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PRESS RELEASE

FROM: Raritan Valley Line Mayors' Alliance

Raritan Valley Line Mayors Respond to NJ Transit Study

The Raritan Valley Line Mayors' Alliance appreciates the commitment by NJ Transit to complete the legislatively-mandated RVL one-seat ride study on time. While we are disappointed with some of the findings, we note there is positive data and potential for additional direct trains into NY Penn Station.

From the Alliance's perspective, the report is a mixed bag – it contains a great deal of valuable information, including the potential for adding additional “shoulder-peak” direct trains. However, the report's conclusions regarding the feasibility of adding one-seat ride peak period trains on the RVL, as well as one-seat trains on the weekends, requires further questioning and analysis. The RVL Mayors will continue to work with NJT and legislators toward both short and long-term solutions for better service on the RVL.

One thing the report has made clear: there is a strong desire for a one-seat ride on the RVL, as ridership on the RVL grew significantly as a result of the 2014 inauguration of midday off-peak one-seat ride service (and fell slightly when that service was stopped). In addition, it is clear that the significant pre COVID-19 growth in ridership on the RVL will continue given the substantial transit village developments underway or planned along the line.

The report's glaring omission is any analysis of growth on the RVL as a result of implementing peak period one-seat service. It also fails to recognize that many riders along the Raritan Valley Line have opted to travel to both stations with one-seat service, rather than continue to suffer through the grueling Newark-Penn train change reality that leaves many commuters frustrated and missing connections. The report fails to recognize that these riders, not to mention other commuters who have simply given up on the RVL and instead opted for driving, taking the bus, or abandoning Manhattan jobs would likely return to the RVL if the commute were more bearable.

The 32 Mayors of the RVL Alliance -- led by Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr, Bound Brook Mayor Robert Fazen, and Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle -- are united in our efforts for better and more equitable service for RVL riders. We stand with other organizations (such as the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition) and of course, the riders themselves, in demanding basic equity for the RVL.

Mayor Fazen cited the long-term picture given the reassessment of urban office locations as a result of the pandemic. “It's clear that one of the best ways to get workers back to our urban centers is to improve their commute, and there's no better way to do that along the RVL other than by instituting peak period one-seat ride. In our opinion, there's no better time to do that than now, when typical commuting patterns have been substantially disrupted.”

“Given the report’s conclusions that at least some one-seat trains can be added to the RLV, it’s disappointing that NJT’s recent five and ten year strategic and capital plans do not include any funding for additional one-seat service on the RVL. This needs to be addressed, even if done so by the legislature rather than NJT,” said Mayor Mahr.

The RVL serves 32 towns across Hunterdon, Somerset, Middlesex and Union Counties. “We will not stop advocating for the more than 23,000 RVL riders, who deserved improved, efficient service,” stated Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle.

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