



**Include Affordable, Attainable Alternatives
in the DRPA/PATCO
Southern New Jersey to Philadelphia Transit Study**

A Statement for the Five Public Meetings
February 22 - March 3, 2005

The Delaware Valley Association of Railroad Passengers (DVARP) has a serious concern regarding the potential costs associated with several alternatives proposed by the Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA) for a rail transit system in Gloucester County. These proposed alternatives require the construction of a grade-separated rail system (no level intersections between streets and railroad). This dramatically increases the capital requirements for building a rail transit system.

Given the current public sector economic climate, now more than ever, **a rail transit system for Gloucester County must be affordable so that it can be attainable.**

1. The federal government has substantially reduced funding resources for New Start projects. With federal New Start money becoming less accessible, gold plating (i.e. grade separation) for a relatively small ridership will prove detrimental. In competition with other projects for federal dollars, a grade-separated rail system for Gloucester County is unlikely to compete successfully for scarce federal funding resources.
2. The State of New Jersey is currently facing a projected deficit for the next fiscal year of nearly \$4 billion, and similar structural deficits in the years following.
3. The Delaware River Port Authority has existing commitments for funding ongoing projects and debt service with little available for any new capital expenditures, let alone projects of this scale.

The 1993 Feasibility Study and the 1996 Major Investment Study clearly indicate that "Modified PATCO", a rail transit system with little grade separation, provided the greatest return for the capital dollar spent in the Gloucester County corridor, defined in these studies as the former Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Line railroad right-of-way between Camden and Glassboro.

A "Modified PATCO" system is neither revolutionary or evolutionary. Similar service operated from Chicago to Milwaukee between 1919 and 1963, and a planned extension of the Blue Line Rapid-Transit facility in Boston would utilize the same concept. Essentially, it is light rail that would merge onto the existing PATCO Line.

Insistence on the construction of a grade-separated rail system most likely will lead to rejection of funding by the federal government. In its most recent Annual Report on New Starts, the Federal Transit Administration has indicated that only under extreme and unusual circumstances

should a federal contribution of more than \$500 million be expected for any new rail project. It is unrealistic to expect other entities to provide funding resources of this magnitude. **Within this context, DVARP advocates that three alternatives using the railroad right-of-way between Camden and Glassboro be included in the study:**

1. Totally at grade;
2. Selectively grade separated; and
3. Fully grade separated.

This project should combat sprawl and provide an alternative to traffic congestion. The existing railroad right-of-way is in good proximity to older communities that have many people in walking distance of the line. Therefore, it does much more to combat sprawl than a highway alignment, which would place the train closer to farmers' fields than to communities.

A highway alignment for rail transit service does NOT:

1. Serve the older communities along the corridor, including the county seat at Woodbury;
2. Generate walk-in traffic or serve the transit dependent, as it will be mainly useful to riders who have a car available for the trip;
3. Handle reverse commutation to suburban jobs well, unless extensive feeder bus routes are provided;
4. Significantly improve air quality, as most riders will still use a car for part of the trip; and
5. Encourage smart growth; instead it simply promotes further suburban sprawl with its accompanying congestion and loss of open land.

Use of the existing railroad right-of-way does not preclude use of park-and-ride lots, as Woodcrest-style stations can easily be provided where the rail line intersects NJ 55 north of Pitman, and at other sites further south, where the railroad closely parallels the highway.

The region cannot afford to have this project process stop with the completion of another study report that will join previous PATCO studies on the bookshelf. What is needed is a reasonable range of alternatives that will result in a fundable, attainable passenger rail alternative.