

## County East-West Rail Link Estimated at Up to \$221 Mil.

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**ELIZABETH** — A proposed 17-mile east-west rail link connecting Plainfield and Elizabeth and towns in between would be "viable but costly," a consultant to the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders said last week.

The proposed rail link would cost anywhere from \$76 to \$221 million, according to a report from the county's consultant, Raytheon Infrastructure Inc. of New York.

Steven Santoro, a Project Manager with Raytheon, said the rail line con-

necting midtown Elizabeth with the monorail system at Newark International Airport, estimated at \$239 million, would be completed first.

That part of the project, known as the Newark-Elizabeth Rail Link, will include stops in downtown Newark, at the soon to open Jersey Gardens Value Mega Mall and the IKEA store in Elizabeth.

The six-mile Newark Airport-Elizabeth Link, which is being done as part of a public-private partnership with NJ Transit, is expected to generate 14,000 daily riders. Extending the project 11 miles out to Plainfield would increase that number anywhere from 2,000 to 7,000.

The second phase of the east-west rail project would connect Elizabeth to Cranford utilizing the old Central New Jersey line, a line that has been defunct for more than 20 years.

The last segment would connect the line further west from Cranford to Plainfield on NJ Transit property using the Raritan Valley Line. That line includes stops in Fanwood, Westfield, Garwood, Cranford and Roselle Park.

Eight alternatives have been proposed to connect westward to Plainfield. Other than the first plan, which exclusively uses electric light rail, the proposals include a mix of light rail and diesel cars.

Mr. Santoro said a consensus is currently lacking on which of these options, either light rail or diesel, is best to complete the east-west rail link. Also, officials are unclear as to where on the line the change from diesel to electric cars would occur.

Among those transfer sites considered by Raytheon were midtown Elizabeth, Roselle-Roselle Park and Cranford.

"All of the alternatives have some impact on the (NJ Transit's) Raritan Valley Line, including the light rail," said Mr. Santoro.

In fact, under the proposal to use electric light rail to connect Plainfield to the airport, the Raritan commuter line would have to be converted to a single track operation at the Westfield station, Netherwood station in Plainfield and the Fanwood station.

The service proposed either parallels or crosses the tracks used by the

NJ Transit's Raritan Valley Line, according to James Daly, Director of the county's Division of Policy and Planning.

An electric light rail system from Elizabeth to Plainfield would transport riders from Plainfield to the airport in 42 minutes and generate the higher ridership, Raytheon's report found.

The other seven options studied by Raytheon, utilizing a mixed use of electric and diesel drive train cars, would add another 10 minutes per trip. These options all would require transfer points to switch from diesel to electric cars.

Mr. Santoro noted that a system of light rail from the airport to Roselle Park and diesel on west to Plainfield would generate the second highest ridership after electric light rail from Elizabeth to Plainfield.

Union County Manager Michael J. Lapolla explained that only electric light rail can be used to connect the airport with midtown Elizabeth due to environmental issues.

In order to form a consensus with towns west of Elizabeth, Mr. Daly recommended the formation of a "working committee" with representatives from each of these towns, the Raritan Valley Coalition, the county's Transportation Advisory Board and "other stakeholders along the line."

Mr. Daly said it is imperative that the eight alternatives are boiled down to "one specific alternative" so that the project can move forward.

In order to speed up the process Freeholder Lewis Mingo of Plainfield suggested that those proposals that are not practical be cut from the list of eight plans.

The county's Transportation Advisory Committee is expected to comment on Raytheon's plan at its next meeting on Wednesday, October 6, at 8 p.m. at the county's administration building in Westfield. The plan will also be presented to the Raritan Coalition.

Raytheon was hired by the freeholders at a cost of \$380,000 last year, \$300,000 of which was paid for with a Federal Transit Administration Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21) grant. The county paid the remainder of the study.

## NJ Transit Head: Direct Rail Service To NYC Remains a Distant Goal

By KIM KINTER  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**WESTFIELD** — Although the new Executive Director of NJ Transit, knows exactly what is on the minds of many Raritan Valley Line commuters — direct train service into Manhattan — he did not offer much hope this week that it would happen any time soon.

Jeffrey A. Warsh, 39, who hails from Westfield, was the guest speaker at a meeting Monday morning of the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition.

Speaking to a small group assembled at the Westfield Municipal Building, Mr. Warsh started off by saying it is "no mystery" that Raritan Valley rail riders are concerned about getting a so-called "one seat ride," or direct, uninterrupted train service into Manhattan, but that several obstacles must first be overcome.

As those who have followed the push for the "one seat ride" know, a new tunnel is needed between New Jersey and New York before that can happen.

The current tunnel has two tracks on both sides, but during peak travel hours they are heavily used and no more trains can be added.

Mr. Warsh said he has heard a \$6 billion price tag put on the project, which would require a regional co-operation among various agencies. If a tunnel project were to be agreed upon soon, it could be 12 to 15 years before a new structure would be in place, he added.

Another obstacle is that electric trains are required for entry into New York and the trains that run on the Raritan Valley Line are all diesel.

Currently, commuters get off in Newark and transfer onto either another NJ Transit electrified train for travel into midtown or a PATH train for travel into lower Manhattan.

Mr. Warsh told his audience that he is interested in electrifying the entire Raritan Valley Line, at an estimated cost of \$90 million. There are dual mode locomotives, which are trains that can travel either via electricity or diesel, but Mr. Warsh said using those would entail extensive training of personnel and equipment retrofitting.

He favors "doing it (electrification) and getting it done with." He said achieving this takes capital and that a new transportation trust fund is needed which might necessitate an increase in the gas tax.

Mr. Warsh's proposal for electrification of the Raritan Valley Line is a departure from the recommendations of groups that advocated the use of dual mode locomotives.

A joint study by NJ Transit, Metro-

politan Transit Authority and the Port Authority, in fact, recommended the use of the dual mode locomotive.

Mr. Warsh, who pointed out that he was only in week 11 of his new position, was invited by the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition to speak about his vision for NJ Transit and to address particular issues which the group has been discussing for the last year and a half.

These issues include the development of a dual mode locomotive for use on the Raritan Valley Line.

The coalition itself is a non-profit group comprised of municipal and county officials, commuters and labor unions. Members are concerned about improving service and stations along the Raritan Valley Line, which services Westfield, Scotch Plains and Fanwood.

Mr. Warsh is a former Republican assemblyman who spent the last few years as a Senior Vice President at the MWW Group, a lobbying and public relations firm in East Rutherford. One of his main clients was Raytheon Infrastructure Services, a major NJ Transit contractor.

Raytheon has been doing a study on the proposed cross county light rail line, and also is proposing a cross county line.

The new Executive Director has not worked for a transportation agency before, although he served on the Assembly's Transportation Committee.

Although the Coalition had outlined its concerns in their invitation to Mr. Warsh to speak before the

group, he said he was already well aware of gripes expressed by Raritan Valley Line commuters.

His wife, Amy, who commutes into New York City daily, keeps him apprised, he pointed out.

Another issue, which the group asked Mr. Warsh to address, is the need to increase the number of trains accessing New York Penn Station.

The new Executive Director said NJ Transit is looking at several ways to create more so-called "slots," which are the number of trains that can get in and out of New York during peak hours.

For instance, an enhanced signaling system is already being constructed between Newark and New York that will allow train cars to run closer together. Related improvements will increase the number of slots to 10.

Not all 10 slots will be available to Raritan Valley Line riders, however, since a number will be used by the Montclair Line, he added.

Mr. Warsh said he also has been told that because of work being done at New York's Grand Central Station to allow more trains to travel through the station, NJ Transit may gain some slots.

To ease overcrowding, Mr. Warsh said the NJ Transit Board of Directors on Friday, October 8, will consider awarding a contract to a group to develop specifications for 200 custom-made bi-level trains for the Northeast Corridor Line, North Jersey Coast Line and the Morris and

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William A. Burke for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**OBSERVING ITS 20-YEAR ANNIVERSARY...NJ Transit's new Executive Director Jeffrey A. Warsh, a Westfield resident, left, accepts a special presentation from Raritan Valley Rail Coalition Vice Chairman and Union County Freeholder Lewis Mingo of Plainfield. The presentation, given to Mr. Warsh during the group's meeting this week in Westfield, congratulates NJ Transit on its 20th anniversary, which occurred earlier this summer.**

### Trailside Offering Variety of Workshops For Kids and Parents

**MOUNTAINSIDE** — The Trailside Nature and Science Center in Mountainside is offering a variety of workshops for children and their parents this fall.

Some brand new workshops are geared toward preschool to fifth grade children and their families:

"Two of Us" — an interactive program for children ages 3 and 4 accompanied by an adult — encourages child and adult to discover nature together through exploration, hikes and outdoor activities.

"Two of Us" classes are offered Tuesdays from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. or 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. in October, November and December. Pre-registration is required and the fee is \$4 per person for each class.

There will also be a family workshop series called "Dusk to Dark," for children ages 6 and up with an adult, includes a "Night Hike" on Wednesday, October 6, at 7 p.m. Hikers will look and listen for evidence of nocturnal residents who visit Lake Surprise at the Lake Surprise parking lot, located on W.R. Tracy Drive in the Watchung Reservation.

Registration is required and the fee is \$3 per person. Hikers should bring their own flashlights.

For a fall program brochure, please call or visit the Trailside Nature and Science Center, located at 452 New Providence Road, Mountainside, at (908) 789-3670.

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