

The New Jersey Sierra Club as part of its Green Transit initiatives strongly supports increased safe bicycle Paths and pedestrian access and has long supported the Northern Valley Greenway in Bergen County. However it is critical that such bicycle /pedestrian Paths along abandoned Rail Rights of Way partner with and actively preserve the space for Rail restoration in the future.

From a rail transportation perspective, Bergen County is among the most poorly served counties in New Jersey. Finally, thanks to the preservation of the Rail Right of Way, the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail is being extended to Englewood. This extension would have been far more costly and probably impossible if the Rail Right of Way was exclusively dedicated as a bicycle and pedestrian.

Plans by NJ DOT and NJ Transit since 2002 have included extending this Light Rail Line past Englewood and all the way to NY State, following the path of passenger rail service that was shut down in the 1960's.

Preserving Rail Rights of Way along the proposed bicycle path for future Light Rail to NY State would actually be a major advantage to bicyclists as well as Green Transit Light Rail riders.

Imagine taking your bicycle on the Light Rail to NY State and then riding back. Or riding your bicycle to NY State or any Light Rail stations and then being able to take the Light Rail back if you are tired or did not make it as far as you planned. Bicycles and Rail are perfect partners and can really work well together. Since Rail takes 10x less land than vehicular lanes, even 2 tracks can use less land than a single suburban 30 foot wide street, easily allowing room for a parallel bicycle/pedestrian Path.

The combination of bicycle and Rails can allow auto free access to points within 3 1/2 miles of Rail stations. For example, instead of ironically having to drive through suburban roads to commuter rail station parking lots, commuters could bike to a commuter rail station along the bike path. Recreational bikers would be able to reverse commute, taking the rail line to biking and hiking paths in lower New York State, for instance.

NJ Sierra Club noted with interest on the Northern Valley Greenway website an artist's depiction of what the trail would look like. Down the

center of the trail is green space with concrete free-standing barriers. NJ Sierra Club proposes that instead, that a light rail line separate the north and south bound trails. NJ Sierra Club has consistently maintained that both “rail” and “trail” can peacefully coexist with proper separation. One shining example of this is the Morris Traction Trail in Morris County between Madison and Morristown. Since the creation of the Traction Trail over twenty five years ago, there have been zero incidents involving pedestrians and rail. If it has been done in Morris County, elsewhere in New Jersey, and elsewhere in the U.S., there is no reason why it couldn’t be replicated in Bergen County.

Automobile use is the single largest source of greenhouse emissions in New Jersey, and as NJ Transit has suffered major cuts and lack of support, auto pollution continues to increase. Restoration of rail service along the entire length of the Northern Valley Greenway can entice North Bergen residents to leave their cars home and ride public transit when commuting to work, when traveling between towns to shop or eat at restaurants, or to stroll, hike, or bike along the trail. This can substantially reduce the release of auto related green house gases which contribute to global warming and climate change.

An argument used by the Northern Valley Greenway group is the increase in economic activity in the towns served by the recreational trail. However, this economic impact would be magnified by many factors if the Greenway were combined with a light rail system. With the extension of HBLRT to the New York State border, economic opportunities open up for each community served in ADDITION to the economic activity of the trail.

Since the HBLR and the Greenway were first proposed over a decade ago, the reality of climate change and the public’s perception of the automobile as the primary choice for mobility has undergone a major shift. Young families now want to live and work in walkable communities with transit, and car ownership in this age group is declining. At the same time, awareness of the impact that auto pollution has on the environment has grown, as has greater acceptance of public transit and ride share options. It would be foolish to make design now that would preclude rail service along this corridor in the future.

NJ Sierra Club calls on the municipalities along this right of way, NJDOT and the NJTPA to consider saving part of their past which could become Bergen County's transit solution of the future. This could be accomplished by keeping the rail "right-of-way" open to allow for light rail service at some point in the future. We would ask that the "Greenway" be developed immediately adjacent to both sides of the rail "right-of-way" so the "Greenway" can fulfill the dual purpose of providing future rail service for Bergen County and accommodate the ongoing recreational needs of the residents of Bergen County.