



## Gloucester County Times

### Public transit to link towns

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WOODBURY What's better than one plan to bring public transportation to South Jersey?

Try three plans.

That's the message Gov. Jon Corzine brought Tuesday as three massive infrastructure projects were announced, extending mass transit to areas long underserved in Gloucester and Camden counties within a matter of a few years.

"This is not going to be decades," Corzine said. "This is going to be plans and we're going to get to contracting and moving forward. The money is set aside, we need to make sure this gets going."

Two of the three components of the more than \$1 billion in construction directly affect residents in Gloucester County, the largest being the implementation of diesel light rail service on existing Conrail right-of-ways.

Initially the train, which will be not unlike New Jersey Transit's RiverLINE, will run from the Walter Rand Transportation Center in Camden to Cooper Street in Woodbury. Stops along the way will include Cooper Hospital and Atlantic Avenue within the City of Camden, Gloucester City, Crown Point Road in Westville and Red Bank Avenue in Woodbury before the final stop.

Getting to Cooper Street alone is expected to cost \$600 million and could be completed as soon as five years from now.

The state has already pledged more than \$500 million in funding to start, still short of both the initial and overall cost.

"I think when we re-authorize the Transportation Trust Fund, the money will be there," Corzine said. "When that happens, we'll go forward."

Extension to Glassboro is planned, with stops in Woodbury Heights, Wenonah, Mantua Boulevard, Sewell, Pitman, Rowan University and downtown Glassboro.

That part of the line could be completed anywhere between six to 10 years from now and would require the addition of a track next to the existing Conrail lines.

"It's a tough economic time, but it's not the time to lose track of the fact we need a vision to move forward," Corzine said.

Delaware River Port Authority Chairman and PATCO CEO John Matheussen said the price tag of the route selected is close to \$1 billion less than other alternatives that would have put a new rail line down the Route 42 corridor toward Washington Township.

Back in 1996, opponents of a proposal to bring passenger rail to Gloucester County applied enough political pressure to keep the Conrail line running through the county limited to freight.

State Sen. Stephen Sweeney, who also serves as freeholder director, along with other leaders claim that

mistake won't be repeated.

"That's not going to happen this time," Sweeney said. "This freeholder board in Gloucester County supports this project and will not walk away from it."

Matheussen called nixing of earlier plans to restore passenger rail service to South Jersey a "missed opportunity."

"We have another chance to build that line and do more," Matheussen said. " We have support in Trenton, we have a commitment for funding in the Transportation Trust Fund, we have the support of our Board, and we have heard from the residents of South Jersey that they want and support extended mass transportation."

An employment boom is expected to come from rail expansion. U.S. Rep. Robert Andrews, D-1st, of Haddon Heights, foresees a minimum of 100,000 construction jobs and establishments of new businesses in the towns along the line.

That comes along with a hope for an increase in the quality of life and property values as part of what Andrews calls "a new South Jersey."

"I know this is not this first time people have talked about doing this," Andrews said. "Believe me, this is the first time it's going to be done."

Rowan University President Donald Farish sees train cars full of students and faculty as a boom for the school. He'd like to see the line running sooner, rather than later, but in this case, a late train is better than no train at all.

"This was the important route," Farish said. "In the long term we will be able to see students and staff once again riding the train to the campus just as they did back in the twenties."

If he's still with the university when the line is running, Farish would have a short walk from his Woodbury home to hop a train to get to work.

Rowan swells in size to about 12,000 people on a normal day. Projections on enrollment have 14,000 students attending classes there by the time a train could be running there.

"It may be worthwhile to subsidize train travel tickets because it's money the university wouldn't have to spend to construct parking," Farish said.

There's room on campus for a train station, most likely near the school's engineering building, Farish noted.

For Woodbury Mayor Robert Curtis, light rail could be the final piece of the puzzle to get his city's downtown thriving again.

"It helps to accomplish exactly what we need to accomplish and that's get more people walking in the center of town," Curtis said.

The city has already looked at making Route 45 through town more pedestrian-friendly. A redevelopment implementation plan was passed by city council Monday night, in a move to inject life into town.

It's a new life that could start on the tracks.

Three restaurants attempted to run out of the old station building on Cooper Street. However, none of them have survived.

The second component sends a bus rapid transit vehicle from Philadelphia, over interstates 76 and 676 to New Jersey routes 42 and 55. The buses would travel on dedicated separate lanes on both highways on this side of the river.

The Route 42 line would stop at Route 168 and Camden County College, Cross-Keys Road in Winslow Township and eventually ending at Williamstown Road there.

Going down Route 55, stops would be included at Deptford Center Road and Delsea drive in the southern tip of Deptford Township.

A price tag for bus rapid transit comes in at about \$200 million.

Last on the list, and what Corzine sees as an overlooked part of the overall plan, is the rail service improvements on New Jersey Transit's Atlantic City Line. As part of that project, the Woodcrest station NJ Transit shares with PATCO will be expanded to become a major multimodal transportation hub.

It will also serve as a connection to Atlantic City International Airport.

"If we open that up appropriately, then the Atlantic City airport becomes a real alternative to Philadelphia (International Airport)," Corzine said.

Anthony DeSantis, president of the Delaware Valley Association of Rail Passengers, was surprised at the large scope of the projects announced Tuesday.

He's glad the route through Woodbury was the one ultimately chosen, but is concerned the use of diesel light rail trains doesn't allow for a one-seat trip to Philadelphia.

"Given the expense and the resources at hand, I think having something down here is a good thing either way," DeSantis said.

Another round of public hearings is being planned for next month to gain more public input on the projects as they move forward.

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