



RESTORING PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

BERKS COUNTY, CHESTER COUNTY, AND MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PA

In late 2019, the Berks Alliance, a leading community development organization contracted with Transportation Economics & Management Services (TEMS) to conduct a feasibility study for restoring passenger rail service between Berks County and Philadelphia. TEMS completed its study in the summer of 2020 with a positive outlook for the potential of this service. Berks County has taken the lead in working collectively with its Southeast PA neighbors on the critical next steps.

Key Findings:

- There is sufficient capacity along the corridor to absorb this passenger service without interfering with existing and even expanded freight transportation. Recent upgrades along the corridor would allow trains to move at speeds up to 79 mph - higher than earlier studies had indicated.
- Two types of service are being considered: Commuter service to Philadelphia and intercity service through Philadelphia to the Northeast Rail Corridor providing intercity service.
- Some form of dual energy locomotives will be required with non-fossil fuel options preferred.
- Agreement from Norfolk Southern for use of the corridor will be required.
- The TEMS plan proposes stops in Reading, Pottstown, Royersford, Phoenixville and four stops in Philadelphia. The potential exists for adding stops in Wyomissing, Birdsboro, and Valley Forge. Upgrades would be required at these stations and some upgrades along the corridor.
- The capital cost for restoring service is estimated to be \$356 million – substantially less than prior studies.
- The intercity model has the potential to operate without subsidy due to slightly higher fares.
- Restoration of passenger train service will create significant environmental and economic benefits along the corridor. It will reduce vehicle travel along the highway corridors by five percent, increase property values by over \$1.1 billion, create over 28,000 person years of jobs and dramatically increase tax revenues.

The tri-county collaboration includes the Phoenixville Mayor's Task Force which is working to restore passenger service to that community. Phoenixville is one of the stations identified along the proposed corridor. That plan has been focused on commuter service connecting to SEPTA.

Next Steps:

Creation of a Tri-County Passenger Rail Committee: Restoration of passenger rail service assumes the creation of a tri-county municipal authority to govern the rail service. The County Commissioners in Berks, Chester and Montgomery Counties have created a Tri-County committee to determine the next steps in the process which likely would lead to the formation of a Tr-County municipal authority.

Conversations with AMTRAK and Norfolk Southern: There have been several conversations with the leadership of SEPTA and conversations are underway with AMTRAK concerning their role in the new service. Once the municipal authority has been formed, negotiations with Norfolk-Southern will begin in earnest. Some funding has been identified to support the required freight capacity analysis.

Federal Funding: Conversations are underway with the U. S. Department of Transportation, focusing on the availability of FTA and FRA funding and the inclusion of funding for passenger rail projects such as this one in future federal legislation.

Inclusion in the State Rail Plan: To be eligible for federal support, projects must be included in the state plan as an active plan. PennDOT's 2020 plan includes identification of this study and listed it as a vision – a potential future project not in the active plan. Conversations with PennDOT are continuing and focused on how to include restoration of passenger rail service along the Reading to Philadelphia corridor and intercity service through Philadelphia to the Northeast Rail Corridor as an active project in the State Rail Plan.

Engagement with Elected Officials: Conversations are being held with local, state, and federal elected officials. Several state legislators have expressed support for the project as have several Congressmen and the offices of both U.S. Senators from Pennsylvania. Conversations have also occurred with the Governor's Office soliciting the Governor's support for the project.

A full copy of the Passenger Rail Feasibility Study can be found on the Berks Alliance website: www.BerksAlliance.org

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