

It's time to think about West Shore Rail...

Residents, political leaders, and transit officials agree there is a dire need for new rail transit on the Hudson River's West Shore. Today many southbound West Shore commuters in both New Jersey and New York are forced to choose between driving to work and unreliable bus transport. As a result, Bergen County is New Jersey's most congested county and rush hour traffic crawls across the George Washington Bridge.

Transit officials have proposed restarting passenger service on three existing freight lines (see box). NJ Transit is beginning an important study to decide which of these new lines will be pursued or pursued first.

Questions to Consider

- *What new regional travel options would the line make available?*
- *How many people will use the line? How many new transit riders will the line draw?*
- *How many auto trips will the line eliminate? Which line would do the most to reduce congestion in Bergen County?*
- *How much will the line cost? How successful will each line be in winning funds from the Federal Transit Administration and other sources?*
- *How will each line affect expected growth? Will the line contain or encourage sprawl? How will riders get to and from the station?*
- *What difficulties are posed by existing freight service for each line? How can they be resolved?*

See other side for a summary of what we know now

The **West Shore Line** would run between Hoboken, NJ to West Nyack, NY via the Secaucus Transfer and the Meadowlands Sports Complex, with potential NJ stops in Norwood, Closter, Dumont, Bergenfield, West Englewood, Teaneck, Ridgefield Park/Bogota, and a proposed connection to the Hudson Bergen Light Rail at either Edgewater or the Vince Lombardi Park & Ride.

The **Northern Branch** would run between Hoboken and Tenafly, with potential stops in West Englewood, Englewood, Leonia, Palisades Park, Ridgefield, and a proposed connection to the Hudson Bergen Light Rail at 69th Street in North Bergen or Edgewater.

The **Cross County Line** would run between Maywood, NJ and Hoboken with stops in Hackensack, and Ridgefield Park/Bogota with a proposed connection to the Hudson Bergen Light Rail at Edgewater or the Vince Lombardi Park & Ride. The extension of the line west to Paterson and Hawthorne in Passaic County is being actively pursued.

There are many questions that transit analysts, elected leaders and citizens should consider when making the choice. Supporting one line over another will affect how quickly new service begins, whether needed Federal funding is available, and how much congestion relief the West Shore region will get back in return for its investment.

As the study continues, stay informed. Check in to make sure NJ Transit is asking the right questions.

West Shore Rail...Questions to Consider

What new regional travel options would each line make available?

The West Shore Line link to the Secaucus Transfer would allow easy transfer to six NJ rail lines, including the Northeast Corridor Line with speedy access to Manhattan. The Northern Branch would link to the Hudson Bergen Light Rail with transfers available for ferries and the PATH. The Cross-County line would replicate the links between Paterson and Hoboken and Hackensack and Hoboken already available via NJTransit's Main Line and the Pascack Valley Line.

How many people will use the line? How many new transit riders?

A 1999 study found that the West Shore Line would draw 5,400 new transit riders and 15,300 total passengers; the Northern Branch 4,550 new transit riders and 11,350 passengers; the Cross County Line 850 new transit riders and just 4,500 passengers.

How will each line meet and direct regional growth?

Both the West Shore line and Northern Branch run through dense residential and employment zones. More than 41,000 new jobs are projected for the West Shore corridor in the future. Job growth is projected at roughly 11,000 along the Northern Branch corridor and 22,000 along the Cross County line corridor. Dense population and employment zones along the corridor increase the likelihood that riders can travel to and from work and home to the station without a car, by walking, cycling, or a shuttle bus.

How much will each line cost?

The 1999 study estimated that restarting the West Shore Line would cost \$303 million to build, but just 28 cents per annual passenger mile. 65% of the annual operating costs are expected to be recovered from passenger fares (a high percentage; nationwide the average recovery rate is less than 44%). The Northern Branch will cost \$237 million to retrofit, 31 cents per passenger mile and should recover 71% of annual operating costs from fares. The Cross County Line will cost \$237 million, 66 cents per passenger mile, and is expected to recover only 35% of annual operating costs from riders fares.

Because of their low cost per annual passenger mile and high fare box recovery rates, the West Shore and Northern Branch are likely to be favored under Federal Transit Administration criteria for "New Starts" funding. Also, because it would serve New York, NJ Transit would share the cost of construction and operation of the West Shore with New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

What difficulties do existing freight service pose for each line?

Existing freight service runs on all or part of each of the lines. Each line potentially will require construction of a 2nd or 3rd track to comply with safety regulations and to avoid conflicts with freight trains.

While many questions remain, previous analyses suggest that the West Shore and Northern Branch lines will move more riders and replace more auto trips than the Cross County Line for far less money. The West Shore branch has the added benefit of adding substantially to regional connections through its extension into New York and its link to the Secaucus Transfer.