

# WILL PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE RETURN TO LEONIA?

**\*\*\*\*\*NJ Transit presented information, maps and charts included in this bulletin on June 30, 2008 at the CLC Meeting in Englewood, NJ. The findings are discussed in this bulletin; the presentation board can be viewed on page 6.**

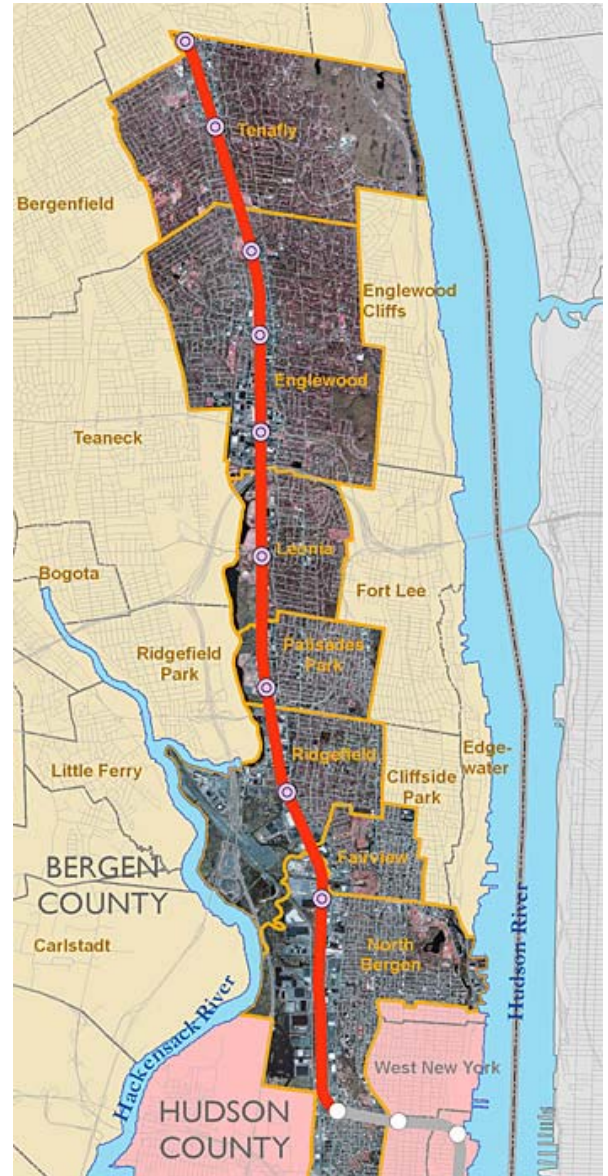
A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and is expected to be released for public comment in mid-2009 according to NJ Transit officials. This bulletin contains information prepared by NJ Transit about the project and potential impacts for our community. This project will have a significant impact on Leonia.

The Northern Branch Corridor Project seeks to restore passenger rail service on the existing Northern Branch rail corridor, which now serves only freight trains. Proposed service would run through North Bergen in Hudson County, and Fairview, Ridgefield, Palisades Park, Leonia, Englewood, and Tenafly in Bergen County.

There are two alternate service plans proposed and two alternate vehicle modes proposed - Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) and Electric Light Rail Vehicle (LRT). See page 3 for more information on vehicle alternatives. The NJ Transit plans include one station site in Leonia that is shown on the map on page 2.

The **Leonia Transportation Committee** has developed a communication plan to provide information to Leonia residents about the project and alternatives, and to initiate a community dialogue in order to assess the impact of the proposed project on our community and obtain feedback from residents. The information provided in this bulletin is the first step of our communication plan. During our community outreach phase of the communication plan, we hope to obtain a consensus from Leonia residents regarding the proposal to restore passenger rail service.

Leonia faces numerous challenges in 2009. This special bulletin spotlights the possibility of the restoration of passenger rail service on the railroad, which passes through Leonia. Passenger rail service would bring with it many potential benefits and burdens, which need to be addressed so that the impact of rail service would not create issues for our residents and business owners. *Your elected officials need to know what Leonia residents are thinking in terms of whether or not the restoration of passenger rail service should be encouraged. Issues such as traffic flow, parking, and noise need to be evaluated and addressed. We encourage Leonia residents to participate in the process and speak their mind. Now is the time to be heard!*



<http://www.northernbranchcorridor.com/>

## Learn More

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**Residents should submit their written comments to the Leonia Transportation Committee via email at [Leoniatransportation@gmail.com](mailto:Leoniatransportation@gmail.com).**



### Leonia Station Site



The NJ Transit plan includes one station in **Leonia** as shown on the above map. Go to [www.northernbranchcorridor.com/docs/cicjun08/Leonia.pdf](http://www.northernbranchcorridor.com/docs/cicjun08/Leonia.pdf) to view an enlarged version of the map and other information. As part of the rail line project, *New Jersey Transit is planning to pave significant portions of Overpeck Park in Leonia to build a 780-space regional commuter parking lot or multi-story parking garage.* This will necessarily result in increased traffic congestion to Fort Lee Road and surrounding areas. Without the establishment of federally-approved “quiet zones,” the rail line would also have a “severe” noise impact on large parts of Overpeck Park in Leonia, as well as on a large residential section of Leonia (noted by the large circle).

## Parkland, Recreational, and Section 4(f) Resources

Map #	Resource Name	Impact
<b>Alternatives 1, 1A (DMU), 2, and 2A (LRT)</b>		
1	Overpeck County Park: Leonia South Area	All Alternatives – Severe Noise Impact & Acquisition Impact – 4.1 acres required to construct Leonia Station.
2	Overpeck County Park: Henry Hoebie Area	
3	Leonia High School Fields	All Alternatives – Severe Noise Impact. No Safety Impact – Grade crossing protection would be installed to improve access between Leonia High School and the ballfields.
4	Station Park	All Alternatives – Severe Noise Impact
5	Sylvan Park	No Impact
6	Leonia Swim Club	No Impact

**Noise impacts to Overpeck Park and Leonia High School Fields would occur when rail vehicles sound their whistles at grade crossings. Access to the parks and use of the facilities will not be affected. Quiet zones are one mitigation method that would likely reduce this impact.**

**The 4.1 acres of Overpeck Park required for Leonia Station are located along the existing rail right-of-way and are not incorporated into active use areas of the park (the acreage is not part of fields or playgrounds). The conversion of this acreage will not affect access to the park or use of existing facilities. As such, the taking acts as a “de minimis” impact under the Section 4(f) regulations and is not considered a significant impact to the public park.**

## Vehicle Type and Destination

A decision on the type of vehicle has not been made yet. Both alternatives will involve construction of new transportation infrastructure including stations and yards.

The Northern Branch **DMU [Diesel] Alternative** would provide service to municipalities along the corridor between Leonia and North Bergen. To reach Manhattan would require a passenger to transfer twice: first in North Bergen to the HBLR, and second in either Weehawken or Hoboken to reach NYC; estimated travel time from Leonia to Hoboken **~37 min.** Diesel technology perpetuates reliance on fossil fuels with resultant air pollution, and requires short high-level platforms.

The **Electric Light Rail Alternative** would provide service from Leonia to Hoboken. To reach Manhattan would require one transfer, either in Weehawken or Hoboken, to reach NYC; estimated travel time from Leonia to Hoboken **~27 min.** This service will be time-separated from the freight operations—passenger service would operate between 5:30 a.m. and 10:30 p.m., while freight service would operate between 11:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. Electric technology does not utilize fossil fuels, and requires short low-level platforms.

## Noise



Refer to the map on page 2 for locations of “severe” noise impact areas indicated by the large circle delineating the area that will be impacted, according to NJT. In practical terms this means that for affected areas in Leonia during commuting hours, train whistles will sound at 12 to 15 minutes intervals during rush hours from 5:30 AM to 10:30 PM resulting in “severe” noise impacts with less severe impacts farther away from the station. Leonia has a right to apply to the Federal Railroad Agency to be designated a “Quiet Zone,” which would mitigate the noise impact. However, it is not assured that this would be granted, and, even if it is, Leonia would have to pay for the construction and maintenance of the necessary infrastructure. If “Quiet Zone” status is not granted, or if Leonia cannot afford its costs, significant noise impacts will negatively affect the quality of life in affected areas.

### Noise

The determination of noise impacts involves the analysis of decibel level (loudness) over time, relative to existing background noise. This analysis considered the service plans for the proposed DMU and LRT service combined with the noise from freight trains. The table below summarizes the number of pass-bys of each vehicle type during the day and at night. At each pass-by, a rail vehicle (DMU, LRT, or freight train) will sound its whistle at a grade crossing.

Pass-Bys: At and South of Route 4

Alternative	# of commuter trains		# of freight trains		Total Trains
	Day	Night	Day	Night	
Alt. 1 - DMU	80	14	2	0	96
Alt. 1A - DMU	80	14	2	0	96
Alt. 2 - LRT	296	26	0	2	324
Alt. 2A - LRT	296	26	0	2	324

-  **Wayside Noise Impact Area--** illustrates the greatest area affected by the noise made by passing rail vehicles (DMU, LRT, freight train)
-  **Grade Crossing Noise Impacts Area--** illustrates the greatest area affected by the noise made by LRT or DMU whistles and freight train whistles at grade crossings (each pass-by)

Quiet zones, which restrict the use of train whistles at grade crossings, are one method that can be applied to mitigate the anticipated noise impacts.






*Other Considerations in Leonía*


**In the opinion of NJ Transit:**

*Note: The “dots” in the “Community Facilities” box below correspond to the page 2 map.*

**Community Facilities**



No schools, libraries, or public medical facilities would be impacted by the proposed project. Grade crossings are not anticipated to adversely affect the operation of emergency service providers, including police  , fire  , and EMS  .

Leonía High School  is adjacent to the right of way. The whistle noise from the grade crossing at Fort Lee Road is not anticipated to affect the school. Enhanced pedestrian safety measures installed along with all Alternatives will provide added security for students using the ball fields in Overpeck Park.

**Property Acquisition and Tax Implications**

The construction of project elements, including Leonía Station and parking areas, will require the partial acquisition of 3 parcels. The parcels are owned by the County and are tax-exempt, resulting in no loss of tax revenue to the borough.

**Wetlands** 

Development of Leonía Station will impact approximately 0.5 acres of wetland. NJDEP will be consulted regarding mitigation, to be determined on a case-by-case basis, which may include mitigation on-site or off-site within the same watershed.

 **Hazardous Materials**

Potential hazardous material sites located within the right-of-way or near proposed station locations are identified. Site remediation, in accordance with State and Federal regulations would be required to use these sites. In areas where contamination is suspected, additional site reconnaissance, such as a Phase II study, will be conducted. During construction, health and safety plans developed pursuant to Federal regulations will protect construction personnel and the community from exposure to contaminated soil and water.

*Where can I find more detailed information about this project?*

Go to the NJ Transit website at [www.northernbranchcorridor.com/](http://www.northernbranchcorridor.com/)

# Traffic Level of Service and Mitigation



Intersection	No Build	Mitigation Methods	Alternative 1- DMU	Alternative 1A- DMU	Alternative 2- LRT	Alternative 2- LRT
Fort Lee Road/Park Drive/Overpeck Park Entrance	●	All Alternatives Traffic signal modifications. Alts. 2 and 2A: Provide left-turn lane on SB Park Entrance and right-turn lane on NB approach.	●	●	●	●
Fort Lee Road/Station Parkway/Willow Tree Road	●	All Alternatives Traffic signal modifications. Alts 1 and 1A: Provide right-turn lane on SB Willow Tree Road. Alts 2 and 2A: Right-turn lane on EB Fort Lee.	●	●	○	○
Grand Avenue/Fort Lee Road	●	All Alternatives Traffic signal modifications. Alts 2 and 2A: Restripe Fort Lee Road to allow additional through lane.	●	●	●	●

○ Very little delay      ○ Less delay than in the No Build condition      ● More delay than in the No Build condition  
 ◐ Noticeable delay      ● Same delay as in the No Build condition      ● Significantly more delay than in the No Build condition  
 ● Significant delay

The table presents the final, mitigated traffic level of service (LOS) anticipated under each of the four build scenarios. The LOS indicated above represents the functioning of roadway intersections. Grade crossings, indicated on the map with this symbol are not evaluated in terms of LOS. The impact of a grade crossing is measured in terms of the impact on the nearest roadway intersection. Where grade crossings affected the function of an intersection, mitigation measures, such as road widening, traffic signal timing adjustments, and lane reconfigurations were applied to relieve the anticipated traffic congestion.



# Leonia Station Site



## Traffic Level of Service and Mitigation

Intersection	No. of Lanes	Signalized	Signalized	Signalized	Signalized	Signalized
		1-1 PM	1-1 PM	3-5 PM	3-5 PM	3-5 PM
Palisades Park Station	2	●	●	●	●	●
Englewood Station	2	●	●	●	●	●
Leonia Station	2	●	●	●	●	●
Palisades Park Blvd	2	●	●	●	●	●
Englewood Ave	2	●	●	●	●	●
Palisades Park Blvd	2	●	●	●	●	●
Englewood Ave	2	●	●	●	●	●

The table presents the final, mitigated traffic level of service (LOS) anticipated under each of the four build scenarios. The LOS indicated above represents the functioning of roadway intersections. Grade crossings, indicated on the map with this symbol, are not evaluated in terms of LOS. The impact of a grade crossing is measured in terms of the impact on the nearest roadway intersection. Where grade crossings affected the function of an intersection, mitigation measures, such as road widening, traffic signal timing adjustments, and lane reconfigurations were applied to relieve the anticipated traffic congestion.

**Property Acquisition and Tax Implications**  
The construction of project elements, including Leonia Station and parking areas, will require the partial acquisition of 3 parcels. The parcels are owned by the County and are tax-exempt, resulting in no loss of tax revenue to the borough.

**Wetlands**  
Development of Leonia Station will impact approximately 0.5 acres of wetland. NJDEP will require a wetland mitigation plan, to be implemented on a case-by-case basis, which may include mitigation on-site or off-site within the same watershed.

## Parkland, Recreational, and Section 4(f) Resources

Resource Name	Location	Section 4(f) Status
Palisades Park	Palisades Park Blvd	Not Anticipated
Leonia High School	Leonia Ave	Not Anticipated
Overveck Park	Overveck Park	Not Anticipated
Leonia High School	Leonia Ave	Not Anticipated

The 4.1 acres of Overveck Park required for Leonia Station are located along the existing rail right-of-way and are not incorporated into active use areas of the park (the acreage is not part of fields or playgrounds). The conversion of this acreage will not affect access to the park or use of existing facilities. As such, the taking acts as a "de minimis" impact under the Section 4(f) regulations and is not considered a significant impact to the public park.

**Community Facilities**  
No schools, libraries, or public medical facilities would be impacted by the proposed project. Grade crossings are not anticipated to adversely affect the operation of emergency service providers, including police, fire, and EMS.  
Leonia High School is adjacent to the right of way. The whistle noise from the grade crossing at Fort Lee Road is not anticipated to affect the school. Enhanced pedestrian safety measures installed along with all Alternatives will provide added security for students using the ball fields in Overveck Park.

## Noise

The determination of noise impacts involves the analysis of decibel level (loudness) over time, relative to existing background noise. This analysis considered the service plans for the proposed DMU and LRT service combined with the noise from freight trains. The table below summarizes the number of pass-bys of each vehicle type during the day and at night. At each pass-by, a rail vehicle (DMU, LRT, or freight train) will sound its whistle at a grade crossing.

Pass-Bys: At and South of Route 4

Alternative	# of crossings/traffics			# of noise events		
	Day	Night	Total	Day	Night	Total
ALT 1 - DMU	201	14	215	0	0	0
ALT 2A - DMU	201	14	215	0	0	0
ALT 2B - LRT	201	14	215	0	0	0
ALT 2A + LRT	201	14	215	0	0	0

**Wayside Noise Impact Area** - illustrates the greatest area affected by the noise made by passing rail vehicles (DMU, LRT, freight train)  
**Grade Crossing Noise Impacts Area** - illustrates the greatest area affected by the noise made by LRT or DMU whistles and freight train whistles at grade crossings (each pass-by)  
Quiet zones, which restrict the use of train whistles at grade crossings, are one method that can be applied to mitigate the anticipated noise impacts.

**Hazardous Materials**  
Potential hazardous material sites located within the right-of-way or near proposed station locations are identified. Site remediation, in accordance with State and Federal regulations would be required to use these sites. In areas where contamination is suspected, additional site reconnaissance, such as a Phase I study, will be conducted. During construction, health and safety plans developed pursuant to Federal regulations will protect construction personnel and the community from exposure to contaminated soil and water.

Presented by NJ Transit at the Citizen Liaison Committee meeting on June 30, 2008, Englewood, NJ



## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

### ***What is the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process?***

The EIS process is mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). NEPA regulations govern the environmental review process for projects that may result in significant environmental impacts, to ensure that all significant issues are identified and the full range of alternatives and impacts of the proposed project are addressed. The EIS is part of a process that must be completed for a project to be eligible for federal capital funds. The EIS will identify significant environmental issues in the environmental review process, including thorough consultation with federal, state and local agencies and from public input.

### ***When will the Draft Environmental Impact Statement be available for public review? Will the public have a chance to comment on it?***

NJ Transit anticipates that the DEIS will be released in mid-2009 and the public will be advised via newspaper advertisements, and the **Leonia** website, of the locations where the public may review copies of the DEIS. Also, NJ Transit will conduct a public hearing to obtain public input on the DEIS. Check NJ Transit website for date, time, and location of public hearing.

### ***What is the estimated cost of the Northern Branch Corridor Project?***

The cost of the project will depend on the Alternate selected in the EIS process and will be discussed in the EIS.

### ***What alternatives will the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Consider?***

The range of preliminary alternatives identified in the Scoping Document include: Diesel Multiple Unit alternative, Electric Light Rail alternative, and a No Action alternative.

### ***What is the Northern Branch Corridor Project's relationship to the Tunnel Project?***

The Tunnel project involves the expansion of New York's Penn Station, a two-track tunnel under the Hudson River, and additional improvements that will allow NJ Transit to increase its rail capacity and improve service. A connection of the Northern Branch Corridor line to the Tunnel will necessitate a separate environmental process, as it will be a separate project in the future.

### ***How many times would I have to change trains to get to Manhattan?***

On a DMU service, a change to the Hudson Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) in North Bergen and a second change to either a ferry in Weehawken or PATH in Hoboken would be needed. A LRT system would eliminate the North Bergen transfer, but not the subsequent ferry or PATH connections.

### ***How many times would the train pass through Leonia?***

Peak hour service on a DMU system would have 15-minute headways, which would be four trains per hour per direction. Off peak DMU service has 30-minute headways or two trains per hour per direction. On an LRT system, peak service has 12-minute headways with five trains per hour per direction. Off peak LRT service has 24-minute headways or two trains per hour per direction.

### ***Leonia is a small town. Why are so many parking spaces needed?***

NJT ridership model seeks to increase its ridership by strategically locating parking in Overpeck Park located off highway exit Route 95 and Route 80. A large capacity parking facility can be expected to have significant traffic impacts to Fort Lee Road during commuting hours, and would thereby adversely affect the flow of traffic within Leonia.

### ***Who (which government agency) makes the final decision on the project?***

NJ Transit determines the modes and terminus, which is carried forward into the Final EIS. The FTA will approve a Final EIS and Issue a record of decision (ROD). The ROD memorializes the FTA's satisfaction that the NEPA process has been successfully conducted and details the conditions under which the project is approved.

### ***If this project is approved, when will construction start?***

After the ROD has been received, NJ Transit can begin Final Engineering, which could take as long as two years to complete. However, some aspects of construction could start during that period, such as utility relocations.

## *Glossary of Terms*

**Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU):** A self-propelled, diesel-powered passenger rail car. In 2002, the first DMU designed and approved by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) that meets the latest FRA standards to operate in mixed freight traffic was introduced by the Colorado Railcar Manufacturing Company.

**Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS):** The draft version of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that documents the potential social, economic and environmental effects of a proposed project or action and alternatives to it. It is released to the public and agencies for review and comment.

**Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):** The report that is required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which documents the potential social, economic, and environmental effects of a proposed project or action, and alternatives to it.

**Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS):** The environmental document prepared following the close of the comment period for the Draft EIS (DEIS). The FEIS incorporates changes to the project analysis, and reflects pertinent agency and public comments on the DEIS. The FEIS, if not done previously, also identifies the alternative selected for the project.

**HBLR:** Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line which connects the towns of Bayonne, Jersey City, Hoboken, Weehawken, Union City, and North Bergen.

**Headways:** Time between trains on the same route.

**Light Rail Transit (LRT):** A self-propelled vehicle operated on predominantly reserved, but not necessarily grade-separated, rights-of-way. Compared to heavy (commuter) rail transit, LRT is characterized by smaller trains, shorter headways (time between trains on the same route), slower speeds, more frequent stops, and the possibility to operate in mixed traffic on surface streets. Light rail vehicles do not meet federal safety requirements to operate in mixed freight environments. Examples in New Jersey include the electric-powered Hudson-Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) and Newark Light Rail and the diesel-powered River Line between Trenton and Camden.

**Mitigation:** Planning of project design and/or construction to avoid or overcome adverse impacts.

**Northern Branch:** A lightly used freight rail line owned by CSX Transportation that runs through the Hudson and Bergen County communities of North Bergen, Fairview, Ridgefield, Palisades Park, Leonia, Englewood, Leonia, Cresskill, Demarest, Closter, Norwood and Northvale.

**Northern Branch Corridor:** The area through which the Northern Branch rail line traverses. The Corridor is a densely settled suburban environment that has not been served by passenger rail since the 1960s.

**Quiet Zone:** Rail crossings that have special controls (gates, lights and other supplementary safety measures) where the sounding of train horns or other audible warning devices are not required when trains are crossing. The Federal Railroad Administration establishes crossing control requirements and Quiet Zone designations and has final jurisdiction over Quiet Zone applications.

**Scoping:** A step in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process that provides an opportunity for members of the general public, stakeholders, and others to comment on the purpose and need of a proposed project/action, the types of alternatives to be considered, and to provide input on the issues and concerns that should be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

**Wayside:** A section of track, next to the main track, where a train can park or stand allowing another train to pass using the main track.

**Decisions made today will impact Leonia for years to come. We need to know your opinion on this most important matter. Please email us:**  
**[Leoniatrtransportation@gmail.com](mailto:Leoniatrtransportation@gmail.com)**

The Leonia Transportation Committee: Adrienne Albanese / Matthew Brennan / Frank Livelli, MD / Barbara Marchant / Vanessa Marks