

From: JohnPawson Pawson <dvrails@yahoo.com>

Subject: Better than Parking Garages: Improve Parking and Train Service All Around

To: "RCC" <rcc_transportation@yahoogroups.com>, "DVARP" <core@dvarp.org>, "SEPTA Citizen Advisory Committee" <septacac@comcast.net>

Cc: "Candace Snyder" <csnyder@dvrpc.org>, "Jane Meconi" <jmeconi@dvrpc.org>, "Joseph Hacker" <jhacker@dvrpc.org>, cheltenhamchamberofcitizens@gmail.com

Date: Wednesday, May 12, 2010, 10:02 AM

The Cheltenham Chamber of Citizens has done northern suburbanites a favor by opposing the construction of an aerial garage at Jenkintown-Wyncote train station. They have shown us that concentration of commuters and parking to "magnet" locations with energy-intensive parking garages is neither cost-effective nor environmentally responsible. It would increase energy use and vehicle miles traveled and reduce passenger miles on public transportation.

While some commuters may be persuaded to live within walking distance of a station, many will need to drive there. This drive should be as short as possible; so passengers should get on a train as close to home as possible. Incremental amounts of new parking and added train service should be added inexpensively and environmentally responsibly where and when needed.

There are a number of important factors in optimizing the existing train services to attract passengers at "home" stations:

- (1) Parking at each station should be kept adequate to the demands of its natural catchment area.

- (2) Numbers of trains during the 2-1/2-hour traffic peaks (6:30-9 am inbound and 3:30-6 pm outbound) should be at least five in order to meet SEPTA's Service Standards which call for peak service at least every 30 minutes at all stations,

- (3) The stopping times should be spread evenly with minimum spread occurring at the demand peak.

(4) Because inner stations and their catchment areas are the easiest places to begin a drive to center city, consideration should be given to somewhat more frequent stops there.

(5) The few persons who transfer among the three rail lines need a common transfer point. Fern Rock Transportation Center best meets that need because it also is the terminus of SEPTA's Broad Street subway line. Most trains should stop there.

These principles need to be better observed in practice on the Doylestown, Warminster, and West Trenton rail lines. The 40 stations of the northern three rail lines may be geographically divided into 11 groups. Given first below are the number of inbound morning peak trains now stopping at each station or group of stations. Next are the ranges of intervals between trains (measured at Suburban Station), which can be seen to vary widely. An asterisk indicates an interval which exceeds the Service Standards.

(1) Fern Rock Transportation Center: 13 station stops, intervals vary.

(2) Melrose Park: 8 stops, intervals 15-31* minutes.

(3) Elkins Park: 7 stops, 15-31* minutes.

(4) Jenkintown: 14 stops, 3-22 minutes.

(5) Glenside: 14 stops, 3-25 minutes.

(6) North Hills, Oreland, Penllyn: 5 stops, 27-30 minutes.

(7) Six other stations Fort Washington-Lansdale: 7 stops, 10-30 minutes.

(8) Seven stations beyond Lansdale to Doylestown: 4 stops, 26-83* minutes (the last is at the end of the morning peak).

(9) Six stations on the branch to Warminster: 5 stops, 28-35* minutes (only one of the intervals is less than 30 minutes).

(10) Noble, Rydal, Meadowbrook on line to West Trenton: 5 stops, 18-42* minutes.

(11) Other stations of West Trenton branch: 8 stops, 11-23 minutes.

Similar data can be found for the 2-1/2-hour 4-6:30 pm afternoon peak, leading to similar issues.

Areas around the nearby low-service stations generate most of the non-neighborhood patrons who drive to Jenkintown and Glenside stations, according to Jenkintown-Wyncote Station Region Commuter Preferences and Parking Needs Study.

A total of about 398 persons drive from other neighborhoods to the two stations, dividing approximately as follows:

(1) Among some 61 from the inner Lansdale line, 30 live near North Hills and 4 near Oreland. These could easily be accommodated in existing spaces.

(2) Among some 134 from the Warminster line, 23 live near Ardsley, 35 near Roslyn, 40 near Willow Grove, and 22 near Warminster. Sufficient vacant spaces and SEPTA-owned or other vacant land exists among these locations to accommodate present and future parking demand.

(3) Among some 90 from the inner West Trenton line, 23 live near Noble, 41 near Rydal or Meadowbrook, and 14 near Bethayres. Here, too, more-than-sufficient paved or unpaved space exists near the stations.

(4) About 30 drive outward from Elkins Park or Melrose Park. Sufficient unused parking spaces exist at Melrose Park to serve these patrons.

(5) About 51 live near the outer stations of the Chestnut Hill East line, with many unused spaces, including SEPTA-owned space for 120 cars at Chestnut Hill East itself.

(6) About 35 live near the Fox Chase line, which has more-than-sufficient parking potential around its last three stations.

The above-cited report states (page 12) that "(a)lterations in service, if feasible, could dramatically shift patron commuting choices". The initiatives that are needed to equalize and improve services to the 40 stations are relatively simple and quickly implemented:

(1) Add stops at North Hills, Oreland, Penllyn, Noble, Rydal, and Meadowbrook to the trains which now bypass them. While the current "EXPRESS" label on the timetables may impress the new commuter, the reality is that these trains often bog down behind stopping trains in the express areas, reducing the advantage of long non-stop runs.

(2) Emphasize Fern Rock as a regional transportation center by scheduling more trains to stop there.

(3) Provide 8 quality-spaced stops (about three per hour) at inner stations Melrose Park and Elkins Park.

(4) Make the number of peak-period stops at Jenkintown the same as the off-peak frequency, approximately every 15 minutes, or 10 peak-period stops in total.

(5) Similarly, schedule 10 peak stops at Glenside.

(6) Insert one train each on the Doylestown and Warminster branches to meet the 30-minute Service Standards requirement.

(7) As part of the rescheduling process and insofar as possible, make intervals more even.

(8) Spruce up parking areas, remove vegetation, etc. at stations where more parking is expected. At just the six stations now bypassed, over a hundred excess parking spaces now exist or can be quickly provided on SEPTA property.

(9) Make appropriate, right-sized expenditures to support more frequencies on single-track segments, provide more overnight train storage space, and further expand parking. For instance, the hazardous right of way of Old Valley Road through the present Meadowbrook parking lot should be vacated, turned over to SEPTA, and reconfigured to add more parking spaces. In another example, excess property of PECO at Warminster can be converted to parking use to benefit PECO's best customer for electricity, SEPTA.

There is no reason why the easier of these changes could not get under way very shortly, to be in effect within months. The uncertainties of capital funding make it even more urgent to begin operational reforms and minor capital investments at once.

John Pawson

dvrails@yahoo.com