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Coalition makes a pitch to restore R8 line

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Wrightstown

While SEPTA officials say they will likely never resurrect the R8 Newtown rail line, several advocates gave a presentation Monday that pleased the Wrightstown supervisors.

After hearing from Jon Frey and Paul Iverson from the Pennsylvania Transit Expansion Coalition, the supervisors agreed to possibly adopt a resolution supporting the plan at its next meeting.

Specifically, Iverson told the board the coalition projects there would be 3,500 potential riders who would use the R8 line, should it be rebuilt, at an estimated cost of \$300 million.

SEPTA shut down the R8 line in 1983, due to low ridership, SEPTA's Richard Maloney has said.

But Iverson and Frey argue there has been a population explosion since in areas like Newtown Township, Warminster, Southampton and other areas.

One look at the Newtown Bypass at rush hour, and you'll likely want to take a train. Statistics show between 28,000 and 36,000 vehicles use the road daily.

The coalition claims if the R8 was restored, greenhouse gases, along with our dependence on foreign oil, could be reduced as there would be fewer cars on the highway and others.

Currently, there is no public transit service in most areas along the R8 corridor. However, the coalition estimates four new stations would need to be built, the tracks redone and overhead electric wires reinstalled.

Iverson says SEPTA still owns all of the right of way, where the tracks are, and therefore would not need to buy any property.

While the \$300 million cost seems high, Iverson said the cost could be broken down into \$50 million increments over six years. This translates to one-eighth of SEPTA's annual capital budget, which is currently \$430 million.

Of the proposed project, Frey said, "It's been an uphill battle, but we think we can prevail and the project will be built."

"We're making headway. SEPTA is building more parking lots, but we believe unless you provide riders with new stations, some of those spaces are empty, as our research shows," he said.

Frey claims many SEPTA riders from areas as far away as Plumsteadville and Wrightstown drive as far as Cornwell Heights to catch a train to Philadelphia daily. They added if new stations were built in places like Southampton, along the Newtown Bypass, Huntingdon Valley and Newtown Borough, more people would likely ride the train.