

## NJ Transit Pushes Start Of Controversial Rail Line

Safety concerns have knocked back the opening of NJ Transit's new, and highly criticized, light rail line between Trenton and Camden, N.J.

NJ Transit had planned to launch the new service next week, but now has delayed the opening of the River Line light rail system from Feb. 15 to March 14.

Transit agency officials have instructed the system's contractor, **Southern New Jersey Rail Group**, to continue testing the rail cars, in addition to resolving persistent problems with grade crossing and schedule simulations.

"Looking at the Contractor's readiness for service based on our experience with complex operating start ups, it is absolutely clear to me that the system will not be ready to run reliably on Feb. 15," said NJ Transit Executive Director George Warrington. "I won't force them out of the gate when I know it will result in unreliable service and disappointed customers."

Problems at more than a dozen grade crossings still need to be resolved. A number of gates continue to malfunction in the down – or fail-safe position, while other gates are experiencing component failures that are forcing trains to run at slow speeds.

### Ridership Figures Faulted

Snow and freezing temperatures contributed to preventing the completion of various testing programs, said NJ Transit officials.

The contractor has assured the agency that testing will be completed in time for the March start date, and a few additional days of recovery time has been built into the schedule over the past month to ensure there are no further delays.

In addition, trains will run at 30-minute intervals throughout the day once the system is opened. After two months, the schedule will be modified to include trains running at 15-minute intervals during peak periods.

The 34-mile light rail from Camden to Trenton is estimated to cost an estimated \$1.1 billion.

Critics have assailed the project saying that early ridership projects were too optimistic and based on an overestimation of housing growth in the along the Route 130 corridor where the light rail will travel (UTS 8/11/03, p. 1).

## Study: Transit Investment Accelerates Jobs Growth

Investing in public transportation creates more jobs than building new roads and bridges, according to a report recently released by the **Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP)**, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that studies transportation issues.

In comparison to building new roads and bridges, job creation associated with public transportation investment jumps 19 pct, reported STPP's study, titled *Setting the Record Straight: Transit, Fixing Roads and Bridges Offer Greatest Jobs Gains*.

Repairing existing roads and bridges creates 9-pct more jobs per dollar than building new roads and bridges, the report said.

"This report will help make the case to Congress as it begins debate on renewal of [*Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*] that when it comes to job creation, investing in new public transportation, and repairing roads and bridges, creates significantly more jobs per dollar invested than does spending only on new highways," STPP President Anne Canby said in a released statement. "As our findings demonstrate, balanced investment in transportation is not only good public policy but a good deal for America's workers."

In other findings, the report states:

- For every \$1.25 billion invested, public transportation investments create nearly 51,300 jobs compared to 43,200 jobs created when the same amount is spent on new road and bridge projects; and
- Approximately 47,000 jobs are created when \$1.25 billion is invested in road and bridge repair and maintenance.

The U.S. **Department of Transportation** own findings suggest that more than \$20 billion in infrastructure investment is needed annually to maintain the existing quality of transit service.

Funding conflicts have been holding up the reauthorization of TEA-21, which was to expire Sept. 30, 2003 until Congress passed a five-month extension (*see story, p. 2*).

If Congress and the president cannot agree on a reauthorization plan by the time the current extension expires Feb. 28, then the legislature will have to pass another extension.

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**Clarification:** The recent article on SEPTA's proposed Schuylkill Valley commuter rail service (UTS 1/26/04, p.7) misstated the **Delaware Valley Association of Rail Passengers'** (DVARP) objection to the project's scope. The group believes that there is insufficient population and employment density in the corridor to justify construction of dedicated tracks for a passenger rail service.