

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



FRANK HUTTLE III

**CITY HALL
ENGLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY 07631
(201) 871-6666**

February 21, 2012

Ms. Linda A. Mosch, P.E.
Project Director, Northern Branch Corridor EIS
Capital Planning & Programs
NJ TRANSIT
One Penn Plaza East
Newark, NJ 07105

Dear Ms. Mosch:

On behalf of the Englewood Economic Development Commission and my Office, this letter provides the City's official comments concerning the findings of the Northern Branch Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). This letter, which will be incorporated into a resolution of the City Council, elaborates upon our remarks at the NJ Transit public hearing held on January 26, 2012 in Englewood.

The City of Englewood supports restoration of passenger rail service through Englewood via the Northern Branch assuming resolution of concerns addressed below including but not limited to a modification of the Plan to preserve 128 critical on-street parking spaces in the Central Business District. Our support of light rail is expressly contingent upon this modification; we feel it is essential that restoration of passenger rail be sensitive to, and promote, the economic viability and growth of the City's CBD. Assuming a satisfactory resolution to our areas of concern, we believe that a properly planned light rail line through Englewood will enhance the residential, commercial and industrial sectors of our diverse community by providing convenient and reliable transportation links to and from employment and population centers in Hoboken, Jersey City and Manhattan.

The City additionally believes that it is critically important that the new light rail line include stops at Route 4, Englewood Town Center and Englewood Hospital. For this reason, we do not support NJ Transit's "Route 4 Option" that ends light rail service before reaching the heart of Englewood. We note our neighbor Tenafly's strong

opposition to the alternative “NJ Transit Preferred Option” that would have carried light rail further north, and out of deference to Tenafly’s concerns we support instead a new “Third Option” that would bring light rail only as far north as Englewood Hospital.

The City’s support for the Northern Branch project is contingent on NJ Transit addressing the detailed concerns which we have set out below in geographic order, from north to south:

Englewood Hospital Station

1. NJ Transit should increase the customer service area for the Hospital Station by providing safe pedestrian access to both sides of the Station from the Durie Avenue neighborhood to the west and the Hudson Avenue/Ivy Lane neighborhood to the north.
2. NJ Transit should facilitate the use of the Hospital Station by the hospital’s employees and visitors by providing a traffic signal on busy N. Dean Street to allow pedestrians (including those who are mobility-challenged) to cross from Englewood Hospital Station to the medical center.
3. NJ Transit should ensure public safety by fencing the train tracks behind the bordering Pindle Avenue homes, from Durie Avenue to W. Hamilton Avenue.
4. Representatives of Englewood Hospital and Medical Center have advised us that the Center plans to erect a new multi-use parking garage with parking spaces for both hospital and commuter users. (For further reference I have attached for your consideration a letter from Englewood Hospital and Medical Center to you dated today, February 21, 2012). NJ Transit should integrate this proposed multi-use garage into its light rail plan and make a capital contribution to cover a proportionate share of its total cost.

Englewood Town Center Station and Parking in the Central Business District

5. NJ Transit should improve passenger convenience and station visibility by relocating the proposed new Englewood Town Center Station to the northern side of Palisade Avenue – along Depot Square, between the Bergen Performing Arts Center (PAC) and the former rail station. This is the commercial and cultural heart of Englewood as well as the historic location of passenger rail service. This station stop is our much-preferred alternative to the W. Englewood Avenue station assumed in the DEIS.

The City understands that a downtown station north of Palisade Avenue may require a wider right-of way to accommodate dual-tracks in the vicinity of the passenger platform. The municipality owns property on either side of the current single track right-of-way and, depending on the availability of replacement parking spaces, may conceivably sell or trade this property to enable NJ Transit to provide a second track and boarding platforms at this location.

6. Light rail service into the Englewood Town Center should operate until 12:30 a.m. on nights when performances are scheduled, so that Bergen PAC patrons may take the light rail back to their homes. (A letter of support for light rail into Englewood from the Chairman of the Bergen PAC Board of Trustees is attached.) While we understand that the matter of extended hours of service may require negotiation with the Federal Railroad Administration, we note that the volume of freight trains running through this section of the Northern Branch has declined in recent years.
7. Englewood is already known as "a parking constrained town". The DEIS on page 9-35 states that 128 on-street parking spaces would be removed from the neighborhood of the Englewood Town Center Station not because they are needed to locate train stops, but as part of recommended "traffic mitigation" measures to improve traffic circulation in the general area. Most of these spaces are located directly in front of retail stores.

Loss of on-street parking spaces in the Central Business District is completely and utterly unacceptable to Englewood as it would decimate our CBD. Accordingly, NJ Transit must delete its plan to mitigate traffic through the removal of parking spaces and replace it instead with a synchronized traffic control system for the Palisade Avenue intersections at Engle Street, North Dean, and Van Brunt.

While we acknowledge that it may be necessary to remove some existing parking spaces that may physically conflict with the location of a train stop or needed right-of-way, NJ Transit should replace these spaces at its cost in specific locations acceptable to the municipality and the business community.

We note that a great deal of time and thought over the years has gone into promoting traffic calming in downtown Englewood as means of enhancing its reputation as a pedestrian-friendly retail and entertainment destination. However, the overall NJ Transit traffic mitigation plan proposed in the DEIS would reverse these efforts, turning Englewood from a "destination" to a "thoroughfare" and causing a complete and adverse change in the character of our downtown.

Englewood Route 4 Station & Vehicle Base Facility

8. The City supports construction of the "Preferred Option's" large commuter parking deck of 870 spaces at this location regardless of the rail line's terminal point. This will be a primary park and ride location for Englewood and out-of-town residents who wish to access the Northern Branch rail line. We further urge NJ Transit to collaborate with NJDOT in the design and implementation of a plan for improved access to the parking facility from Route 4 East.
9. Englewood strongly opposes construction of a Vehicle Base Facility (VBF) within its corporate limits. According to the "less preferable" Englewood VBF option found on page D-3 of the DEIS, the City would lose \$197,806 in annual property tax revenue from the proposed Englewood VBF facility (in addition to the loss of \$228,095 from the Route 4 parking deck footprint). On the other hand, if the VBF is located in North Bergen as provided in the DEIS "Preferred [North Bergen] Option", the revenue to Englewood from the VBF site would be restored, while the incremental loss to North Bergen would be only \$2,863.

Moreover, the alternate Englewood VBF would take land from four additional employers and impact 85 employees according to page 5-17 of the DEIS. This prime location is situated only minutes from the George Washington Bridge, and is targeted for major commercial and industrial re-development as part of the City's Master Plan currently under revision. During the last five years, millions of dollars have been invested in the City's public road network to prepare for this eventuality.

Access to Interstate 95

Given NJ Transit's close connection with its sister agency, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), we note that the City supports a new interchange of Interstate 95 in the vicinity of Grand Avenue to improve highway access to Englewood's industrial, commercial and residential areas as well as to the Englewood Route 4 Station.

* * *

It is critically important to Englewood that NJ Transit adequately address the nine (9) matters shown above in the DEIS in addition to providing the entire City with light rail service.

Englewood notes that we are about to commence a Master Plan revision which will specifically address light rail service. We plan to complete this work by the end of the calendar year. Input from this process should be helpful in finalizing planning for restoration of passenger rail service in the City.

We look forward to having an opportunity to meet and discuss these points with you as you had announced at the end of the first Englewood public hearing on the DEIS. As you stated, this should occur prior to preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Hutt III', written over a circular stamp or seal.

Frank Hutt III
Mayor

cc: Englewood City Council
Englewood Economic Development Commission
James Weinstein, Executive Director, NJ TRANSIT
Anthony G. Carr, Acting Administrator, USDOT - FTA Region II
Donald C. Burns, USDOT - FTA Region II
John C. Leon, Senior Director - Government & Community Relations, NJ TRANSIT

bergenPAC

Bergen Performing Arts Center

January 18, 2012

Mr. Charles Silberman
Englewood Economic Development Corp.
2-10 Van Brunt Street
Englewood, NJ 07631

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Endowment Campaign

Frank Huttie III
Founder

30 North Van Brunt Street
Englewood, New Jersey 07631
(201) 818-8160
www.bergenPAC.org

Dear Members of the EEDC,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Bergen Performing Arts Center, I am writing to express our strongest support of the light rail project currently under construction.

bergenPAC is the state's busiest performing arts center attracting over 250,000 people per year. Not only does this have a positive impact on local businesses regionally in terms of tourism revenue, but equally important, it keeps the disposable income in New Jersey that would otherwise be lost to New York City which is only a few miles away. The light rail will aid in more effectively bringing audiences to the venue in an environmentally friendly manner while lessening parking problems within the city on performance evenings.

The existence of the light rail will also aid in our mission to diversify audiences ethnically, regionally and economically. Key to our success is a policy where no one is turned away from programs due to an inability to pay. The light rail will create another cost effective solution to bringing not only audiences from diverse economic areas, but also bring children and families participating in arts education programs. bergenPAC operates one of the state's largest arts outreach programs both during the school day and for afterschool enrichment. The light rail will help to make these quality programs available to many who otherwise may not have the means or opportunity to attend due to transportation barriers.

The light rail also will help transport employees who find it difficult to accept positions at the venue due to a lack of options in mass transportation. This would help not only full time employees but also those who work at the venue on a show by show basis. bergenPAC serves as a home for recordings of live performances - having gained 12 Grammy awards in the past five years. Our ability to keep these recording projects in the state includes the transportation options available to production teams. The light rail will make us more competitive in the marketplace.

I welcome any questions regarding this letter and welcome any opportunity to advocate for this important project.

Many thanks for pursuing this option to enrich our community.

Sincerely,

Edmondo Schwartz
Chairman, Bergen Performing Arts Center

The next wave in the performing arts