

Groundbreaking—finally—at Paoli Train Station

By Brian McCullough, Daily Local News

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Amtrak, SEPTA, and state and local officials held a groundbreaking ceremony Tuesday morning for the \$36 million initiative to improve accessibility, safety and provide operational flexibility at the Paoli Train Station. This is the first step in turning the station into the Paoli Intermodal Transportation Center. From left are: Thomas F. Moritz, senior director at Amtrak; Chester County Commissioners' Chairwoman Michelle Kichline; Toby Fauver, PennDOT deputy secretary for multimodal transportation; state Sen. Andy Dinniman, D-19, Tredyffrin Board of Supervisors Chairman Reaves Lukens; Jeffrey Knueppel, P.E. general manager at SEPTA; Joe McHugh, vice president at Amtrak; and Theresa Garcia Crews, regional administrator for the U.S. Department of Transportation. PETE BANNAN – DIGITAL FIRST MEDIA

TREDYFFRIN >> There were many bemused looks Tuesday in the parking lot of the Paoli Train Station.

The looks were not coming from commuters looking for a late train, however, but from officials of numerous agencies and governments who were on hand to mark the groundbreaking for the long-discussed Paoli Station Accessibility Improvements Project.

That \$36 million initiative will improve accessibility, safety and provide operational flexibility at the Paoli Train Station, and is the first step in turning the station into the Paoli Intermodal Transportation Center.

The mood of relief and accomplishment among those attending the ceremony stemmed from the fact that it has been a project under discussion in one form or another for about 30 years.

“This is a ‘build it and they will come’ moment,” said Tredyffrin Supervisor Murph Wysocki, one of several township officials on hand Tuesday with representatives from Amtrak, SEPTA, planning agencies and state and federal politicians. “This is a positive for the region and for Paoli.”

In fiscal year 2016, some 201,572 Amtrak passengers and approximately 740,000 SEPTA passengers passed through the station. The current station facilities, built in 1953 by the Pennsylvania Railroad, including a one-story brick station building, are not fully accessible and are in need of improvement. SEPTA and Amtrak have partnered to bring it into compliance with 2006 U.S. Department of Transportation Accessibility Standards.

Amtrak has contracted with Neshaminy Constructors Inc. of Feasterville to do the work, which will include a new center island, high-level platform, new elevators and ramps, a pedestrian overpass, parking lot improvements, ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) improvements to the existing station building and upgrades in rail infrastructure to support other project components. During construction, there will be no impact to the number of available parking spaces or train operations, Amtrak said.

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“The improvements at Paoli Station are in line with station improvements PennDOT (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation) has overseen at stations all along the 104-mile Keystone Corridor between Philadelphia and Harrisburg,” said Toby Fauver, deputy secretary for multimodal transportation at PennDOT. “Governor Wolf’s administration has continued the commonwealth’s commitment to enhancing and building ridership along this vital passenger rail corridor, which contributes to the region’s economic vitality.”

Chester County Commissioners’ Chairwoman Michelle Kichline said she is particularly pleased to see work begin on the project because she grew up and still lives in the Paoli area.

“Today’s groundbreaking for the accessibility phase of the Paoli Train Station is the long awaited, and critical first step in the Paoli Train Station revitalization,” Kichline said. “It is an example of how effective partnerships can be between local, county, state and federal elected officials and PennDOT, SEPTA and Amtrak. It took over 20 years of planning and perseverance to get to today. The focus on providing accessibility to transit for our residents reflects the county’s vision for smart growth...”

Kichline insisted on putting former Tredyffrin Supervisor Stephen Aichele in the limelight during Tuesday’s ceremony. Aichele was a township supervisor from 1988 to 1995, served four years on the township planning commission before that, and chaired the Paoli Task Force from 1995 to 2002. He continued to follow and support the project when he served in former Gov. Tom Corbett’s administration, first as general counsel and then as Corbett’s chief of staff.

“What it takes to get to a day like today is dozens of dedicated people,” Aichele said.

The completion of the accessibility improvements – expected to take two years – will set the stage for the second phase of the project, the proposed Darby Road Extension, state Sen. Andrew Dinniman, D-19, of West Whiteland, noted on Tuesday. That phase calls for replacing the existing bridge on North Valley Road over the Amtrak/SEPTA lines with a new bridge that redirects the road to the intersection of Lancaster Avenue and Darby Road. That will allow the parking areas and jitney operations on the north side of the tracks to be combined.

A public open house on the second phase of the project has been slated for Monday, March 6 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Tredyffrin Township Building.

The final phase of the Paoli project calls for the reconstruction of a new, expanded transportation center that will also support the Paoli business district. The design has yet to be finalized, but the proposed intermodal station complex will include an additional high-level platform on the outbound side, a new waiting area, ticket offices and passenger amenities, enhanced bus facilities, and a commuter parking garage with more than 600 spaces, among other upgrades. Plans also anticipate retail and commercial storefronts on the proposed parking structure.

Along the same line, Dinniman said he recently helped secure \$375,000 in state funding for West Whiteland for the Route 100-Exton Station Multi-Use Trail, a project to provide pedestrian access from the Chester Valley Trail to Exton Station. The new link will offer commuters, residents, visitors, shoppers



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and employees with safe access to the trail, Main Street at Exton, the Exton Square Mall and other destinations around Exton Crossroads.

He also noted stops in Downingtown, Coatesville and Parkesburg are being addressed.

“The train doesn’t stop in Paoli,” he said during his remarks. “Let’s keep the train moving.”

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