersey.

Light rail system would be beneficial to NJ's environment. The transportation sector is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in New Jersey. Every light rail car removes between 60 – 125 cars from our roadways, reducing harmful emissions from our air.

Light rail is also a boon for the local economy. According to a study conducted in 2010 by RPA (Regional Plan Association), homes located in close proximity – a mile or less - to a rail station see increased property values of up to 8%. This is especially true within a half mile as home buyers are willing to pay more for the convenience of accessing transit. Such increases were seen in those municipalities served by Midtown Direct (Morris & Essex and Montclair-Boonton).

Public transit access also helps attract transit-oriented development. This is important and both the Millennial Generation and the Baby Boomers are fleeing our sprawl communities for walkable, livable communities that provide numerous transportation choices.

Public transportation investment not only supports short term job creation in construction, but lays the groundwork for strengthening our local employment base over the long term. Service to town centers, such as Englewood Town Center, will play a vital role in bringing consumers back to our downtown businesses, revitalizing our downtowns in the process and broadening the community tax base. Increased public transit will also benefit existing employers, like Englewood Hospital, the one of the largest employers in Bergen County.

Contrary to assertions from opponents that the light rail system will bring danger to pedestrians and cyclists, a greater danger is improper roadway design that prioritizes automobile speeds over building communities. Over 146 pedestrians were killed by automobile in NJ in 2011 compared to 2 deaths caused by light rail; one of which was a suicide. A smart

way to address potential dangerous environments for pedestrians is to utilize traffic calming measures, Safe Streets to Transit concepts and Complete Streets roadway design. These are design concepts that accommodate all users of the road. Smart pedestrian planning within the LRT will help mitigate accidents and engineers must carefully consider the safety measures necessary to minimize accidents involving vulnerable residents such as the elderly and the young.