

Letter to the Editor Bergen Record  
Saturday December 6, 2008.

### **New rail tunnel: region's 'Big Dig'?**

NJ Transit is currently in the final stages of planning and funding for the much-needed additional set of trans-Hudson rail tunnels. But due to a clear lack of vision on the part of the agency, we are on a path that will spend billions of tax dollars, take years to complete and not deliver what is truly needed for the northeastern United States. This will be our own version of Boston's misguided "Big Dig," which broke records on wasteful public spending.

The prior plan for the additional tunnels envisioned them connecting to Penn Station and a through connection to Grand Central Station; all four tunnels would have been shared with Amtrak. This configuration would have saved many commuters an arduous crosstown commute, added capacity and redundancy for Amtrak and created the much-vaunted one-seat ride to Midtown.

The changed Access to the Region's Core plan envisions the additional tunnels now dead-ending next to Macy's, with no linkage to Penn Station, Grand Central Terminal or Amtrak. This contradicts NJ Transit's original vision of the plan, which remained until June 2007, when suddenly without public explanation, it was changed.

The new plans now call for a "deep cavern" station 175 feet below Macy's, 140 feet below and 200 feet north of Penn Station. Think about that. The current timing from track to street is a few minutes, even during rush hour. Imagine how long that trip might take, not even calculating how long an emergency evacuation would take. And after the events in London, Madrid and now Mumbai, that is a critical calculation to make.

NJ Transit still refuses to release any of the publicly funded studies used to justify this change, nor has it released any revised ridership projections. This is outrageous on a project that will cost billions.

There is very definite need for additional capacity under the Hudson River to maintain our regional economic viability. But the current plan only focuses on NJ Transit's "private tunnel" and "deep-cavern" station. It will not be the agency's primary destination, as riders will be split between Penn Station in New York and the new station. This path seems to have been chosen solely to allow NJ Transit to build and manage its own set of tunnels and not have to share capacity. This is not the way to run a railroad.

I have written both of New Jersey's U.S. senators urging them not to support the project in its current form. I urge others to get involved as well.

Tom Browne

Emerson, Nov. 28