

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

Background

Recently we all became aware of the potential for increased rail freight traffic through Morris County as a result of expansion at the Port Authority and the resulting proliferation of rail service. Already running an intensive commuter schedule, the Erie-Lackawanna train track, also known as the Morris-Essex line, in Morris County is under pressure from expansion plans at two points.

- First, there are plans to extend commuter service on the Lackawanna Cutoff from Andover NJ to Scranton PA, connecting to the existing New Jersey Transit (NJT) lines at Port Morris. This will help promote development in western New Jersey and along the Pennsylvania border, but may cause issues for Morris County commuters due to the increased ridership which will certainly result in additional crowding on trains into New York City and Hoboken.
- Second, the ongoing Union County and Morristown & Erie (M&E) Railway work to restore freight service on the Staten Island Railway and the Rahway Valley Railroad will establish a freight connection to the Erie-Lackawanna at Summit. It is unlikely that the transport of rail freight will stop there. It has been suggested that this will establish the capability for through-freight service from Staten Island garbage and cargo facilities to the municipal landfill west of Scranton and out to Class 1 freight lines at Binghampton, Buffalo, and Montreal.

Easing the congestion on our roads in Morris County, even temporarily, by increasing the movement of people and freight by rail could be positive. However, potential negative impacts to commuter, pedestrian, automobile and truck traffic, as well as our environment, property values and quality-of-life warrant our concern and our continuous monitoring of the situation.

I have attempted to consolidate what we heard in our May meeting as well as conversations/correspondence that have taken place subsequent to that meeting for your information and use. Please use this document as a place to begin your education and form a valid opinion on the issues. Hopefully you will find that I have presented a balanced view. Happy reading!

What We Heard in May

The guest speakers at our May 2005 Republican Club of Morristown meeting were Bob Sheehan, President, East Summit Association (ESA) and Summit's representative to Union County's Five City Coalition and Stewart Weiss, Chairman of the Inman Railroad Committee, representing Edison & Middlesex County; assisted by Anton Evers, Assistant to President - East Summit Association (ESA) and Dan Westervelt, Cranford's representative to the Coalition To Stop The Freight Train. Also in the audience of this session, which we opened to the public, were Gordon Fuller, Executive VP and COO of the Maine Eastern Railroad (parent of M&E); Bob Belz and Bob Simpson of Denville's 'Halt Outrageous Railroad Noise' (HORN) organization; and some members of the Commuter Coalition (strong proponents of the Lackawanna Cutoff).

We heard of the reported plans of the Morristown & Erie Railway (M&E) to use the Erie-Lackawanna (including the Morris-Essex Lines and the future Lackawanna Cutoff), Rahway Valley Railroad and Staten Island Railway to move Port Authority freight and NYC municipal garbage from Staten Island across Morris County from our guest speakers. In rebuttal, we were told by Mr. Fuller that M&E plans only *one* train a day to

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

Staten Island and that NYC has alternative plans for disposing of its garbage because PA is planning to close its garbage dumps in 2007, and alternate plans called for movement of trash by barge on the Hudson River.

We also heard from the supporters of the reopening of the Lackawanna Cutoff for western commuters. They spoke of the benefits of mass transit which could alleviate some traffic congestion on Morris County. In fact, our Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen has stated that he is a proud supporter of reopening this line. In rebuttal, we heard that the cost of reopening this line for commuters cannot be substantiated without the revenues that would come from running freight on the Cutoff.

Finally, we were told that Middlesex and Union County legislators, Senators Bono and Kean, along with Assemblymen Bramnick, Munoz, Barnes and Diegnan, are working to prevent funding of the reactivation of the Rahway Valley Railroad in Union County and to stop a second freight line from being laid in Edison and Middlesex County. Our speakers asked for our assistance in gaining access to the Morris County Freeholders and the Mayor and Town Council in Morristown to discuss the impacts of increasing rail freight traffic in Morris County with them.

There is growing interest in this subject – both the Daily Record and the Star Ledger were represented at our May meeting and have been periodically covering stories about increasing rail freight traffic in Morris County since then. In addition, presentations have been made to the Freeholders and Morristown's elected officials. Requests for resolutions opposing increases to rail freight traffic in Morris County are pending.

At a special session on July 11, 2005 at the Morris County Library, we will also hear from Peter Palmer, Somerset County Freeholder and Chairman of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, and retired Morris County Transportation Coordinator, Frank Reilly. They asked to be our guest speakers to offer a counter point to what we may have heard from the prior speakers in May.

What's Been Learned So Far

Port Authority Expansion –

With the intent to make the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey an economic engine in the Northeast, there are plans to spend \$3.2 billion to expand port operations. The Port Authority has recently completed a \$360 million project to deepen a series of channels and signed another \$760 million agreement to continue its dredging in order to make the port accessible to larger international cargo vessels, allow the port to operate more effectively, and produce major economic benefits to the region (*Star Ledger, May 3, 2005*). In addition, another \$7 billion has been requested by Congressman Bob Menendez (NJ-13), Chairman of the Democratic Caucus and senior New Jersey Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, for development in support of the port expansion along the 'Liberty Corridor' which emanates from the port region, and travels north, south and west, along railways, roadways and waterways. Specifically in terms of rail, the Liberty Corridor seeks the development of 1) an inland port rail distribution network, 2) intra-regional rail shuttles/short-line freight rail, and 3) the establishment of intra-region rail-served distribution nodes.

From handling 2.2 million freight containers in 2002, the Port Authority is looking to reach 8.8 million containers by 2022. The NYC Boroughs of Brooklyn and Staten Island are slated to be major contributors to the increase. The Port Authority has a goal of increasing the 12% 'share of freight' carried by rail, and concurrently quadrupling the number of containers shipped. It has already announced plans to expand the Howland Hook facility into Port Ivory so that there will eventually be berthing for up to seven container ships at the same time. This would create circumstances where there could be over 20,000 containers (roughly 189 miles) awaiting removal from Staten Island at the same time. Proportional, dramatic increases in container movement will both put more trains on the tracks and more trucks on the road.

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) Involvement –

Currently, the Lehigh Valley Railroad is used to move freight traffic west across NJ. Trying to meet the Port Authority goals of 'share of freight' carried by rail and number of containers moved is an impossible goal using the Lehigh Valley Railroad alone since it had been averaging 36-40 trains daily and now runs up to 46 daily with much difficulty. This has resulted in around-the-clock rail freight traffic including during rush hours – causing traffic blockage at every grade crossing. It should be noted that the Lehigh Valley Railroad also shares track with the Raritan Valley commuter line from Cranford to Newark.

The Port Authority expansion demands that NJDOT plan for ways to handle the cumulative increase in freight traffic. Going due north is not much of an option, according to the Port Authority in its Comprehensive Port Improvement Plan, because everything to Selkirk/Albany is already at over 90% of capacity. Looking at rail inventory, NJDOT found that the New York Susquehanna & Western and the Erie-Lackawanna through Morris County are the only other viable lines leaving northern New Jersey.

Currently, NJDOT focus is on the reactivation of previously unused or abandoned rail lines and construction of new tracks along a number of short-line railroads, including:

- North – Oak Island, New York Susquehanna and Western, connection to/from Lehigh Valley Railroad
- South – Chemical Coast Line, Port Reading Branch, West Trenton Line, connection to/from Lehigh Valley Railroad
- West - Staten Island Railway, Raritan Valley Line, connection to/from Lehigh Valley Railroad, Rahway Valley Railroad, Erie-Lackawanna, and the Lackawanna Cutoff

In fact, NJDOT has already purchased the rights-of-way for several of these abandoned rail corridors. The June 2004 rail freight budget called for \$6.8 million for freight improvements. NJDOT's updated FY2005 budget for rail freight transportation projects totals over \$22 million, and New Jersey Transit (NJT) has proposed an additional \$15 million for 'commuter' improvements on the western end of the line toward Vernon. Some of the freight projects funded or underway that directly impact Morris County include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kenvil Lumber Transload Spur to provide transload capacity for current customers \$190,000 (FY2004-05)• Track Rehabilitation Roxbury/Wharton on 4 miles of track to support increased rail traffic to construction/demolition facility being constructed in Roxbury Township \$1,500,000 (FY2004-05)• Berkshire Valley Railroad Road Bridge Raising from 11'5" to 14'5" for better truck clearance \$750,000 (FY2004-05)• Reconstruction of five trestles to connect the Rahway Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rockaway Runaround to provide staging area for loading/unloading rail cars \$295,000 (FY2004-05)• Reconstruction of the Route 46/15 interchange, the replacement of 2 bridges and the abandonment of a section of the D&R line (underway)• Rebuilding track spurs in Denville/Dover to allow better access to Rockaway customers (underway, associated with project above)• Expansion of Sparta Terminal to include improved mail line
---	---

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

Railroad to the Erie-Lackawanna/Morris-Essex Lines (pending)	access, 2 add'l sidings, and a new team track \$738,716 (FY2004-05)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Roxbury/Wharton Runaround to provide staging area for loading/unloading rail cars \$315,000 (FY2004-05)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rail Completion from Little Ferry to Sparta by finishing joined rail work between Elmwood Park & Hackensack \$932,000 (FY2004-05)

In addition, NJDOT is pushing for a new Transportation Trust Fund to be paid for by NJ taxpayers. To justify a new fund, NJDOT has outlined their plans for road and bridge repairs and some commuter rail projects, like the proposed new tube into Manhattan and the Lackawanna Cutoff. As soon as a new fund is decided upon, NJT is ready to move forward. The new cross-Hudson tube is priority number one, but will probably take decades to complete. The Lackawanna Cutoff is its second highest priority, but is likely to be finished first – the land is already acquired, no environmental study or STB approval is required, and work could begin within months. As mentioned earlier, our Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen has stated that he is a proud supporter of reopening this line, and one assumes by extension that he is in favor of the new Transportation Trust Fund.

Under the premise of restoring passenger service on the 26 mile long Lackawanna Cutoff in NJ, NJT estimates capital expenditures of \$350 million and annual operating expenses of \$22 million to bring service to 2,800 eastbound passengers daily when fully build-out in 2025. If used for commuter traffic alone, this amounts to over \$7,800 per passenger per year on an ongoing basis, and about \$125,000 each to get started. Congressman Frelinghuysen is attempting to get federal funding to cover part of it.

On the other hand, it has been suggested by some that the Erie-Lackawanna/Morris-Essex route across Morris County is unattractive for heavier freight traffic because the grade between Springfield and Summit can be too steep for trash and marine cargo trains. However, in most cases, railroads can just add another locomotive to accommodate and compensate for any grade issues. It also seems that any negative assertions about the grade and routing of the Lackawanna Cutoff are red herrings. In rail circles, the Lackawanna Cutoff is legendary for its straightness and its ability to move freight trains at sustained speeds. Check <http://www.gsmrrclub.org/HISTORY/history5.html> for a history of the Cutoff online. According to the Garden State Model Railroad Club:

“To this day, the great Lackawanna Cutoff...is considered to be an engineering marvel. At the time of its construction in the early 20th century, it was engineered for unprecedented speed and efficiency...the route went north from Port Morris, New Jersey, and turned west near Roseville for an arrow-straight shot right into Pennsylvania. It was well designed indeed, as even freight trains were capable of sustaining 70 mph on the Cutoff upon its completion in 1912!”

Potential Rail Freight Impact in Morris County –

The Morris-Essex Lines of the Erie-Lackawanna which run through Morris County are not exclusively commuter lines today. New Jersey Transit (NJT) owns these lines, but the Morris & Erie Railway (M&E) has a contract with NJT that allows the M&E to move freight across the lines. There are two to three tracks available along the route between Summit and Hackettstown and currently there are switching facilities at both Dover and Hackettstown. NJT has strict limitations on the freight traffic using its Morris-Essex rails, such as height (15'3"), weight (263,000 lbs. per rail car), and dispatch (freight traffic timed to minimize interference with commuters). This short-line rail carrier owns very little track

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County? **(Information compiled from a variety of sources)** **Updated June 14, 2005**

of its own, but is able to transport freight on tracks wherever it has negotiated or prior 'grand-fathered' rights and leases. The M&E has trackage rights currently from the area of the port to Bound Brook and Hackettstown.

Today the freight trains traveling through Morris County are short and slow – Norfolk Southern (NS) comes through every 10 days or so, M&E maybe once or twice per week. The current situation can be highlighted by looking at Dover where there are two separate commuter and freight tracks. One freight line is owned by Morris County and operates from Wharton to Rockaway Township, known locally known as the Dover and Rockaway (D&R) line and built in the late 1880s as an iron ore line. The other is the NJ Transit line. Freight shuttle traffic currently runs on both lines at about 10 mph and often must wait on sidings when they run.

- On the D&R the freight trains are literally walked through town, stopping at each of 13 existing crossings which are uncontrolled grade crossings that require deployment of a flagman.
- The slow movement of freight on the NJT line is caused by the large number of train stations from end to end and the numerous crossings at grade crossing. Low rail speeds are posted even for NJT trains for safety reasons, although commuter trains have been clocked at up to 45 mph between stations.
- There is a complex transportation plan underway that involves the reconstruction of the Route 46/15 interchange, the replacement of 2 bridges and the abandonment of a section of the D&R line.
 - One of the old D&R spurs in Denville/Dover will be rebuilt to allow better access to Rockaway customers.
 - Dover and Morris County plan to turn a section of the D&R in Dover into a recreation path. It will eliminate the 13 crossings and put the M&E permanently on the NJT line, which it prefers.

Since the Morris & Erie Railway (M&E) is *the* short-line railroad that serves north central NJ, this is the rail carrier most likely to serve needs for intra-regional rail shuttles, short-line freight rail, and rail-served distribution nodes in Morris County as an extension of the Liberty Corridor. According to Mr. Fuller, Executive VP and COO of the Maine Eastern Railroad (parent of M&E) the M&E has interest in 1) providing "sprint train service" to the Port Authority – moving containers quickly to points where the long haul inter-modal carriers (rail and truck) can pick them up; 2) sharing "open public team tracks" with other rail carriers to help move containers intra-region; 3) participating in "brown field development" of rail-served distribution nodes for container stuffing and other packaging/unpackaging facilities; and 4) providing more switching support to customers such as the Bayway Refinery. He also indicated that he would like to run as many as six round-trip freight trains per day (or more) if NJT scheduling could support this increase in traffic and noted that current NJT limitations stated previously would dictate the type of cargo that his trains might carry (i.e. plastic pellets, paper, and so forth).

In addition to the budgeted projects mentioned previously that could impact Morris County rail freight traffic, M&E currently has three applications on file with NJDOT for monies from the state's rail assistance program: rehabilitation of the Kenvil-Susquehanna Branch; expansion of the Kenvil trans-loading facility; and updates to an existing unloading station in Hanover Township at Cedar Knolls to handle plastic pellets for local companies. The \$1.3 million Hanover project would allow for as many as 18 to 25 additional rail cars to pass through daily. But concerns about noise and increased truck traffic on South Jefferson Road have Hanover Township residents and officials questioning the project's viability and suggesting alternative sites for this unloading station.

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

Interim Conclusions: Morris County lies between the Liberty Corridor and the Lackawanna Cut-off! Higher volume movement of freight through Morris County in the future seems inevitable given the increasing pressure for rail freight associated with the Port Authority expansion. This will certainly happen as track routing, rail capacity and profitability allow.

We are in the path of more rail freight traffic once the 'dots' are connected. Under the contract with NJT, the M&E will have the right to move freight traffic on the NJT commuter line all the way to Pennsylvania once the rail lines are completed – giving the rail carrier an unobstructed run from Staten Island to Scranton – and M&E can drop/pick up freight anywhere along the way for its customers. If the M&E can get access to Scranton after the completion of the Lackawanna Cutoff, it will have a connection to the Class 1 carriers that run through Binghamton NY to Montreal, Buffalo, and beyond.

As better rail transport becomes available, there may be additional business development opportunities for light manufacturing firms along the route in Morris County, although, to the best of my knowledge, there is no analysis available that we can use to project potential positive economic benefits and jobs. This is something that needs more investigation. Morris County residents and elected officials may react positively to prospects for more jobs and economic benefits to their communities.

NJT commuter rail has its grade crossings controlled by automatic signals which allow for unobstructed movement of trains. As freight traffic increases, the grade crossings on the NJT lines (and possibly other lines pressed into service) will most likely be shut down more frequently – there are ninety-six grade crossings in Morris County – causing delays for automobile and truck traffic. A freight train making a through movement across Morris County to Scranton would not be subject to the same operational limitations as a freight train making local calls or a commuter train having to stop at multiple commuter stations. Properly scheduled, a mile-long freight train could keep sequentially tripping crossing signals and not even have to stop on the NJT lines.

Federal regulations allow a train to routinely close a grade crossing for up to five minutes. A mile-long train only needs to average 12 mph to clear a grade crossing within five minutes. Without having to stop, a through freight train could do better speeds than this, especially during nighttime hours when it does not have to contend with commuter train schedules. While some would say that the nine separate NJT stations in Morris County, heavy rush hour traffic on our roads, and heavy population along the train lines are deterrents to increases in freight traffic, the same conditions apply to our neighbors in Union and Middlesex Counties and they have not been spared.

It is important to note that some of NJT limitations on freight traffic could be changed in the future, either through administrative revision (i.e., weight up to 286,000 or 315,000 lbs. per rail car) or through infrastructure improvements (i.e., strengthening bridges, raising electrical wires). It is also clear that 'Not in My Back Yard' (NIMBY) will be a continuing challenge for M&E expansion plans as evidenced by the Hanover Township case and a previously squashed M&E proposal for a truck-to-train construction debris transfer site that was planned for Roxbury. Considering the quiet, electrified commuter service on most of the Morris-Essex Lines, the noise, vibration, and air emissions associated with diesel freight trains may have Morris County residents along the entire route of travel increasingly concerned about detrimental environmental, property value, and quality-of-life impacts.

A reasonable person may ask what for-profit business would voluntarily limit its potential for future growth as the Port Authority expands and opportunities for rail shuttles/short-line freight rail transport grows. I think it is safe to say the M&E (and perhaps other rail carriers) will want to transport as much cargo through Morris County as it possibly can in order to increase its revenues and profitability. In Mr. Fuller's shoes, I would do the same.

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

The Possibility of Municipal Garbage Transport -

There are some advantages to moving trash through by rail rather than on highways, if the New Jersey rail infrastructure could handle it efficiently. Right now municipal garbage from NYC rolls through NJ on Route 78 and Interstate 80. More trains on the proper rail line and fewer trucks could be beneficial. But what is the real possibility of these trash trains coming through Morris County?

The Morris-Essex Lines of the Erie-Lackawanna are known to have low clearance due to the electrical wires used for powering NJT commuter trains. People are being told now that municipal garbage cannot be moved on the Erie-Lackawanna because of assertions that trash containers are always double-stacked. However, NYC currently ships containers of trash on the Lehigh Valley Railroad from Selkirk/Albany to Collier, Virginia - some double-stacked and some single stacked.

Local opposition to moving garbage by rail on the Erie-Lackawanna may be expected. Four years ago, when Linden was trying to become the site for a barge-to-train transfer station for NYC trash, the outcry from Middlesex County residents who did not want trash trains coming through their towns was so great that the project was abruptly dropped. In a similar circumstance, NJDOT plans for a Middlesex-Ocean-Mercer line (MOM) have been held up for years due to local opposition. Residents of Manville have been complaining that railcars of containerized trash are just left on sidings to rot, causing quite a stench. Although 'sealed' to keep the garbage in, these municipal garbage containers are not odor-tight. Residents in Morris County will definitely be able to tell/smell when a garbage train is coming through their town based on the experience of residents in Union and Middlesex Counties. Keeping any such plans under wraps may be a defensive posture by the rail carriers.

In July 2004, NYC received federal Surface Transportation Board approval to extend the Staten Island Railway along the west shore to Fresh Kills Landfill so that trash can be containerized at the facility and *shipped by rail into New Jersey*. NYC also issued a report in December 2004 that said it will begin seeking other sites for its trash because PA has indicated it to close its landfills by 2007, the cost of the disposal system is forcing changes, and that it is seeking upstate landfills, among other options. Virginia, where NYC also sends considerable trash, is also planning changes that will take that state off the market. There is nothing being said about the potential of moving NYC municipal trash by rail across NJ to other disposal points further west or south. In fact, there are already discussions underway about shipping solid waste through Pennsylvania to Ohio landfills.

That said, on 5/23/05, Alliance Sanitary landfill in Taylor, PA announced plans for expansion:

"[Alliance Sanitary Landfill] plans to reapply with the state for expansion next month, proposing to add 87.6 acres that would handle 4,000 tons of waste per day, about doubling its current daily intake. Alliance and its parent corporation, Waste Management Inc., said the retooled plan is 40 percent smaller than the previous plan, addresses concerns previously raised by landfill neighbors and the state."

Interim Conclusion: There is no way for us in Morris County to control whether the rail freight coming through our communities is trash or not. I also suspect it is unlikely that M&E would turn down a shipment of trash if it was offered - a freight train is a freight train after all. Realistically, market forces will determine the cheapest disposal site and the best rail routing to get there. Depending on traffic and current or future connections, routing could include the Erie-Lackawanna/Morris-Essex route and the Lackawanna Cutoff. Based on the experiences from Union and Middlesex Counties, we could reasonably ask whether an assumption of 'efficient movement' of garbage by rail is realistic. One has to guess that trains loaded with municipal waste may get lower priority of movement than trains carrying more valuable cargo. Morris County residents should be concerned and watch this closely.

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

Lack of Transparency in Planning -

Transparency in the planning process has been a real problem. Things were so bad that Tri-State Transportation Campaign (TSTC) sued the NJDOT for inadequate public disclosure. In June 2003, the State Court of Appeals ruled that NJDOT failed to comply with the requirements of the Trust Fund Renewal Act by "failing to plan at all." The court ruled that NJDOT was merely producing "a description of a single year's projects, selected through unstated criteria, without the benefit of articulated strategic goals." *Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Inc., et al v. Donald T. DiFrancesco, et al, No. A-0278-01T5 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. June 11, 2003)*

As a consequence of the decision, NJDOT has spent the last two years developing a "Comprehensive Statewide Freight Plan" that some say seems long on procedure and short on revealing any plan. Since the decision, TSTC has found a seat at the planning table with the Port Authority, is an advocate of rail freight, is intimately involved with Port Authority discussions to use 'green vehicles' within the confines of port areas, and is less active in pressing for public disclosure of any strategic plan.

Also in June 2003, NJDOT people, including Dennis Keck, Policy Director, and Messrs. Badgley and Matthews from Rail Freight, were at a public meeting in Edison regarding plans to double-track the mainline Lehigh Valley RR through Middlesex County. Pressed for reasons for the expansion and traffic estimates, their only replies included things like "to improve fluidity", that any increase in movements would depend on the economy, and that they were not aware of "any plans" to bring trash into New Jersey by rail.

Within a few months of that meeting, the New York City Economic Development Corporation filed with the Surface Transportation Board to allow connecting Fresh Kills Landfill to the Staten Island Railway so that containerized trash could be brought by rail into New Jersey. On July 15, 2004, the NYC Economic Development Corporation and the NYC Department of Sanitation quietly received federal Surface Transportation Board approval to extend the Travis Branch of the Staten Island Railway along the west shore to Fresh Kills Landfill so that trash can be containerized at the facility and shipped by rail into New Jersey.

The Lackawanna Cutoff is being framed as a commuter project, but western Morris County is already served by both the Boonton Line and the Morris-Essex Line through the stations at Lake Hopatcong, Netcong, Mount Olive and Hacketstown. Current estimates indicate that the Cutoff would take about 800 cars a day off Route 80, a number that hardly justifies the estimated expenditure. However, growth planned for areas out to Scranton will eventually overtake any initial reductions in traffic on Route 80. There are some municipalities along this route that are for and against the Cutoff completion, for example:

- Andover wants the Cutoff because they are in line for transit village designation which would entail high-density development around a reopened station.
- Byram Township opposes the Cutoff, because it will create a second development corridor through their area, paralleling Route 80 and creating more sprawl.

Almost no one knows that the Cutoff will also be available for freight use. Many other rail freight projects in NJ are just not talked about. Some people from Union and Middlesex Counties feel that NJDOT has just stopped publicizing why they are involved in certain projects because of negative local resident response to some of their plans. However, at the public meeting on the Cutoff held in Andover on June 29,

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

2004, the people from Byram were told that NJDOT would have to run freight on the Cutoff to make up some of the operating costs – something we have already deduced just based on economics.

At a Comprehensive Port Improvement Meeting on June 9, 2005, the Port Authority indicated it would like to quadruple container movements and increase the containers carried by train from 12% to 23%. This means that freight trains will have to carry eight times as many containers to meet these goals. Discussion about impacts to other surface transportation and environmental concerns was answered with a categorical decision that moving freight by rail was more desirable than other options, and that delaying all other surface transportation such as commuter rail, car and truck traffic was an acceptable consequence.

Norfolk Southern is sinking millions into its Allentown, PA yard as part of the redevelopment of the old Bethlehem Steel site. That yard is at the end of the Lehigh Valley line and is the main switching point in the region outside of the port. It should also be pointed out that Scranton coincidentally sits at the midway point of a rail connection between Allentown PA and Binghamton NY. Ultimately, the M&E may be able to run full trains at up to 70 mph on the Lackawanna Cutoff, bypass Allentown by going directly to Scranton, and have cargo at Binghamton ahead of the lines using Conrail Shared Assets on the Lehigh Valley Railroad. This prospect is very real once the rail infrastructure is in place. To do this, the rail freight traffic must go right through Morris County.

More recently, on June 6, 2005, acting Governor Codey announced plans to raise the gas tax to fund the Transportation Trust Fund and to consider the sale or lease of the Turnpike and/or Parkway to fund important transportation projects. Administratively, this is a way to avoid public confrontations over a growing number of transportation projects that may be locally undesirable, but the funding options impact all of the residents in New Jersey. Taxes are taxes, and the state's assets belong to us all as taxpayers!

There is legislation currently pending in both the state Senate (SJR 49) and Assembly (AJR 105) calling for the creation of a 10 member bipartisan "Smart Freight Railroad Study Commission" to ensure the expansion of rail freight traffic in New Jersey is engineered with an overall strategic plan that maximizes the efficiency of freight movement with reasonable costs and benefits while minimizing the impacts on traffic flow, the environment, and community safety. The results of this Commission are to be reported one year after its inception. Based on the content of AJR 105, this legislation would require NJDOT pause in moving forward with plans that impact Morris County by freezing any state monies that would be needed for rebuilding bridges on the Rahway Valley Line to connect freight trains to the NJT commuter line in Summit (see Assembly Amendment dated 3/11/2005). There may also be similar analyses underway that will need to be coordinated to result in one plan for the region – Portway Study (NJDOT) and various needs studies (CSX, Norfolk-Southern).

Some say the construction of a modern, high-speed, welded rail freight line with complete grade separation from commuters and local cargo may be the best answer. This would isolate movements of through-freight traffic from commuter, pedestrian, automobile and truck traffic, as well as protect our community's environment, property values and quality-of-life.

The funding question overall is a confusing one. Funds that support the rail carriers in NJ may come from NJDOT's rail freight budget, NJT's commuter rail budget, the state's Transportation Trust Fund, the Federal grants program, NJDOT-issued GARVEE bonds, and/or from the rail carriers themselves. A comprehensive picture is very difficult to piece together.

Interim Conclusions: Most people watching the expansion of the Port Authority fully understand that more truck and train traffic will come as the port is fully developed. It is also clear that the issues in Middlesex and Union Counties may be far more immediate than they are in Morris County because of the proximity to the port expansion. However, it is clear that we should be paying attention to what is happening east, west, north, and south of us and one is left to ponder what else we do not know that may be potentially detrimental or beneficial to Morris County residents. Plans and projects continue to come out in a fragmented fashion.

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

Many New Jersey municipalities and counties have genuine concerns over the need for reactivation and construction of short-line freight railroads for through freight traffic due to the inadequate, archaic rail freight infrastructure in New Jersey. Some have already passed resolutions opposing knitting the short-lines together as proposed without further study, including, but not limited to:

- Borough of South Plainfield
- Borough of Middlesex
- Township of Edison
- Township of Scotch Plains
- Borough of Roselle Park
- Five Union County municipalities?

Overall, it is important to understand what the real costs and benefits to New Jersey may be. Opponents of increasing freight traffic on short-line rail say we will realize little economic advantage in serving as a through-corridor for trash and marine cargo from the Port Authority and that the negative local impacts are not worth it. Proponents say access to better rail transport will create jobs and new business development opportunities in the entire region. I personally believe this is the area where we should focus our attention – the ‘value equation’: what will NJ/Morris County gain from this that can benefit us all? Will the potential pain be worth the potential gain?

Where do we start? Peel back the monolithic and consolidate the fragmented – create an environment in which things are done with us rather than to us! The Port Authority expansion is like a tsunami coming at us and will effect us whether we like it or not. We need to get engaged in order to advantage our County and communities.

- Create a visual representation of existing railroad routes and planned rail projects in North Central NJ so we can begin to see how the ‘dots’ may look in the future when they are connected. If we keep this visual (i.e., map) updated, we will always be able at a glance to see to what projects we need to pay attention.
- Try to determine how much of the estimated 8.8 million containers at the Port Authority are actually destined for regional use vs through shipment to other regions. This will allow us to see how much of the estimated increase should be transported on short-line rail and how much may need to be sent out of our state on a high-speed, welded rail freight line with complete grade separation from commuters and local cargo. This alone may make the case for concurrently investing in both short-line and high-speed rail projects.
- Based on the estimated % of containers for regional use, evaluate the number of associated rail-served distribution nodes and other packaging/unpackaging facilities that may be required, both at the Liberty Corridor and in Morris County, to serve this volume and get product to regional customers. Product that is not destined for use in our region should not be put in expanded packaging here – let the volume increase take place closer to the point of end use.
- Identify potential sites in Morris County for “brown field development”, light manufacturing, and industrial parks that would benefit from better rail transport and could be a foundation for new/expanded business development opportunities and jobs creation. This work may need to be done in conjunction with local municipal officials. I would suggest bringing the M&E into those discussions too.
- Create a positive planning environment and engage all interested parties in the process. It is not in anyone’s interest to have one or more planning participants feeling beleaguered, nor to have information withheld for fear of negative response.

What About Increased Rail Freight Traffic in Morris County?

(Information compiled from a variety of sources)

Updated June 14, 2005

I might add that I am not against increases in rail freight traffic in principle. I just want us to make wise, sustainable investment in our transportation infrastructure instead of trying to cobble together an interim solution, only to have to make the better thought-out investment later anyway. If it is worth doing, it is worth doing correctly the first time! Let's not spend our taxpayer dollars twice.