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Letter: Need for additional parking in doubt

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To the editor:

At its monthly meeting on the afternoon of Thursday, Sept. 24, the board of directors of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority authorized the acquisition of a parcel of land adjacent to Philmont Station, on the R3 West Trenton Line.

The board's decision to authorize the acquisition of this parcel follows its decision this past summer to authorize the acquisition of another parcel of land adjacent to Philmont Station. Together, these acquisitions will permit the addition of approximately 130 parking spaces to the station's existing complement of 409.

Significantly, these acquisitions cast doubt upon SEPTA's claims that it urgently needs to construct multilevel parking garages at both Glenside and Jenkintown stations. At the present time, the limited service and inadequate parking at outlying stations on the R2, R3, and R5 lines encourage large numbers of passengers to bypass their local stations in favor of Glenside and Jenkintown stations, neither of which was ever intended to serve as a regional transportation center.

Greatly aggravating this situation is the continuing shutdown of service on the R8 Line between Fox Chase and Newtown. This continuing shutdown of service has obliged virtually all of the passengers who would otherwise board at points north of Fox Chase to compete for the limited number of parking spaces available at outlying stations on the R2 and R3 Lines.

We can reasonably expect, therefore, that if pursued in conjunction with the reactivation of service on the R8 Line between Fox Chase and Newtown, the continued expansion of parking facilities at stations north of Glenside and Jenkintown will eliminate altogether the need for constructing a pair of multilevel parking garages here in Cheltenham Township. The continued expansion of parking facilities at these outlying stations will, of necessity, also take place in conjunction with judicious increases in service on the R2, R3, and R5 lines.

It is instructive to note that according to the results of a survey conducted by SEPTA on May 19 and 20, 52 percent of the passengers boarding at Jenkintown station bypass their local stations. Of the 48 percent of the passengers who themselves dwell in Jenkintown or Wyncote — the two communities served by the station — two out of every three walk to the station, or a friend or a relative drops them there.

In other words, more than 80 percent of the cars parked every day at Jenkintown station belong to passengers who for one reason or another are unable or unwilling to board at their local stations. It is likely that a survey of passengers boarding at Glenside station would produce comparable results.

SEPTA's proposal for constructing an oversized parking garage at Jenkintown as well as at Glenside station will perpetuate this situation in lieu of correcting it. Both of these projects, if authorized, will increase rather than decrease the number of vehicle miles traveled throughout the region. Both are an abuse of the purposes for which public transit funds are intended — namely the construction of facilities which strengthen the use of public transit rather than undermine it.

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