



Pennsylvania State Rail Plan – Questions/Comments & Responses

Elected Officials Meeting

November 16, 2020 / 1-2PM

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

How do I find the project which relates to the NEPA or Scranton area?

On the Plan the Keystone website (www.planthekeystone.com) there are linked appendices on the State Rail Plan webpage. There you can find the passenger rail appendix that lists all of the passenger rail projects and a second appendix that lists all the rail/freight projects. They are organized by geographic area within the state and by rail carrier.

Are there any new passenger rail projects planned? Passenger rail service between the Lehigh Valley and New York City is always talked about but never gets past the talking stage.

We did identify long term visioning projects in rail, but passenger rail service from Lehigh Valley to New York City was not one of them. This kind of new project is challenging because it requires an upfront significant capital investment and a continued commitment to supplement operational costs to move forward.



Pennsylvania State Rail Plan – Questions/Comments & Responses

Virtual Public Meeting #1

November 16, 2020 / 4-5PM

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

There has been discussion of SEPTA taking over Amtrak's Keystone Service as a way to free up resources to expand service on the Pennsylvanian. Is that part of the overall plan?

This potential scenario is not part of the state rail plan update.

Can you please show the keystone plan website for comment again?

<http://www.planthekeystone.com/Pages/PA-State-Rail-Plan.aspx>

What role do you see hyperloop playing in the long-term Pennsylvania rail strategy?

At this time hyperloop is not considered in Pennsylvania's rail strategy; however, this could change as hyperloop technology becomes more developed.

Are there long-term opportunities to use the median strip of interstates...like I80 to put in place freight or passenger rail?

The utilization of PennDOT right-of-way for rail use has not been discussed.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

Is the Plan offering strategies/projects that might enhance or expand opportunities for HOW rail freight in PA may be able to support and financially benefit from the growing ONLINE Consumer demand?

Freight rail strategies or projects presented in the Plan are not specifically aimed at the movement of online consumer goods. However, the Plan's Rail Service and Investment Program promotes a reliable and efficient freight rail network in the commonwealth. A robust freight rail network would provide increased opportunity for all businesses, including those serving online customers, to utilize freight rail for transportation of their products.

When do you foresee the NS study for the Pennsylvanian being finished? From your contacts with NS do you know if NS is favorable toward the second passenger rail service? What about the issue of private/nonprofit owned stations along the corridor, have you been able to secure their cooperation and coordination toward expanded passenger service?

The 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan assumes that a second roundtrip of the Pennsylvanian will be added by 2024. PennDOT and Amtrak coordinated to develop potential timetables and cost information, which was provided to Norfolk Southern. In turn, Norfolk Southern is doing their due diligence to determine what opportunities exist for additional service while minimizing impacts to their operations since they own the rail from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh. PennDOT anticipates receiving this information from NS in early Summer 2021. Please note that Amtrak projected the additional roundtrip in 2024 without consideration of any capital improvements that may need to be completed as a result of additional study and analysis.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Will people be able to see all questions listed and answers?

Can you please provide everyone with an update on the Lackawanna Cutoff rail project to Northeastern Pennsylvania?

RESPONSE

The written questions were not visible to attendees but were stated and answered verbally, as time allowed. In addition, the public will be able to review the question and answer document for each public meeting on the Plan the Keystone website:
<http://www.planthekeystone.com/Pages/PA-State-Rail-Plan.aspx>.

The Lackawanna Cut-off Project is noted as a visionary project in Appendix C: Proposed Passenger Rail Projects. Currently, the New Jersey and Pennsylvania portions are unfunded and there are no implementation timelines. You may find some additional information in Section 2.1.1.4.1. This project is not led by PennDOT.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

Do we have any idea how much rail helps to reduce GHG emissions as it is so much more efficient than trucks and cars?

Yes, environmental impacts, land use, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are included in the Pennsylvania State Rail Plan. New locomotive standards established by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) once fully implemented could reduce GHG emissions by 90% for particulate matter and by 80% for nitrogen oxide emissions. Rail is about four times more fuel efficient than truck/freight. Please refer to Section 2.1.7.4 of the Plan for further details.

Is there any chance that the Lehigh Valley can receive passenger rail service again?

We did identify long term visioning projects in rail, but passenger rail service in the Lehigh Valley was not one of them. This kind of new project is challenging because it requires an upfront significant capital investment and a continued commitment to supplement operational costs to move forward.

Will rail help alleviate the horrendous truck traffic in the Lehigh Valley due to all the warehouses along I-78?

Freight rail provides an alternative mode for the movement of goods. The availability of rail can result in a reduction of truck traffic and congestion (Section 2.1.7.1). However, at this time no planned freight rail projects in the Lehigh Valley were identified for inclusion in the Plan.

QUESTION/COMMENT

On behalf of the Schuylkill corridor communities, we urge you to make the Reading, Pottstown, Phoenixville to Philadelphia line a priority for the Commonwealth.

During this plan has there been discussions with trail groups that are trying to work with rail roads for rail with trail or rail acquisitions? Does the plan address this community need?

The Western portion of the state receives a small portion of the state's investment in passenger rail. Is there a plan to balance the investment and to advertise passenger rail services in western pa?

RESPONSE

Comment acknowledged.

Yes, please refer to Sections 2.1.1.7.2 and 2.1.1.7.3 for information regarding recreational trails along rail lines.

One assumption of this rail plan is that a second roundtrip of the Pennsylvanian will be added by 2024. PennDOT and Amtrak coordinated to develop potential timetables and cost information, which was provided to Norfolk Southern. In turn, Norfolk Southern is doing their due diligence to determine what opportunities exist for additional service while minimizing impacts to their operations since they own the rail from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh. PennDOT anticipates receiving this information from NS in early Summer 2021. PennDOT continues to look for ways to invest more in the western part of the state, including securing additional FRA funding and capitalizing on existing infrastructure.

QUESTION/COMMENT

My name is Craig Blizzard and I am a member of the West Chester Borough chartered Committee to Re-establish Passenger Rail Service to West Chester. We have been active since 2014 and, as a result of our work and support from regional governments and transportation planning entities, SEPTA has included the possibility of re-establishing passenger rail service from Elwyn/Wawa to West Chester in its 20-year plan as a very positive sign. We would respectfully request that this possibility be included in the State plan. We have significant support documentation which would be happy to share with all appropriate and interested entities. What do we need to do to have this included in your plan?

RESPONSE

In 2018, PennDOT completed a feasibility study on restoring rail service to West Chester that laid out costs and next steps. It is available on the SEPTA website: <http://www.septa.org/notice/pdf/2018-Feasibility-Report-combined.pdf>. While the report found that it is physically feasible to restore service, currently SEPTA has no plans to restore revenue rail service to West Chester due to the limited availability of capital funding and the high cost of this large capital project as compared to SEPTA's funding needs to address the state of good repair backlog and projects with higher ridership and economic development potential. SEPTA continues to work with the West Chester Pike coalition on improving surface transportation operations and services: <https://www.chescoplanning.org/transportation/WestChesterPike.cfm>.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

How do I get a new project listed in the plan?

To have a project considered for addition to the plan, please provide a description of the project, the project type (passenger or freight rail), the cost in the short term, and the completion date of the project (before 2025). Also, please include what types of benefits the project will bring to the public and/or environment. Please submit the information to RA-PDPASRP@pa.gov

Does a project have to be included in the plan in order to be eligible for FRA funding?

Yes, if you want to be eligible for various FRA grants, the project does need to be listed in the Pennsylvania State Rail Plan. If you do not see your project listed in the Plan appendices, please provide us with those details either through email at RA-PDPASRP@pa.gov or comment form on the Plan the Keystone website (<http://www.planthekeystone.com/Pages/PA-State-Rail-Plan.aspx>).

How developed does the project have to be to be eligible for federal funding?

Please refer to the specific grant program requirements for funding eligibility. Federal funding sources are described in Sections 1.4.4 and 2.1.5.2 of the Plan.

QUESTION/COMMENT

There are two passenger rail plans identified in the plan for passenger rail service from Berks County to Philadelphia. How will these two plans intersect with each other? Does one take precedence over the other?

The second Berks County plan has not been made public so how can we get access to that report [PennDOT's report] and comment on it?

What process is underway for the Berks to Philadelphia passenger rail restoration effort. There are some preliminary discussions about creating a joint municipal authority to develop and operate the service. As this plays out how can it be factored into the plan?

RESPONSE

In some ways these plans will be complimentary but may differ in estimated cost and schedule. PennDOT anticipates releasing their study results at the end of the year on PennDOT's plan the keystone webpage for the public to view. Please refer to Section 5.7 of the Plan for more information on current rail studies.

The final report will be posted to www.planthekeystone.com website upon completion.

The State Rail Plan is updated every 4 years and can be modified at any time to include new projects.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Energys is developing battery powered engines. What could the plan do to encourage this development?

RESPONSE

Battery powered engines could be utilized to reduce locomotive emissions once the technology is sufficiently developed and cost competitive. The 2020 Pennsylvania Rail Plan supports various rolling stock improvement projects, which can include locomotive emissions reduction efforts. The Plan also supports EPA's 2008 emission standards. Therefore, the Plan indirectly supports alternative power development; however, there are no specific projects focused on developing battery powered locomotives at this time.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Are there any plans for passengers' rail service to Northeastern PA? As it would open more tourism to the area.

RESPONSE

Restoring passenger rail service to northeastern Pennsylvania is included as a visionary project in the 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan. The Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Railroad Authority is working toward restoring passenger service to this region (Section 2.1.1.4.1). In addition, both New Jersey and New York state transportation agencies noted an existing weakness in Pennsylvania's passenger rail network in northeastern Pennsylvania. Addressing this will require significant capital and ongoing operational funding and commitment from more than just the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Section 6.4.7).

Any update on the SEPTA Route 100 extension to the King of Prussia Mall?

This is not an intercity rail project and therefore was not considered as part of the state rail plan update. Visit www.kingofprussiarail.com for the latest information on SEPTA's project.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

You did not mention the Harrisburg to Philadelphia trains go to New York & to Vermont.

Not every Keystone train goes from Philadelphia to New York, but we do have some. None of the Keystone trains go directly to Vermont. From Philadelphia, one can transfer to the Burlington line to go to Vermont.

I had the Cutoff (Hoboken-Scranton) question as well. This seems extra important given that by all indications, remote-working and bedroom communities will take the place of X-thousand sq-ft office rental commitments.

The Lackawanna Cut-off Project is noted as a visionary project in Appendix C: Proposed Passenger Rail Projects. Currently, the New Jersey and Pennsylvania portions are unfunded and there are no implementation timelines. You may find some additional information in Section 2.1.1.4.1. This project is not led by PennDOT.

Is environmental justice in any way included in the plan, from an access perspective for employment opportunities?

The 2020 State Rail Vision and its supporting goals and objectives equally apply to and include environmental justice populations. Each project noted in the appendices that receives state and/or federal funding will include considerations for environmental justice communities during project design and implementation.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

Pennsylvania is an energy rich state, especially recently in regards to natural gas. The plan should support the movement of LNG by rail.

The Plan's Rail Service and Investment Program supports a freight rail system that will be able to accommodate current and future shipping demands of liquid natural gas and other petroleum products. Between 2017 and 2045, rail shipments of natural gas, crude petroleum, and gasoline are projected to increase by 157% in Pennsylvania (Section 2.2.2.2).

Will the PA rail map be updated again as part of this new plan submission?

The rail maps contained within the 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan are updated to reflect current conditions.

PA has one of the best programs in the nation!

Comment acknowledged.

What checks and balances are in place to ensure that Norfolk Southern will not ask for more capital improvements than necessary to add a second Pennsylvania frequency between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh.

There will be many discussions with Norfolk Southern to ensure impacts to their freight transportation business are minimized while still accommodating expanded passenger service. Typically, a legal agreement will be established defining requirements and commitments (i.e. checks and balances) for both parties. PennDOT will be working through this to ensure a fair agreement is reached.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Has there been given any thought to extending service out to Reading to alleviate congestion along 422?

What is the status of PA taking over the Keystone from Amtrak?

Several corridors that were railbanked with the Surface Transportation Board and being used as "Interim Trails" were shown on the schematic map with the different railroads. Are all railbanked corridors in the commonwealth shown or just some?

RESPONSE

Yes, PennDOT and Berks County Alliance are engaged in separate studies to analyze the restoration of rail service between Reading and Philadelphia (Section 5.7).

Pennsylvania House Resolution 918 was adopted July 8, 2020 in support of the Commonwealth taking ownership of the Keystone Line. The resolution enables Pennsylvania to engage with USDOT to consider the potential transfer of ownership; however, federal legislation would be required to transfer ownership and no actions have been advanced at this time.

The 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan presents a fairly complete picture of the railbanked corridors from the U.S. Surface Transportation Board (STB) listing. If there is missing information, we encourage you to email us at RA-PDPASRP@pa.gov.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Cambria County commissioner looking for additional trips from Johnstown to Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh to Johnstown.

How does Pennsylvania compare to other states in terms of the amount of state funding for rail infrastructure projects, both passenger and freight? How much will that funding increase over the next 25 years, and what are possible sources of funding?

RESPONSE

PennDOT recently published the Altoona to Pittsburgh Commuter Rail Study in 2019 (Section 5.7), which evaluates the potential for additional trips including the Johnstown-Pittsburgh trips. The study report is available on the Plan the Keystone website for public review (<http://www.planthekeystone.com/Pages/Altoona-Pittsburgh-Study.aspx>).

From a freight rail perspective, the funding programs that PennDOT has for freight carriers are robust. From a passenger rail perspective, as a state subsidized route, the commonwealth contributes more dollars to that line than any other state. For example, the Mount Joy Station Improvement Project was around \$32-\$33M from start to finish, with no funding contribution from Amtrak. This was a total commonwealth investment. This is not typical in other states. The commonwealth will continue to invest in Pennsylvania's passenger and freight rail network. Please refer to Sections 1.4 and 2.1.5 for a summary of the various available funding sources.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

Is there any vision in the near future to have passenger train service in the central and northern part of the state running east and west as well as north and south?

No.

Does the state have any ideas or plans to entice truck freight to switch to rail transport and thus increasing rail funding? This would also reduce the amount of truck traffic on our aging roads and bridges and reduce congestion.

The 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan discusses the potential benefits of freight movement by rail versus by truck (Section 2.1.7), although specific plans aimed to entice shippers away from trucking to rail have not been discussed by PennDOT. PennDOT is currently developing an update to its Comprehensive Freight Movement Plan in association with the state's Long-Range Transportation Plan. PennDOT will look at freight movement for consideration and discussion along with various policies. Public meetings will also be held in the future as part of this effort.

QUESTION/COMMENT

What kind of Impact is the state looking at on the freight and passenger rail systems from the COVID19 Pandemic?

Intermodal and land management - the Philadelphia area is losing precious sites to non-transportation related uses. Every effort should be made and the plan should support enlarging Philadelphia area sites for water to rail and truck to rail transfers.

Hi. It's inevitable that improved rail traffic will bring increased trucking activity. How do we ensure "good neighbor" policies are observed to minimize neighborhood noise, exhaust, and the impact on paved roads?

RESPONSE

COVID-19 has had a major impact on commonwealth and PennDOT revenues; therefore, PennDOT is constantly evaluating our revenue streams and whether adjustments to our programs will be required in the future. Please refer to the COVID-19 pandemic note in the Executive Summary and Sections 5.5.4, 5.6.2, and 5.8.

Land use is always a consideration. The 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan includes land use planning needs and opportunities (Section 2.3.5). PennDOT continues to work toward integration of multimodal transportation, including rail, with land use development and land use policies that are controlled at the local level.

Local level "neighborhood" policies are generally developed and enforced by the local municipality. Similar to the previous comment response, PennDOT continues to strive for the integration of land use planning/policies and rail transportation needs.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Most of the passenger rail projects are state of good repair efforts or operational improvements. How did you balance these with the need to consider more ambitious efforts?

RESPONSE

With the capital investments that PennDOT provides for passenger rail, PennDOT identifies projects that would bring stations into ADA compliance as priorities. The Mount Joy Station Improvement Project is an example of this. State of good repair projects also tend to take priority; however, PennDOT is always looking at how to improve passenger service as well. The ability to fund expansion projects, from the capital perspective and ongoing operational supplement, is key in the evaluation.

QUESTION/COMMENT

How do you establish the priority that one project has over another?

Thank you for hosting this meeting. Based on all of the comments a majority are revolved around passenger rail. Any chance they state/PennDOT take into consideration all of these needs/questions that may not be shown in studies performed?

RESPONSE

From a freight capacity standpoint, PennDOT compares incoming freight rail project applications to determine if they are consistent with the program and overall freight plan. Those that are consistent are generally given a higher priority. With the capital investments that PennDOT provides for passenger rail, PennDOT identifies projects that would bring stations into ADA compliance as priorities. The Mount Joy Station Improvement Project is an example of this. State of good repair projects also tend to take priority; however, PennDOT is always looking at how to improve passenger service as well.

PennDOT will review all comments provided during the public meetings and regarding the draft plan. These comments will be considered as the Department considers any future study needs.



QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

Amtrak passing through Philadelphia has two routes to Miami, one to New Orleans, one via Washington DC to Chicago, Newport News, Norfolk, North Carolina & VA plus north to Vermont, Boston, various routes out of New York City.

Comment acknowledged.

Thank you for an excellent presentation especially the answers on passenger and commuter rail service.

Thank you for your comment.