



Association for Public Transportation

MEMORANDUM -- URGENT

DATE: 20 MARCH 2009
TO: APT MEMBERS
FROM: RICHARD ARENA

RE: *\$10 Billion "Access to the Region's Core" (ARC) has become "Access to Macy's Sub-Basement".*

Proposed Hudson River Rail Tunnel between New Jersey & New York City -- a good project gone bad -- a grave threat to high speed rail in New England.

Brief Overview

The ARC project --- originally a much needed **Hudson River Rail Tunnel on the Northeast Corridor between New Jersey & New York City** -- has been drastically changed from its original purpose and design for the worse. If this unfortunate change cannot be reversed, the ARC tunnels, in the best case, will limit high speed rail improvements in New England; **in the worst case, Acela service to Boston, Providence, New Haven, and Stamford could end!**

The project in its original form was excellent. It called for two new rail tunnels - one for each direction --under the Hudson River from New Jersey to New York. These new tunnels would connect to Penn Station and then to another new tunnel from Penn Station to Grand Central Terminal. This plan met the three top criteria spelled out in the **Major Investment Study of 2003:**

- 1. Providing new capacity to supplement the existing 100-year-old Pennsylvania Railroad tunnels which are now at capacity.**
- 2. Providing critical backup for Amtrak's NEC routes.**
- 3. Providing access to the East Side of Manhattan for New Jersey commuters.**

The Original Plan

The original ARC plan called for the tunnels to enter New York City at a shallow enough depth that would enable them to proceed into NY Penn Station on the West Side of Manhattan and interlock (i.e. connect to) the existing NEC tracks. At this depth, the ARC tunnel would also have access to the planned Moynihan Station in the adjacent Farley Post Office Building. The ARC tunnel would follow 31st St. out the back of Penn Station, and turn north on Park Ave, until reaching the lower level of Grand Central Terminal on the East Side. (It should be noted that engineering technology required to construct this plan is not extraordinary and is less complicated than what was required by Boston's Big Dig. This routing is described in a 2003 Major Investment Study as ARC Alternative G.) Unfortunately, this is not the current plan.

The Current Proposal and the Deception in a Name

Even though the currently approved ARC plan shows tracks going into Penn Station, **nothing could be further from the truth. The tunnel will NOT go to Penn Station. It will instead go to a proposed New Jersey Transit station in a deep cavern that terminates with dead-end stub tracks, 175 feet under 34th Street and 6th Avenue (adjacent to**

Macy's department store), about a half mile from Penn Station (beneath Madison Square Garden) and the proposed Moynihan Station (across the street for Madison Square Garden at the Farley Post Office Building).

NJ Transit has given its New York terminal a temporary name – Penn Station Ext. What a deception! This is NOT a “Penn Station Extension.” Also, NJ Transit's plans show the ARC tracks crossing the original NEC tracks -- what is not obvious by the drawings is that the *ARC tracks are 130 feet below the existing NEC tracks.*

The net result: The new ARC plan barely meets even one of the three original criteria for the ARC Project and would only be useful for New Jersey Transit. **This \$10 billion project completely shuts out Amtrak and the other commuter lines from any use of the new infrastructure.** Also, tunnels at such an extreme depth -175 feet - are a major security risk in the event of accident or attack. The lowest level below the street at Penn Station now is approximately 42 feet.

Danger to New England High Speed Rail.

This unfortunate plan will **preclude many good transportation improvements** and enhancements that are so important to through-travelers and to commuters. These include the efficiencies of through-running trains for the Long Island Railroad and New Jersey Transit, as well as the much anticipated cross-town shuttle in Manhattan from Penn Station to Grand Central. But the greatest loss is to New England, specifically in the area of high speed, intercity rail.

Due to the depth of the ARC tunnels, they cannot enter Penn or Moynihan Stations and proceed north along the NEC to Boston. To repeat, **that means they are unusable by Amtrak, first because the new ARC tunnels dead-end in Manhattan, and second, because the proposed NJT terminal is a half mile from Amtrak's future station, Moynihan. This limits Amtrak to solely using the existing hundred year old tunnels.**

The immediate danger is that Amtrak has insufficient NEC tunnel time slots for its trains during rush hours. More slots are required to increase intercity rail frequency from Washington to New England, as various planning organizations have requested. There are many discussions about major speed enhancements on the NEC between Washington and New York but far fewer references to high speed rail improvements from New York to Boston. **Why is that? Why is New England being left out of any benefit from a \$10 billion infrastructure project on the Northeast Corridor?**

The inability of New England bound trains to use the ARC tunnels cements a second class status for the NEC north of New York City.

And what if the 100-year-old rail tunnels are out of service for any length of time? Amtrak does not have sufficient equipment to run one set of Acelas between Washington and the proposed NJ Transit cavern station in New York, and another set of Acelas to run between Penn Station New York and Boston. **Net result – the Washington-New York route would get high speed Acelas while the Boston-New York route would have to revert to slow Metroliners.**

ARC Project Update

The current project has momentum. There is need to redouble efforts to revert to original ARC shallow tunnel plan.

- US DOT filed a “**Record of Decision**” on the ARC project in December 2008. This is a legally significant milestone in the process of building large infrastructure projects.
- NJ Transit has sent out the first “Request for Bid” for ARC bridge work on the NJ side. Response due in April.

- NJ's Senators Lautenberg and Menendez inserted an **earmark of \$130 million into the Omnibus Appropriation bill** for the ARC project. This bill, which was just signed into law by President Obama, does not have the "shovel ready" requirement of the Stimulus Package. NJ Transit will use this appropriation to pay for the design of ARC. NJ Transit has just filed a Request for Bid for this segment of the project: responses are due in September 2009.
- Despite this funding so far, the ARC project still has a way to go to secure the full \$10 billion. NJ, with a \$2.7 billion commitment, has a \$4 billion current budget deficit. The federal government has only committed \$1.6 billion to a \$3 billion commitment. The Port Authority, with a \$3 billion commitment, has some internal issues as to how that commitment will be divided between NJ and NY.
- There is some blowback on NJ Transit as the deception of calling the NY terminus of the ARC tunnel, Penn Station, has embarrassed political leaders and advocates alike.
- The reality of the damage that ARC will potentially inflict on the NEC is likewise being realized.
- U.S. Senators, Congressmen, and Governors of the New England states are being apprised of the problems with ARC. "Senatorial courtesy" has made New England legislators reluctant to criticize a fellow Senator's (Lautenberg) pet project. N.E. legislators need to appreciate that, but, in this instance, the project is unacceptable as designed and needs to be modified, senatorial protocol notwithstanding.

Recommended Actions:

We recommend that the New England Regional Rail Coalition take a position, consistent with the "Message" bullets below. We also recommend that individual members of the Coalition reach out to the "Recipients" mentioned below to express their concern with ARC project as currently proposed

Message:

- The ARC Project is sorely needed, but not at the expense of Amtrak and intercity rail. Project needs to revert back to its original mission which was to provide backup to the existing 100 year old NEC tunnels. Also, the ARC tunnels **MUST** go into current Penn Station and a future Moynihan Station, and connect to the NEC in New York.
- Intent is not to kill the project, only modify it, preferably back to the 2003 MIS Alternative G.
- This is a strategic project, affecting stakeholders and tax payers far beyond New Jersey.
- After the lessons of 9/11, it is unbelievable that ARC does not provide backup for the NEC Hudson tunnels.
- Advocates must emphasize that, as currently designed, the ARC tunnels do not enter Penn Station – the tracks are 130 ft. beneath it, and terminate a half mile away. Many prospective NJ commuters are not aware of this fact.

Recipients: Call, Write, E-mail

- Your legislators and governor, other N.E. legislators and governors to let them know you are angry about ARC
- New York and New Jersey legislators and governors to let them know ARC affects you
- NJ Transit, Amtrak, Port Authority of NY & NJ to express concerns with the project you are also paying for
- Newspapers – NY Times, Newark Star Ledger, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, NY Post, Boston Globe, Boston Herald. Also, write to correct any insinuations that the ARC tunnel goes to Penn Station.
- Other advocacy groups – transportation groups, Sierra Clubs, rail organizations, etc. Don't assume they know.
- Names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses on following pages.