
Public Hearing

before

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

*“Updating of the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex Study and the
restoration of train service from Monmouth Junction to Lakewood”*

LOCATION: Committee Room 6
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: June 14, 1999
1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Andrew R. Ciesla, Chairman
Senator Diane B. Allen, Vice-Chairwoman
Senator Henry P. McNamara
Senator Nicholas J. Sacco
Senator Shirley K. Turner



ALSO PRESENT:

Peter R. Manoogian
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide*

Patrick M. Gillespie
*Senate Democratic
Committee Aide*

Hearing Recorded and Transcribed by
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STANLEY ROSENBLUM: --that project for the host counties. Three counties continue to debate the issue, and there continues to be a lack of regional consensus for the advancement of the project. While Monmouth and Ocean support the Monmouth Junction Alignment, Middlesex County continues to have concerns about that alignment.

Commissioner Weinstein and I have met with officials from those three counties to continue to try to discuss how we can develop consensus, address some of those concerns, and move forward with the project supported by all three counties. While South Brunswick and Monroe officials continue to raise concerns, we have been working with Jamesburg to help them understand the benefits of public transportation investments, their local and state economy, and to begin to try to address and better understand some of the concerns that the Jamesburg officials have raised.

New Jersey Transit, as part of the Governor's vision for the 21st century, is committed to moving forward two additional rail projects within the next five years. The Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex Project is one of 10 projects that are to be considered. Regional consensus is the key to advancing this or any other project within the state. And New Jersey Transit is committed to working with the counties and the municipalities to try to advance those projects.

We know that from South Jersey that the opposition was raised, and sometimes opposition can be addressed. The Commissioner is committed to working with all parties to address the issues as best as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR ANDREW R. CIESLA (Chairman): Thank you.
Thank you very much.

Senator Allen.

SENATOR ALLEN: I'd just like to ask, for the record-- This is an existing right-of-way?

MR. ROSENBLUM: Yes, it is.

SENATOR ALLEN: And could you tell me the background on passenger rail service on the right-of-way?

MR. ROSENBLUM: I know that the Rail Passenger Association is here, and they could probably do a better job than I in addressing the past passenger service on that line.

SENATOR ALLEN: But it did exist.

MR. ROSENBLUM: Yes, the rail line does exist.

SENATOR CIESLA: And it was a former passenger rail line at one point. That was (indiscernible) to the best of my knowledge.

MR. ROSENBLUM: And I think it's still active.

SENATOR CIESLA: Agricultural. It was an agricultural line, and now it is a freight line that I believe is still in use.

MR. ROSENBLUM: Right. It is an active freight line.

SENATOR ALLEN: Thank you.

SENATOR CIESLA: We'll get some clarification as we go along further.

One of the things I would like, Stan, is that we have had a lot of change in the past. We went from Commissioner Downs to Commissioner Wilson to Commissioner Haley. And as we heard some of the testimony

before, it just seems that this project has fallen through the cracks. It has been focused on, and I know that the Department is committed to building two railroads -- two railroad lines. And we're on a list of 10. Obviously, everyone wants theirs to be selected. But I'm convinced, personally, that this is important enough of a project that we need to dedicate whatever resources in order to make it happen. And I'm not married to the alignment. I happen to think that it is a good alignment, but I also believe that there needs to be discussion -- ongoing discussion to work the problems through. So hopefully, we can get past all of the changing of the guard, if you will, in order to focus on a target and work the problems through.

If you could help me with that, I would certainly appreciate that.

MR. ROSENBLUM: Absolutely, Senator. I think that what we've heard today, particularly from South Brunswick officials for their-- They continue to feel like they're not within a loop. And that's certainly not a way to address or develop consensus. We need to do a better job at making sure all parties are brought to the table, understanding what those issues are and addressing them as best as possible.

I think we've also clearly understood the important role of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Agency as a regional consensus builder. And the Commissioner has said that we're going to try to get them more involved in helping facilitate and foster a degree of consensus that these projects can be looked at objectively and advanced with consensus where possible.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you for your testimony.

The next two individuals I'd like to call are people that are intimately involved with this project -- personal friends and individuals that probably know more about it than many people in the room.

Bill Braden, from the Central Jersey Rail Coalition, and Sal Petoia.

Mr. Braden, good afternoon.

WILLIAM F. BRADEN: Good afternoon. I'm Bill Braden, the Chairman of the Central Jersey Rail Coalition.

The Central Jersey Rail Coalition appreciates this opportunity to address the Senate Transportation Committee on this matter vital to the future economic well-being of the State of New Jersey. This is also an issue about the quality of life for one-quarter of New Jersey's population.

The restoration of rail passenger service to the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex region has been postponed for far too long. At the conclusion of a federally funded study in 1987, the need for the restoration of rail passenger service in this region was identified. In the summer of 1996, at the close of the next level of study in this Federal process, this original conclusion was ignored by New Jersey Transit planners for the politically expedient solution of an Enhanced Bus Alternative.

The Enhanced Bus Alternative was clearly seen by those involved, outside of New Jersey Transit, as being one of marginal help in the alleviation of the existing traffic congestion of the time or that which the future was surely to bring. Putting more busses into a tunnel on an exclusive lane, which was already almost at capacity, would be an exercise in futility.

Through intensive work and relentless lobbying by the County Governments of Monmouth and Ocean, some of them are present here today,

finally convinced the Board of Directors of New Jersey Transit that rail service was needed. At the Directors' December 1996 meeting, they earmarked what funds were still available from the study to further a rail passenger option.

A group of nine rail advocates formed the Central Jersey Rail Coalition shortly afterward to move this project along. We believe rail is the only real solution. Our efforts have demonstrated that there is strong grassroots support for rail. Today we are here to explain why rail is the real solution, and we are confident that you, too, will join the many thousands who support rail as the solution.

Now, I would like to direct your attention to the graphs provided. These graphs are indicative of the fact that time marches on. The growth of the region has not stopped while the argument of whether or not to restore rail passenger service goes on and on. These are actual vehicle counts at the toll plazas as provided by the Garden State Parkway. Anyone who uses the highways in the region can attest that congestion is reaching ridiculous proportions at peak hours and off-peak hours as well. You can see that in the time that this study has dragged on, traffic at the Raritan Toll Plaza has climbed almost 25 percent and much more at the Asbury Park and Toms River Plazas.

I have been a commuter on the Parkway for over 30 years, and I can tell you that the Parkway today, with all the widening and improvements that were done over the years, is just as slow going as it was when I first started commuting.

An alternative to driving is the only solution. This is common sense. It seem common sense isn't too common anymore.

As you look at the graph, you can see that the bottom shows the increase by counties. Ocean County, at the bottom, has the most. This is all the toll plazas. And I was looking at this before. I don't know if Assemblyman DeCroce is here. I was thinking about calling that the Assemblyman DeCroce Toll Plaza. You can see that the traffic is going up and up and up, and there is no end to it in sight.

You need an alternative to driving. Now, I would like to make a quick response to South Brunswick's objections to trains running from South Brunswick. These are active rail lines that we're talking about. They're going to see an increase in rail traffic whether they want it or not because of the recent split up of Conrail between the Norfolk Southern and CSX Railroads. They have plans to increase rail traffic considerably. By embracing passenger service, South Brunswick can mitigate the negative and accent the positive. Passenger service is available to South Brunswick. They only need to make known what service could help them.

I'm also told -- authorized by Luci Green, the President of the Toms River-Ocean County Chamber of Commerce-- She wants me to state for them -- she's unable to attend today -- that their 900 members of the Toms River-Ocean County Chamber of Commerce support the rail restoration. They see it as needed for economic development. And it can only help with maybe Lakehurst.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to be heard. If there are any questions--

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you, Bill.

Sal, before you start--

Dan Green and Milton Itell, also from the Coalition, are here. Why don't we have them come up as well and join.

I'm sorry, gentlemen, I didn't see your slips.

Go ahead, Sal.

SALVATORE R. PETIOA: Senator, thank you very much, and members of the Committee.

I came here with a prepared speech, but I think it's been preempted. So I'm going to have to chuck it and go by what I feel, based on what I've heard today.

Now, obviously, public transportation is on the rise through the entire country. If you keep tabs on what's happening in the rail industry, so many cities and communities are embracing commuter rail as a means to get from one place to the other. Here in New Jersey, there are several rail lines that are being either studied or are in construction. We have the Trenton-Camden line that was mentioned so many times before. We have the Hudson Waterfront Light-Rail System. There's also talk about a rail line coming from Sparta into the metropolitan area. These are all justified on the basis of need.

Well, in our section of the state, Central Jersey, Ocean, Monmouth, and I would like to think Middlesex County, there is a need. It has been mentioned so many times before that we're going to be housing, in those three counties, nearly one-fourth of the total population, as well as one-fourth of the entire workforce.

When Transit did the study a few years back, and Senator Singer mentioned it very appropriately-- The study did not include a good part of Ocean County. If you look at Ocean County and take the 10 most populous

communities and the 10 fastest-growing communities, only one of those towns was included in the New Jersey Transit study for potential ridership. It's not surprising, therefore, that one of the conclusions of that study said that there's not enough riders from this area to justify the expense.

Well, if you set the boundaries to ignore potential riders, then certainly you're going to conclude that you don't have potential riders. It's a vicious, self-fulfilling prophecy.

I'd like to take a look at what's happening down in Ocean County. We've got tremendous growth going on, especially down in the Stafford section -- Barneget, Stafford -- those areas.

Senator, you know Brick so well. You've been a councilman there. Brick is just about fully developed.

Those other communities now are where Brick was 20 or 30 years ago. And many of those people that work and that are commuters use the only choice they have, the Garden State Parkway, to get to their work sites up north. We need to provide an alternative.

I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the benefits of rail service. I made up a chart that is also in your handouts there.

Let's look at some of the positive things about rail. We've heard from Middlesex County, and the negative things, in their opinion, are related to rail. But on the positive side, rail provides a public transportation alternative that's not affected by bad weather or adverse traffic conditions. It offers a ride that, certainly, has to be much more relaxing than a bus. And it also provides better on-time service.

And while I'm on the on-time service, let me mention something. In the Transit study -- and a lot has been hung on the Transit study as being the ultimate reason for not accepting rail service. But in the Transit study, just as a comparison-- When they did the comparison between on-time service, the report said that the buses have a 95 percent or a 96 percent departure rate from Port Authority -- departure rate. Sure, that's great. But what about the arrival time? Rails have that kind of a success rate on arrival, not departures. So there was little mix of apples and oranges. I don't know how many of these people actually appreciate some of the subtleties that are in that report that, in my opinion, show an absolute bias against the rail at that time.

Trains would, obviously, reduce traffic congestion on the public roads. A 10-car train can carry the equivalent of 400 passenger vehicles. Air quality would be improved because, if you reduce the number of vehicles, you have less exhaust gasses and emissions to deal with.

Commuters from South Jersey would be relieved of that long-distance drive all the way up to North Jersey. True, they would still have somewhat of a ride to get to Lakehurst to catch the train or Lakewood, but it wouldn't be that grinding, 65-mile ride every day that many of them go through.

Taking a look at our growing senior citizen population in Ocean County. Right now we estimate there's about 175,000 seniors in the county. It would provide them with a better way to get back to the metropolitan area. And again -- Senator Singer covered some of this -- just as important is that seniors living in Manchester Township and the other areas in Ocean County -- for the first time, they could take a train, if this was materialized, and make

connections at the Amtrack corridor to take trains to Florida. They could leave their cars at home.

How about our students? We have a lot of our kids going to college. And certainly college education costs are paramount to all of our minds. Rail service out of Lakehurst and Lakewood and going up the northeast corridor to Rutgers University in New Brunswick-- Kids, for the first time, could commute to Rutgers from our area using public transportation. They wouldn't have to pay the high costs of dormitories and food while they're at college. What would that mean to the families?

Travelers going to Newark Airport-- There is a station being built on Amtrack's corridor right now so that again, for the first time, Newark Airport would have direct rail access from our region if this occurs.

Somebody mentioned tourism earlier. Hopefully, if the rail line goes in effect, people from the north could come down and use our beaches and our recreational areas in Ocean County, making their trip easier.

The rail lines would also escalate the property values, and I believe New Jersey Transit has the data on this to confirm this. Where rail service has been implemented in other parts of this state, housing has actually increased in value because those homes become more desirable to those working in the metropolitan area. And the reason is that the rail offers a very easy commute to get to the city and New York.

Business would be stimulated in those areas where the stations would be located because there would be an influx of commuters. And hopefully those commuters would participate and patronize the various businesses that are in the area where the station is located.

Something that many of us think is also important is that if this rail line were established, it would provide a very important link to a line that would eventually extend all the way to Atlantic City from New York.

Those are the benefits. I'd like to also note that Governor Whitman has made several appeals via radio spot advertisements for people to use public transportation. Well, to use it, it has to be there. And the reason why she is doing this is, obviously, to reduce traffic. She recognizes the need to be concerned about the traffic. She recognizes the air quality issues. She was instrumental in the trip reduction program that took place several years ago but didn't not really come to fruition.

In the Central Jersey Rail Coalition, we're convinced that many people in inland Monmouth, Ocean, and even Middlesex counties would welcome the use of rail lines when that takes place. But without it, the alternatives aren't so good: more buses, more cars, more traffic, more pollution, more road construction, concrete and asphalt, destruction of open space to build these roads. That's definitely not the way to go. Now's the time to take a look at the future to address the needs of a growing region and to take the action. And one thing is for certain, it will never be cheaper.

I thank you very much.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you very much, Mr. Petioa.

MILTON M. ITELL: My name is Milton Itell out of Lakewood, New Jersey.

Before I start-- I don't know whether you're aware of the fact that the House of Representatives and the Senate and the President assigned the TEA-21. And in it, of course, you know that they are for the rail to go through

the area that we're talking about. I don't have to tell you what it's all about because you're all aware of the fact that the U.S. government is behind us and the fact that they want to see this done. And all they're saying is just to get the heads together and make a conclusion, but it's got to be done. And as far as the U.S. government is concerned, if you need any money, they'll give you the money for it because it comes under the TEA-21.

Let me go into my little speech.

SENATOR CIESLA: That's one problem out of the way. No funding problems.

MR. ITELL: We are here to concentrate on one of the many problems facing the state. We want to talk about the Central Jersey area, the fastest-growing area in the state and possibly the fastest-growing area in the Northeast. The amount of building and new residents moving into this area we can figure to be about 3000 families a year. To be brief, about 4000 to 4500 new vehicles come into the area. We are using our roads in a concentrated area. We are talking about adding 13 miles of clogged road vehicles. In other words, all those new vehicles will take up 13 miles every year. That's not including the trucks and other sundry vehicles. In a few more years, can you imagine the superclogged roads in New Jersey. Remember, we are known as the catch-up/patch-up state. So what I stated previously does not bode well.

We of the ad hoc Central Rail Coalition have been able to see what was coming and the predicament we are fast approaching as a gridlock area. Keep in mind we are now, yes now, about 95 percent capacity on the main avenues into the metropolitan areas. Don't worry about Y2K. Our biggest

problem is unclogging roads. Putting more buses on a clogged road is not the answer. You can't put five pounds of sugar into a two-pound bag.

With this short preamble before you, we of the Central Rail Coalition who have the complete backing and approval of Ocean County, Monmouth County, many public officials and towns, with the news media and publications, and, above all, the Legislature, by their action and resolution to bring rail service from Atlantic City thru Ocean, Monmouth, and Middlesex counties into the metropolitan area--

To digress for a moment, in 1985, the Monorail Authority Study Commission, under then Assemblyman Robert Littell and Senator Cowan, basically called for rail transportation, and this is a copy of their report (indicating), in order to help relieve the then increasing traffic and air pollution. They also were showing that bureaucratic confrontation and institutional inertia with lack of imagination was there. It existed 15 years ago and still exists on a smaller scale right now.

Our saving grace is that we are finding more people, in and out of government, who, shall we say, are beginning to see the light. We are here before you for one purpose. And that is for all of you to use your power and influence with many of the foresighted groups and friends to bring the efforts of the Central Rail Coalition to a positive conclusion. We would like to see this project taken out of its tortoise mode and placed into a rabbit mode. That's why we're here.

The rails are there, and it's in your power for you to use it to see shining faces peeking from behind passenger cars riding the rails from Lakehurst to the metropolitan area.

Before closing, there is one more important point to bring before you. Speaking of Lakehurst, New Jersey is going to place a large complex for the New Jersey National Guard nearby. And we're talking about thousands of people and equipment and everything else right in the Lakehurst area. There's also rumors about placing a large Government Research and Engineering Group in the Lakehurst Naval Base. The upgrading of rail in that area would show the Federal government our desire to help in bringing a comfortable transportation service and its sundry effects.

Thank you.

SENATOR CIESLA: Milton, thank you for your colorful testimony.

MR. ITELL: You're welcome.

SENATOR CIESLA: We appreciate it.

Mr. Green

DANIEL GREEN: I'm Daniel Green of Jackson. I'm Secretary of the Central Jersey Rail Coalition.

All of us in the Rail Coalition are volunteers. We deeply believe that passenger rail service is vitally needed for the tricounty region, so we are here for advocates for commuters and for everyone else who travels.

You may wonder why all those people are not here today in large numbers to support rail. It's because they're unable to leave their jobs to attend. You may wonder why they haven't sent letters by the thousands demanding rail service. I'll tell you why. It's because they spend so many hours stuck in traffic that they are just too tired to do anything besides their jobs and families. We decided to become their advocates.

How do we know that we're not just a group of train buffs who are imagining a demand for rail? How do we know that there really are thousands out there who want this rail service?

For close to two years, our Rail Coalition has been circulating a petition. And the petition says the following. "The time has come for restoration of passenger rail service to inland Monmouth, Ocean, and Middlesex counties. We need it now. Let the trains roll again." Our petition takes the form of postcards, but we are having them mailed to us instead directly to Governor Whitman. We do send these petition cards on, but first we meticulously record all the names and addresses. So now we have an authentic roster of supporters. We have received petition cards from all three counties including Middlesex. New petition cards are still arriving. I just got a bunch today that I'm not going to give you today because we haven't put them into our computer yet. Many of these cards represent couples or whole families.

So we are talking about thousands of people who have been willing to take the time and effort to sign their names and return these cards. And it is well known that only a fraction of those contacted in surveys actually respond. So we are telling you today that there really is substantial grassroots demand for train service, and it's not just train buffs who want this.

We delivered our first stack of petition cards to Governor Whitman. We delivered the second stack at the New Jersey Transit Board of Directors meeting. Here now is our third stack of cards along with a copy of the complete roster of supporters. And I do want to say, also, that many people mistakenly believe that this rail line -- this MOM rail line from

Lakehurst to Lakewood to Freehold to Jamesburg to Monmouth Junction-- Many people mistakenly believe that this is just a commuter line. This is not the case. There are many people, other than commuters, who will use the line. Sal Petioa already mentioned students from Rutgers University. But how many of us have to go to Newark once and a while? People from Monmouth and Ocean counties and people from South Brunswick can even get on that line and ride directly to Newark Airport with the extensions that are now being built.

All over the United States cities are building and expanding rail lines. Even New Jersey Transit is building and expanding rail services in multiple locations, but Monmouth and Ocean counties are still completely left out.

You, our legislators, are really listening to us now. And we thank you for this opportunity to express our needs. Now is the time for you to realize that the majority of residents of Monmouth, Ocean, and Middlesex counties support rail as a vital component of a sensible and practical regional transportation plan for the future. Even in South Brunswick, Jamesburg, and Monroe, a growing number of residents and officials now admit that some of their objections were hasty and were mostly due to a lack of information, maybe because they were, as we heard, left out of the loop.

It is our sincere hope that they will soon reconsider the subject impartially. We ran a special bus trip for people in Middlesex County to see what's going on on the North Jersey Coast Line. And those officials of South Brunswick never even responded to the invitation, but we do know that some people from Jamesburg did attend and were favorably impressed.

We hope that the people in Middlesex County who are still objecting will come to realize that their legitimate local concerns will be addressed, they will be satisfied, and in the end, rail service will benefit their towns as well.

I want to remind everybody that trains from Ocean and Monmouth can reach the Northeast corridor only by crossing through Middlesex one way or another no matter what the route. Times have changed. It is no longer tenable for a few towns to hold thousands hostage to what we consider provincial thinking. The time has come for the State of New Jersey to say, "We will restore passenger rail service along the MOM route as it once was for nearly 100 years. The transit requirements of thousands in this region must outweigh some minor inconvenience to a few. Travelers cannot wait any longer. More buses can be only part of the solution. Trains provide a sensible complement to buses and cars." As we already heard, they are immune from the highway traffic jams, they function well in storms, they are environmentally friendly. Restoration of passenger rail service to our area is practical. It is affordable, but only the State now has the authority to take action. What we want to hear is not if we will get rail passenger service, it is when. We don't believe that the trains are too noisy. We will be happy to hear the sound of trains. And we want to hear the sound of trains tomorrow. Let the trains roll again.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you very much, Mr. Green. Thank you for your persuasive testimony.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Because the hour grows late, I'm going to ask the balance of the people who are here to testify to summarize their comments and not repeat the testimony. Obviously, I know this is an emotional issue. I want to thank -- would like to call up, at this time, a person who I -- Dan O'Connell. I always hold you to the last, but I'm not going to do it this time only because I nearly forgot you last time.

Dan O'Connell, from the United Transportation Union.

DANIEL J. O'CONNELL: That's fine, Mr. Chairman. I don't take that personally.

SENATOR CIESLA: I apologize. That wasn't going to happen this time.

MR. O'CONNELL: And I will keep my remarks brief.

Obviously, the United Transportation Union supports the restoration of passenger rail service in this area. I just would like to make a couple of observations. We don't have written testimony.

We've testified in the past in support of this before the New Jersey Transit Board, but I remember being before this Committee with the late Chairman, Senator Haines. And if there's one message that we could get out, I think, would be that anyone living near existing rail lines, whether they're active freight or passenger, should know that that line is probably going to be subject to use. It's just the nature of the State of New Jersey, in its size. These lines have to be utilized. The day of us trying to build ourselves out with highways has long since passed.

So with that in mind, again we support this, and we hope it will pass.

Thank you.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you for your privity as well.

The next person who will testify is an individual who normally supports all of my legislation, Curtis Fisher, from New Jersey PIRG.

C U R T I S F I S H E R: Thank you, Chairman. I'll be very quick. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of this bill. My name is Curtis Fisher. I'm the Executive Director of the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group Citizen Lobby.

To not be redundant, I just wanted to specifically address the fact that we've been working for many years to get rail all across New Jersey, and this bill would be a critical first step in moving that process along. We strongly support it. The things that I wanted to mention were -- in addition -- was to be positive about what I thought to be very good testimony from New Jersey Transit saying that they're-- It's a question of what rail line to build and exactly the timing. I think that we have to make the significant push, and the leadership demonstrated by this Committee has been clearly stated.

I know in reference to the people and the public out there that they support rail, and they want to see rail, and rail is an essential core of the solution to addressing our clean air problems, congestion problems, the time management of people all across the state. And what I've seen and where I've lived in other places in this country, growth occurs all across this state, and we need north-to-south transit, we need east-to-west transit. Not everyone is going to be going to New York City 20 years from now. And I think this rail project will specifically help in addressing those problems.

The last thing I just wanted to mention, I do this reluctantly, is my personal situation. The last two years I've lived 150 feet from a rail line in both Edison and now I live in Metuchen. I just bought a new house, and I'm pleased to say that I think the quality of life is improved by having rail in my neighborhood. And when we're talking about safety concerns, they're very paramount. I understand the testimony, and we should solve those problems. But when it comes to having rail in your community, this is a wonderful benefit, and it should be shared by all the taxpaying individuals in New Jersey. They should have the opportunity for rail. It's needed. It's appropriate. And we must address the concerns that have been expressed by South Brunswick, specifically. But I think it's time for strong leadership to move this project forward.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of this.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you, Curtis. I appreciate your testimony.

The next group of people I would like to call up are those from Monmouth County. We have Eugene Golub, from Freehold Township; Bonnie Goldschlag, from the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders; Jim Raleigh, from Colts Neck, and I believe that there might be one additional person that Jim Raleigh had brought with him.

E U G E N E B. G O L U B: Chairman Ciesla and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity today. I endorse the comments of all the other speakers. I will not try to match the eloquence on most of the issues.

Freehold Township strongly supports either the MOM link or an equivalent of the link. There are two issues that haven't been discussed, and I'll briefly just outline them for you. One would be to consider some type of creative legislation to protect all of the existing rail corridors because as people move in-- That's the seed of the problem we have now in Middlesex County. They move too close to those corridors. They say, "Gee whiz."

Second, I think within the discussions an independent expert group to give you resources and backup would be useful. And I would like to suggest one that you already have access to, which is your own Academic Advisory Council. If you would check with the Office of Legislative Services, you'll find there are several true experts in the transportation area who could independently evaluate what many people are saying. That could be of assistance to you.

Thank you very much.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you very much.

Bonnie.

BONNIE GOLDSCHLAG: I appreciate the Committee's support on this issue. This issue is very important to Monmouth County and Ocean County and this whole region. I'm here representing Freeholder Narozanick and our Board of Chosen Freeholders and our Planning Board. I do have a written statement. I'm not going to read it to you. I'm just going to go over some highlights that weren't mentioned before.

I'd like to tell you that we have statistics of development applications for our county. And our development statistics have shown, for this first quarter, that they have reached a peak that we have not seen since the

building boom in 1989. So that's just to get you a sense of what's taking place in Monmouth County as far as development.

Based on our projections, I just wanted to give you some additional figures that you didn't hear before today. Population is expected to increase by over 30 percent and work trips by 29 percent by the year 2010 in this region. So this just gives you some numbers attached to some of the statements that other people were saying.

What I'd like to mention to you, and this hasn't been discussed this afternoon, is that two weeks ago we held a founding meeting of the Western Monmouth Route 9 Collaborative. That is comprised of all the municipalities in the Route 9 corridor, as well as representatives from New Jersey Transit, the Department of Transportation, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, and the Office of State Planning. The purpose of this collaborative is to address the transportation and land use issues in this region. When we met with the municipalities during cross acceptance, out of desperation, they really formed this group because these issues have to be addressed.

Based on a comprehensive survey that we gave to all the municipalities in this corridor, restoring passenger rail service was the No. 1 priority for the region. This group's ultimate goal is to be designated as the State Planning Commission's center. That's what they're trying to do -- a regional center to try to address some of these issues.

I'd also like to mention-- In our, soon to be released, quality-of-life survey, location was one of the strongest reasons that residents chose to live in Monmouth County. And as people mentioned before, if a rail alternative

is really not moved ahead quickly, the attractiveness and desirability of this region will really be seriously hampered.

One other thing I wanted to mention to you is that we did a study that demonstrates that passenger rail service benefits all three counties. The study that we did was entitled “Property Values and Distance from Transportation Centers.” I gave you a copy of that study that you could read at your leisure. This study investigated the relationship between the existence of a train station and property values of nearby homes. We found that there is a strong relationship between the closeness to a train station and the appreciation of home values. This is evident in Monmouth County for the two municipalities we studied near the North Jersey coastline. In northern New Jersey, we saw that with Mid-Town Direct from the statistics we were receiving from there and in the rest of the country where studies were made of that same issue. So although Middlesex County does have some concerns, it will benefit their county as well.

One other thing I wanted to mention is that Monmouth and Ocean County Planning Boards work together to come up with an alternative alignment for the rail line passing through Middlesex County. And the line that we came up with, first of all, is cost-effective. It has a fair box recovery rate of over 50 percent. And also, it circumvents the residential developments that the speakers from South Brunswick were mentioning before.

So just to sum up, we’re asking you to encourage New Jersey Transit to accept our recommended alignment advanced efforts to implement this project immediately. Further delay in implementing the MOM rail project will result in increased encroachments along the line. This is crucial since

municipalities will remain reluctant to purchase or protect land adjacent to the proposed rail road until a commitment for an alignment is made.

We strongly urge you to require New Jersey Transit to proceed expeditiously as the legislation demands. We recommend that the remaining earmarked \$6 million in ICTEA funds be used to advance this project. And without your immediate action to implement this rail line, we will lose the last window of opportunity to create a balanced transportation system in the state and to maintain the quality of life and to promote the continued economic vitality and development of this region.

Thank you.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you very much.

Yes, sir.

J A M E S R A L E I G H: I'm Jim Raleigh. I signed in as Friends of Monmouth Battlefield because I know the junction of this area -- the crossroads of New Jersey.

The Route 9 bridge over the railroad from Freehold to Monmouth Junction is crumbling. It is being studied for rebuilding. I've been following this process for quite a long time. I wasn't going to testify, but I heard some of the stuff that was presented today. I can make some people unhappy with me, but we didn't have a group of people from Red Bank or Marlboro like New Brunswick telling us they don't want the crossings in their town. They were heard early on in the study that said increase Route 9 bus traffic because the people in Marlboro are happy with their bus traffic into New York. But the rest of the county isn't. Ocean County isn't.

This came up indirectly this year in the DOT Assembly Appropriations Committee. You may remember that in the study, to put more buses on Route 9, that was going to take advantage of five more lanes on the Garden State Parkway bridge over the Raritan. And Lou Romano had his staff check the traffic jam on the express bus lane into Port Authority the day the Commissioner came to the Appropriations Committee. It was a two-hour wait.

We were also discussing other things like improvements in the Montclair Connection in terms of handling bigger traffic into New York on the train. They're going to demolish half of the Broad Street Station in order to put in an extra rail line. And that ties in not only with the rail that we're talking about here, but the improvements to Penn Station and what its traffic-handling capacity is. The Regional Planning Authority has recommended that there be another passenger tunnel to handle the traffic even from North Jersey tying into not only Penn Station, but Grand Central. And so we haven't put those on the table in today's discussion, but I think they're important.

And just as Senator Allen mentioned, what we have happening is that we're trying to combine passenger and rail use. And we've got lots of efforts to have competition in the rail business, and in other places we've got shared routes, and I think this route through Monmouth Junction is going to always stay one of those shared routes just like some in the Trenton thing. So one thing that has changed since the last study was that we can see more freight coming, and it's a matter of how we share the traffic.

The other thing that wasn't put on the table today, I believe, is that the study that said that more buses on Route 9 says that New Jersey Transit should assume the rights-of-way of all the unused lines for future

things. You know, another study 20 years down the road instead of the study now.

In parts of Monmouth County in particular and other parts of the state, there are serious rails to trails efforts in, for example, Marlboro Township. They're trying to tie in with the possible Green Space Preservation on Marlboro Psychiatric Hospital property. So there still are places where this mix of trying to accommodate rail where there was rail and development still ought to be in the study. But adding to Route 9 to increase the parking lot is not going to (indiscernible) the problem. And adding more rail tracks or more parking lots in Monmouth Battlefield-- It's a National Register site. I don't think we want to do that.

Thank you.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you, Mr. Raleigh. Thank you very much for your testimony. We appreciate you taking the time to come.

The next group of people will be from the Manchester-Lakehurst area. Robert Morris, the administrator from the borough of Lakehurst; the Honorable Steven F. Childers, Mayor; and also Ken Vanderziel; from the township of Manchester.

Gentlemen, welcome. Again if you could summarize, we'd certainly appreciate it.

KENNETH VANDERZIEL: The name is Ken Vanderziel. I am a Councilman in Manchester, and I'm here to emphasize that the township of Manchester is composed primarily of senior citizens. We have 16 senior villages, one of which is being constructed now. Part of it is completed. It will be a total of 2400 more units. It's a continuing growth area.

Our Council and Mayor have heartily endorsed having the rail connection at Lakehurst to go to New York for the many reasons you've heard today. I'm not going to reiterate those, but I would say that I'm concerned myself. I worked 30 years for a railroad. I'm familiar with a railroad. I commuted for 15 years, and I know that it's the most efficient way of going.

The problem I see in our community-- One of them is a matter that hasn't been discussed. I would say that it's safety. As you get older, and as you can see I'm up in years a little bit, it becomes more difficult. I had an occasion the other day to drive to Newark Airport. And going down the highway at 70 miles an hour is no fun on the Parkway.

SENATOR CIESLA: It's also illegal.

MR. VANDERZIEL: Even though it's a little excessive maybe.

I just wanted to emphasize that we endorse it. We support the Coalition and its efforts.

Thank you, sir. I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you.

Mayor.

MAYOR STEVEN F. CHILDERS: Thank you, Senator, and the rest of you, for the opportunity to speak.

There are just a couple of things here. One is that the borough of Lakehurst totally endorses this effort. And one of the things, prior to even considering it, was that I went to the businessmen, I went to the residents, everyone-- We've heard testimony about people living within 50 feet. We have the same problem. Everyone is in favor it. It's an old railroad town. They want to have the train back again. Commuters did go through there

years ago, and everyone is still looking forward to that and to having it happen today.

On the other hand, hearing of how other people are opposing it, we, down in our area, did not take any opposition to when the Parkway and the other roads had to be widened right (indiscernible) so that the North Jersey people can come down to our shores and visit us. Now that we want to get mass transportation to get back to the city, they seem to oppose us.

Those are my only comments. Thank you.

SENATOR CIESLA: Good observations.

Mr. Morris.

ROBERT J. MORRIS: Chairman and Senators, briefly without going over everything--

What I have here are a number of petitions signed by our residents, signed by businesspeople, and other folks who are in the area. We heard things about revitalization. And revitalization is something that would happen not only in Lakehurst in Lakewood, in the Manchester Township area. Our business leaders are here with us today as well to support this.

It's interesting, of course, that with time constraints, Lakehurst, whose name has been mentioned a number of times today-- We've got land for the train station. We talk about the railroad. Well, the railroad doesn't go anywhere if we don't have a train station and a place to put it. We've got the land, and we've got the parking. And we've lived with the things that South Brunswick has talked about as big efforts for them with the congestion, the concerns about safety. All of our residents, all of our business community leaders have all supported this effort for the rail line to come into Lakehurst.

It would revitalize, as we said, the entire area. I speak myself just about education as somebody who grew up in Lakehurst for six generations. And for a number years, I didn't have the ability to go away to college. And having had some sort of a ride to get to Rutgers or to get into North Jersey and New York and things like that, I think, would have certainly opened up a completely different avenue, perhaps, in my life.

So again I would like to leave these here (indicating) and to say that we do represent Lakehurst Borough. We've been involved in this since the beginning, our petitions and resolution to the governing body will stress that. We've got the land. We've got the place for a station, and people are very excited and interested here -- to having to come down to our areas.

Thank you very much.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you very much.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony.

A couple of Ocean County rap-ups. We have Peter Waldenmaier for Freeholder Mancini, and Bernard Gindoff, our former safety director from Lakewood Township.

Gentlemen.

PETER WALDENMAIER: Thank you.

I'm Peter Waldenmaier. I'm here for Freeholder James Mancini who had a previous engagement. He asked me to read this statement into the record.

"On behalf of the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders, I wish to convey the Board's strongest support for the restoration of passenger rail service to Lakewood in the central Ocean County region.

“The Monmouth-Ocean County region is undeniably the fastest-growing region in the state, accounting for almost 75 percent of the total population growth in northern New Jersey since 1960.

“Route 9 and the Garden State Parkway are the only links between this region and the employment centers and the metropolitan area. This is especially true for the commuters whose trips originate south of Lakewood. Cars and buses are the primary modes of commuting, with many of the cars having only one occupant. The traffic congestion on Route 9 and the Parkway gets worse on a daily basis, and opportunities to improve the highway capacity are both limited and expensive.

“It is short-sighted to think that we can provide for the long-term transportation needs of this region by continuing to widen roadways, redesign intersections, and put more buses on the road. The only viable, long-term solution to the transportation issues facing this region is the restoration of passenger rail service. An investment in passenger rail service now is an investment in the future.

“Various agencies have been studying the restoration of passenger rail service to northern Ocean County for decades. The most recent study determined that connection to the Northeast corridor and Monmouth Junction was the best alternative to restoring rail service. Other alternatives were considered later in an effort to bypass certain neighborhoods where property owners objected to the project. However, from a practical standpoint, the Monmouth Junction route is clearly the best alternative. It provides the most direct access to the Northeast corridor via an existing right-of-way.

“The Monmouth Junction alternative also provides the most equitable solution to the NIMBY problem because the tracks are already there. When a person buys property located next to a railroad right-of-way, they should realize that activity on those tracks could change over time. It is no different than buying property located along the highway.

“It should be expected that some residents who own property adjacent to the right-of-way will object to this type of project. However, one has to weigh the impacts of what this project will have on a small number of property owners against the myriad of benefits that it will provide to all residents.

“It is the opinion of the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders that this project needs to move forward now. A project of this magnitude will take time to implement, and we need to move this project to construction now. There have been enough studies and debate over the route. It is unlikely that we’ll ever win over the small group of objectors that are intent on derailing this regional project. We need to move on. The benefits that this project will provide to the 1.7 million residents of the fastest-growing region in this state overwhelmingly outweighs the objections in this small but vocal minority group.

“For the good of the entire state, the project needs to move to construction.

“I want to thank Senator Ciesla and the members of the Transportation Committee for holding this hearing. And I also want to recognize the efforts of Monmouth County and the Central Jersey Rail Coalition for keeping this project moving forward in spite of the obstacles that

it's faced in the last few years. Hopefully we can make this project a reality in the near future."

Thank you.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you. On behalf of Freeholder Mancini, we appreciate your taking the time.

BERNARD GINDOFF: Thank you, Senator Ciesla and everybody else. I would echo almost everything that was said here today expect for the one (indiscernible), which will remain unmentioned.

I have been involved in this-- By the way, I'm the Chairman of the Lakewood Transportation Board. I'm a member of the Coalition, and we have been at this now for close to 20 years from when it first started. Lakewood also has areas set aside for train stations right in the same area it used to be. And seeing as nobody else has mentioned it, I would like to just, for historical purposes, mention that I remember riding the Blue Comet. As a youngster, we could tell when it was time to go home, when we heard the whistle. They were on time. Just for historical purposes--

I would like to take a whole different tact. I've listened to the people from Middlesex and our own people, and I heard the comment that they were left out of the loop. They weren't left out by us. I can assure you that. There were invitations sent for various things. I don't believe they ever replied.

But I would like to take it a step further. Through your office, or whomever you might choose, I request that a meeting be set with some of those people from up there with members of the various transportation groups such as Lakewood's Coalition, the Toms River group of transportation -- where we

can sit down with a small group, face to face, and go over what their worries were, what they're worried about. I've heard some of them and I think somebody has lied to them. Somebody, possibly, has told them untruths about the safety and everything that goes on.

You mentioned safety director-- I was a safety officer in Lakewood since 1966. And I retired in 1989. You were close, Senator. One of my jobs was to handle all fatal accidents or look anything like fatal. In that time frame I think I handled close to 200. I can only remember one involving a train where somebody ran a car into a train. Now, that's a long time. We have schools right next to the railroad track. I've never known of a train going off and chasing the kids. I know a lot of them got hit by cars. I've covered a lot of those -- bicycles. I think a lot of the fear that they have been talking about -- somebody has planted it for some reason. I don't know why that is. You take other towns-- Trains go right by their schools all the time. There's not that many youngsters getting hit by cars. One woman, I remember, at a hearing, complained-- By the way, we attended almost all of them. She complained that she had an autistic child, and she was afraid the train would run him over. How would he get out there if somebody wasn't paying attention to him? Some of these things are just blown out of sight, and their imaginations are running wild with these things.

And I personally am a fairly safety-conscious person. I like to look at it and study it as to why it happened. And that's all I can tell you. I think that if we can arrange such a meeting, if we can actually sit down face-to-face with them and talk to them, hear their complaints, find out what we can do to

rectify them, or maybe it's already been planned to take care of some of those troubles in the studies.

So I would highly recommend that, Senator. And I thank you very much, and it's been an honor to be here.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you so much. And rest assured that we're going to have those meetings coordinated by both the Commissioner's Office and New Jersey Transit. So they will begin to occur.

MR. GINDOFF: Thank you.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you.

Two final people. Dan Kerwin, from the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers, and Greg Meyer, from the Tri-state Transportation Campaign.

DANIEL S. KERWIN: Thank you for giving me the privilege to speak before you today.

Honorable State Senator of the Transportation Committee, at this time, the United States and the great State of New Jersey are experiencing a rail renaissance. This renaissance includes passenger rail service. At this time, New Jersey is embracing new and resurrected passenger rail service, everywhere except southern Middlesex County.

The need to reactivate passenger rail service through southern Middlesex using existing railroad right-of-way is warranted. Support, facts, and figures show the need for passenger rail service for this region of central New Jersey. There are no major east-west means of public transportation to handle large numbers of residents who need an alternate mode of travel instead of the current system, which is strained to its limits.

The reasons the MOM route should be reactivated and considered are relatively simple. Economics: the MOM route will provide employment opportunities for all New Jersey residents seeking employment. The MOM route will also serve 100 intrastate and intracounty destinations. The MOM route will help retard the economic and employment exodus to other states and countries. We need to do what we can to retain what we have left. The MOM route will enhance the quality of life in the three-county region.

Environment: renewal of passenger rail service on the MOM route will help New Jersey comply with the 1990 Clean Air Act. MOM will remove a percentage of vehicle traffic off our roadways, thus, reducing the amount of pollution released into our air. On average, a person's vehicle consumes 200 gallons of gasoline a year to get to work. The need for land and natural resources consuming highway projects for that area will be negated if the MOM route is renewed. This will preserve what is left of our valuable open space.

Cost: The cost of the MOM route is equivalent to that of a single Turnpike interchange. This 33-mile rail route offers more bang for the transportation dollar than the proposed 6.6-mile, expensive Route 92.

Family: Yes, family. The MOM route will reduce the amount of time on average a parent spends to get to and from work. All too often dad or mom will call from the cell phone and say, "John or Jane, I'll be late or miss your ball game, play, or recital due to traffic problems."

Thank you for letting me speak.

SENATOR CIESLA: Thank you very much, Mr. Kerwin. We appreciate your testimony.

Our final witness today is Mr. Greg Meyer, from the Tri-state Transportation Campaign.

Greg, if you could summarize, please.

G R E G M E Y E R: Sure.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

My name is Greg Meyer. I'm the New Jersey Coordinator for the Tri-state Transportation Campaign. We're a 13-member consortium of regional public interest planning and environmental groups. We're seeking to redirect transportation capital spending to more cost-effective modes, to improve safety, and to give people more options to travel and to move goods around the state and around the region.

Advancing the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex rail line project will be a major step towards this last objective for the people of Central New Jersey. The counties of Monmouth, Ocean, Middlesex, as you've heard time and time again today, have been developing rapidly. And a great proportion of the journeys to work among these three counties are among these three counties. For example, Monmouth County residents -- more Monmouth County residents commute to Middlesex County than they do to New York or any other county in the state besides Monmouth itself. But access -- east-west access within the region and to the Northeast corridor line will always remain inadequate until better rail Transit service is implemented. Without it, traffic will be condemned to escalate on already overburdened roads and develop a lack of incentive and compatibility to take place in centers as envisioned in the State Plan.

The Tri-state Campaign strongly endorses the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex rail project. We do recognize the number of community concerns that persist in Middlesex County, and we acknowledge the validity of some of those concerns, and we've encouraged New Jersey Transit to address them as it has been successful doing in other rail expansion projects.

My one final comment, with regard to the bill which passed at the Committee today is that while it's certainly valuable to get the MOM project into the circle of mobility plan, I think it's equally valuable or will be equally valuable to get it into the study and development pool in the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority where capital dollars are actually allocated to the project and, then from there on, into the State Transportation Improvement Program.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.

SENATOR CIESLA: Greg, thank you very much for your testimony.

I also want to extend my thank you to the Committee for your indulgence for this particular hearing. I know it was long. I thank you for taking the time to listen to the concerns of what is a very important issue for our three counties.

Thank you very much. This hearing is adjourned.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)