

Remove SEPTA Garage from Comprehensive Plan

Ten years ago train riders boarding at Jenkintown-Wyncote Station (J-W) were asked, “If additional SEPTA parking spaces were provided at Jenkintown and Glenside, at which station would you park?” Amazingly, to this day, SEPTA still calls that a “Parking Demand Study.” In 2005 the same 2000 “Parking Study” “data” was rehashed, and the result was a recommendation for a big new parking garage at J-W Station. Today, a SEPTA website (www.septa.org/construction/jenk-park.html) states, “Cheltenham Township and Jenkintown Borough underscore the importance of the Parking Demand Study by adding its findings and recommendations to their respective comprehensive town plans.”

Indeed, page 79 of the Cheltenham Township Comprehensive Plan dated February 2005 includes a statement that our stations were built, “at the beginning of the century when residents would walk to the station or were driven to the station when there was no need for parking.” And, “...a garage will be built at the Wyncote-Jenkintown station.” In fact, in the present year of 2010, two of every three local area train riders boarding at J-W, are dropped off or walk or bike to the station. Truly, the past is prologue as the age of cheap energy and “happy motoring” comes to an end, and the need for increased commuter rail service to the outer suburbs becomes more obvious. The Cheltenham Township commissioners should remove the parking garage from The Township Comprehensive Plan.

In public meetings and “workshops” during April and May of 2009 SEPTA management and their consultants admitted that the 2000 and 2005 Parking Demand Studies were biased, leading and improper. SEPTA management and consultants agreed with residents of both Cheltenham Township and Jenkintown that a new rider survey needed to be designed and administered in order to gain meaningful data pertaining to the need for a parking garage. Residents ask why SEPTA management and websites continue to refer to the 2000 and 2005 Parking Studies as a foundation for the need for the parking garage.

Residents that are survey experts volunteered, and helped to design a new rider survey and were promised access and input to the subsequent analysis procedure. After the new rider survey was conducted in May 2009, nearly all communication ended from SEPTA management to the residents. Instead of being able to participate in the analysis of the data, or receiving data sets that the resident experts could easily analyze, SEPTA management waited until late August to provide simple scanned pdf copies of more than 1500 rider survey forms and a few spreadsheets that were of very little use.

Undeterred, the residents went to work. 76.5% of the parkers at J-W by-pass every station that is closer to their home. 97% of those parkers stated that a lack of service at their home station was an important or extremely important reason why they did not use their home station. 74% of those parkers stated that a lack of parking at their home station was an important or extremely important reason for them by-passing their home station. 57% of those parkers are driving three or more miles each way. In simple terms; 403 of the 527 parking spaces at J-W are used by people that would likely use their home

stations, reduce rush hour traffic and GHG emissions, save time and money, and enjoy a better quality of life, if SEPTA planners can find a way to increase service and parking at the outer stations. The new survey results clearly show what the real problems are, and that a parking garage at J-W is not the solution.

SEPTA management finally gave a copy of their draft report of their analysis to the residents on December 23, 2009. Their Executive Summary ignores the obvious and makes convoluted arguments for a parking garage at J-W based mostly on walkers and drop-offs wanting to park, and future population growth in the far suburbs. SEPTA management knows that some parkers are driving from as far away as Doylestown and beyond to park at J-W. The residents are asking how Cheltenham Township and the region benefit from encouraging hundreds of more people to drive to and park in a garage built here. The residents are asking why the \$52.7M of their taxes is not being used to expand regional rail service.

The SEPTA draft report of their analysis as well as the SEPTA and resident presentations of January 13, 2010 can be reviewed at the Cheltenham Township and Cheltenham Chamber of Citizens websites.

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