

RAILGRAM

Cuomo Saves the “L” Train, And That May Make a Difference Here, Too

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

Everybody was dreading it. Some people even moved or quit their jobs to avoid it. It was the impending 15-month shutdown of service on New York City’s “L” train under 14th Street and through the Canarsie Tunnels to Brooklyn, scheduled to begin on April 26. Hurricane Sandy had flooded the tunnels in 2012, and repairs had to be made. It was called “L-mageddon” and the “L-pocalypse” and even “L-Hell”; but circumstances changed and the headline in the Daily News on January 4 read: “L-YEAH!” The shutdown itself was shut down, after Gov. Andrew Cuomo took a step that many of us take when we get a report that we do not like from a doctor. We get a second opinion.

Second opinions are not limited to the medical profession. Cuomo got his from engineers who were not part of the powerful “Industrial Infrastructure Complex” of firms that rule the profession and often combine forces to bid jointly on a major project, in the true fashion of a cartel. The engineers he consulted were the deans and other senior engineering faculty at Columbia and Cornell Universities, who owe their loyalty to the universities that employ them, and not to the huge consulting firms.

The original plan was to remove the bench walls inside the tunnels completely and rebuild them for the entire length of both tubes. Instead, the Cornell and Columbia engineers recommended keeping the bench walls intact where possible, removing only the damaged portions and replacing them with a walkway, waterproofing and sealing the walkways and remaining bench walls with state-of-the-art material, and abandoning the original cables. There will still be some service reductions, but both tubes will operate most of the time, and there will be single-track operation on weeknights and weekends. That will mean much less disruption than local residents would have suffered under the original plan, along with a lower cost.

Cuomo’s decision is revolutionary, and it could make a difference to planning and implementing transit projects everywhere, including the Gateway Project here. Part of Gateway is the Hudson Tunnel Project, which calls for building two new tunnels before the making any effort to repair the existing North River Tunnels. Amtrak owns the existing tunnels between New Jersey and Penn Station, New York and says that they must be repaired due to flooding from Hurricane Sandy in 2012, but there would be no effort to begin such repairs before new tunnels are completed. Despite this, the Gateway people allege that the original tunnels could fail, which would cause a catastrophe for the entire region.

We have reason to believe that the extent of the damage in the existing tunnels is similar to that in the Canarsie Tunnels. If that is true, it is possible that the Columbia/Cornell plan could be used to repair those tunnels, too. In that event, it would be possible to repair the tunnels without the threat of failure or time-pressure to spend billions of dollars for little additional benefit. We urge the “powers that be” to get a “second opinion” like Gov. Cuomo did. It could be good for the health of hundreds of thousands of NJ Transit and Amtrak riders.

For more-detailed coverage, see the author’s extensive article in Railway Age. It was published on January 24 under the title “NYCT Canarsie Tunnel Shutdown Reversal May Produce Ripple Effects” and can be found on their website, www.railwayage.com.

Atlantic City and Princeton Are Getting Their Trains Back, But NJT Won’t Talk About Ours Yet

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

Almost every rail line in New Jersey lost service last year. The Atlantic City Rail Line (ACRL) and the “Dinky” between Princeton Junction and Princeton have been completely shut down since Labor Day, but riders on those lines got some good news on Wednesday, Feb. 27. At a hearing in Cherry Hill about the loss and possible restoration of the ACRL, it was announced that the Dinky and the Atlantic City trains would return on Friday, May 24; just in time for the Memorial Day weekend.

The announcement did not mention any other lines, and riders on those lines are still waiting to get their trains back. There are no Gladstone trains on weekends. NJ Transit is providing buses to substitute for those trains, but they did not run during a three-weekday shutdown in late February, due to a downed tree. Other places have lost trains, but there are no substitute buses to pick up riders who would be stranded otherwise. The one exception is a bus we convinced NJT to hire; it leaves Dover on the schedule of the old train #684, the last inbound train west of Summit on the M&E. There are no “one-seat-ride” trains to Penn Station, New York on the Raritan Valley Line, either. Other lines, including the Morris & Essex and Montclair-Boonton Lines, have lost specific trains; losses that have left long gaps in schedules, which were not adjusted to mitigate those gaps.

These service cuts were purportedly made to facilitate installation of the Positive Train Control (PTC) system, which is required by law as an unfunded mandate. NJ Transit made the deadline imposed by the Federal Railroad Administration for the end of 2018, and they deserve credit for doing so. They now have until the end of 2020 to complete the job.

Still, the original deadline for all of our trains to come back was Jan. 1. Then it was pushed back to Jan. 31. Then, in mid-December, it was pushed back to mid-March. Finally, on Jan. 25, we were told it would be the “second quarter” and we interpret that as the last day of the quarter, June 30.

(Newsletter continues on reverse)

HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Come to a Lackawanna Coalition meeting!

Fourth Monday of the month (except holidays), 6:45 p.m., Millburn Town Hall. Next meetings: March 25 and April 22.

Atlantic City and Princeton Trains *(continued from reverse)*

We are happy for the riders to the south, who will be able to celebrate Memorial Day with a train ride. Otherwise, we are deeply concerned, because not a single train has returned to the rails anywhere else. We fear that management could simply keep those trains off the schedule, never bring them back, and expect that nobody would be the wiser. We are telling management, and we are telling you, our constituents, that WE will be the wiser. We will not accept this loss of service on a permanent basis, and we urge you to join us in our campaign to get our trains back; the sooner, the better.

Report From The Chair

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**, Chair

In theory, riders can take their grievances (and compliments, if they have any) to the NJ Transit Board of Directors and make a five-minute statement. They meet once a month, and the Legislature has been pushing them to hold more of their meetings in the evening. They have been doing that lately.

Representatives of the Lackawanna Coalition often show up to make statements. A lot of other people have been doing that recently, too. Russell Graddy ("Mr. G.") is a senior who operates a diner in Paterson and claims that NJT mistreated him on a business deal because of his color. He and his followers appear every month to call for "justice" for him. Former rail riders from South Jersey have been advocating vigorously to get their trains back, and came to Newark to make their case (and NJT now says they will get their trains back in time for Memorial Day). So have elected officials on the Raritan Line and Coalition members on the M&E. A man from South Orange complained about an alleged bias crime, and this writer offered to help as a State-certified mediator, free of charge, to help settle any disputes that might get in the way of all of us getting our trains back.

The result from the entire Board, in every case, was STONY, CONTEMPUOUS SILENCE! Maybe the Board members are required to sit while we air our concerns, but they have demonstrated that they do not listen to us or even care what we say. They may be within their rights, because the statute does not require them to care what we say, or even pay attention to us.

Several years ago, during the Christie era, James S. Simpson was Transportation Commissioner and NJT Board Chair. Advocate Albert L. Papp appeared before the Board and reported a deplorable state of disrepair in the restrooms at Penn Station, New York. Simpson swung into action and dispatched a repair crew to the scene without delay.

It is truly sad that the persons who govern our transit today sit in silence through reports of crime and injustice, along with passionate pleas by riders for the mobility they/we deserve, appearing not to care about any of those aggrieved persons, when their predecessor from the other political party showed enough interest in the rest rooms at Penn Station to waste no time in getting them repaired.

Coalition Celebrates 40th Anniversary!

By **SALLY JANE GELLERT**

On April 22, at our regular meeting, the Lackawanna Coalition will celebrate another milestone in its history of advocacy by and for New Jersey rail passengers — 40 years!

In 1979, Jimmy Carter was president. In January of that year, among other events, the United States and China began diplomatic relations, the Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran after 15 years of exile, and Patricia Hearst was released from prison for bank robbery.

In April, the People's Republic of China joined the IOC, *All in the Family* ended its 204-episode run, and Idi Amin fled Uganda when the capital was captured by the Tanzanian army. Here at home in New Jersey, the Margaret Hague Maternity Hospital in Jersey City closed, the State Theater in New Brunswick was acquired by DevCo and returned to live performances, and, what is relevant to us, commuting was horrendous! Public Service wanted out of the bus business, the three-year-old Conrail was running commuter rail under contract with the Department of Transportation, and commuters were generally unhappy.

In Millburn, a group of seven of these dissatisfied commuters formed an organization with the stated purpose to (1) *promote improvements in all aspects of rail passenger service*, (2) *promote safety in passenger rail service*, and (3) *expedite the re-electrification project*.

They were supported by Millburn mayor Maureen Ogden, who found them meeting space in the Town Hall conference room, with the first meeting on April 9, 1979. Thus was born what became the Lackawanna Coalition, which today still meets monthly in that very room. The first chairperson was Sidney L. Palius, an AT&T engineer, who remained an active member until 2006. Current chair David Peter Alan has served in his capacity since 2000, almost half of the Coalition's existence.

New Jersey Transit was founded later in 1979, and the Lackawanna Coalition's original focus was advocating for rail riders during the reorganization of the state's transit system and the re-electrification of the Morris & Essex (M&E), Montclair and Gladstone Lines. The Coalition has continued to advocate for the rail-riding community during that project, completed in 1984; the 1996 start of Midtown Direct service to Penn Station, New York; the Montclair connection, which opened in 2002; and the ups and downs of 1995-2010 ARC project and its current successor, the expansive Gateway project. We advocated for a smaller ARC and today do the same with Gateway — we want a smaller project that can actually be built, rather than pie-in-the-sky visions that remain unaffordable.

The Coalition worked with Morris County in encouraging the N.J. Department of Transportation to purchase the former Lackawanna Cutoff, which was expected to have service to Secaucus by 2004 and ultimately run to Scranton. We recently had a presentation about this stalled project at a regular monthly meeting, and look forward to working for the completion of an alternative to long automobile commutes for many when this is finally complete. Recently, we have been frustrated by a lack of transparency from NJ Transit, but hope to continue to serve New Jersey rail riders for many years to come!

Railgram

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Coming Attractions for Meeting Presentations

We have some exciting events coming up at the Coalition. On March 25, member Joseph M. Clift will continue his presentation on Gateway, focusing on the flaws in the Portal Bridge plan. On April 22, our meeting will be a very special event, as we celebrate our 40th anniversary. We urge you to come and celebrate with us! Our presenter for May (we will meet on the 20th) will be William C. Vantuono, Editor-in-Chief of *Railway Age* Magazine, who will give us his perspective on national and local rail issues. Chair David Peter Alan will present a mid-year report on June 24. We meet at Millburn Town Hall at 6:45 pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month, and we look forward to seeing you!