

COMMITTEE TO REESTABLISH RAIL SERVICE 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

The Railroad Committee is here to present a review of our work in 2021 to further the Borough's goal of returning rail service to the Borough and to summarize our plans for 2022 as well. In the past, we have presented oral summaries and powerpoint presentations periodically as outlined in our enabling Ordinance. We have been asked to provide a written report to Council members tonight.

2021 was our most successful year to date. The Biden Administration's emphasis on the importance of improving transportation infrastructure and passenger rail service has enabled our Committee to garner increased attention to our efforts that began in 2014, when Borough Council created the Committee. The Borough's goals dovetail nicely with the Department of Transportation's aim to enhance safety, economic opportunities, racial and social equity, and to minimize the effects of climate change (www.transportation.gov). Our work, as will be outlined below, has consisted of many public meetings, public outreach through media outlets, as well as the creation of passenger service plans and station improvement plans. Additionally, we are exploring various funding opportunities with the idea of obtaining funds, including matching grants, to finance the Borough's wish to provide rail service to residents, students, and employees, and to achieve an added benefit of increasing tourism to the Borough.

Our regularly scheduled February meeting was moved to February 24, 2021 to enable Borough Council, SEPTA, Chester County Planning Department, DVRPC, and elected officials to gather together virtually. Tom Hickey presented our service plan, as it existed at that time, at a well-attended meeting that included Mayor Norley, State Senator Carolyn Committa; Representative Diane Herrin; Chester County Commissioners Maxwell and Moskowitz; Jody Holden, Assistant GM, SEPTA; John Kern, Congresswoman, Chrissie Houlihan's office; Barry Seymour, DVRPC; Jennie Granger, Deputy Secretary, Multimodel, PENNDOT; and Brian Dyche and Brian Donovan, CC Planning Department. The meeting gave the Committee the opportunity to outline the scope of our work to stakeholders since the public release of SEPTA's feasibility study in 2018, and to obtain feedback as well. Ongoing financial constraints and SEPTA's continued backlog of state of good repair projects were noted by various speakers. Our next steps included the idea of engaging Econsult Solutions, Inc. to analyze the economic benefits of a return of rail service to the Media to West Chester rail corridor.

Our first funding application to the County's Vision Partnership Program in 2020 was unsuccessful, however, we reapplied in 2021 requesting \$12,000 to accompany the Borough's \$9,000 contribution to engage ESI. The purpose of the report is to analyze the economic value of the return of service to the region, the equity implications of adding a significant transportation option to the corridor, and the potential property value increases to the areas adjacent to the rail line. We obtained letters of support from West Goshen Township, Westtown Township, Delaware County Planning Department, and the Borough of Chester Heights.

ESI presented their draft report at the February 2022 Committee meeting. The final report will be issued in a matter of weeks and will become an integral part of our future funding applications.

One of our ongoing goals is to integrate the WC Railroad Heritage Association's tourist train into plans to reestablish passenger rail service. Our March meeting included a guest speaker, Paul Ballard, a multimodal transportation advisor, who discussed his very positive experience with the coexistence between the TexRail commuter line (Trinity Metro) and the Grapevine Vintage Railroad in Grapevine, Texas. Mr. Ballard provided a copy of the interlocal agreement between Trinity Metro and the City of Grapevine, Texas as a roadmap for a future agreement between a new passenger rail service and tourist train operations in West Chester.

Our April meeting included discussions with Eli Kahn, a local real estate developer and owner of at least two tracts adjacent to the rail line. He is interested in the progress of Market Street station improvement plans and the return of rail service in general and indicated a willingness to build a new station at the Market Street location. Also at the April meeting, GB Arrington spoke as a national expert on transit-oriented design. He discussed five important principles of the concept including, creativity; a defined center with 18-24 hours of activity; quality public realm; limited, manageable parking; mixed uses; and medium to high density. The design should be compact and pedestrian oriented. He noted that people will walk farther from home to transit than from transit to their offices.

Also in April, the Committee submitted a Community Project Funding application prepared without charge to the Borough by the McKees Group, to Congresswoman Chrissie Houlihan in the amount of \$274,985,400 based on 2018 feasibility study guidelines. There were over 60 applicants resulting in 10 awards with grant amounts in the neighborhood of \$11million each. The Committee has since decided to break up funding requests into smaller amounts and to apply to various programs in an effort to approve the chance of success in future applications.

In May, the Committee submitted a funding proposal to Senator Casey's office to be added to a Senate appropriations bill in the amount of \$5,426,600 as part of the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant program.

In June, the Committee met with Borough Council, SEPTA staff, and the Chester County SEPTA representatives to discuss the feasibility of the Borough's continued efforts to return rail service to the Borough. At the meeting, only the original plan and costs outlined in the 2018 PENNDOT study were discussed. SEPTA representatives indicated that the plan was not feasible under the current financial constraints. Although the Committee had developed a plan for interim service at a much lower cost using leased vehicles, Council did not review the plan at the June meeting. The Smart Growth Committee decided to forego disbanding the RR Committee in light of the funding applications we had previously submitted.

In July, Senator Casey recommended a \$2.4 million earmark funding from the Senate Appropriations Committee to enable the return of service to Middletown. Unfortunately the Senate did not approve the Senator's funding request. The Committee submitted an unsuccessful RAISE application to DOT in July as well. Only three projects were awarded in

PA. A debrief by DOT will take place in 2022 prior to a second application period in 2022 with \$50 million more in funds available.

A biannual meeting between the Borough and SEPTA was initiated on August 27, 2021 with a meeting with the SEPTA General Manager, and staff. We reviewed our efforts at identifying funding sources and a plan for interim service with leased vehicles. The Committee and the Mayor came away with renewed optimism that our plans were given attention and scrutiny by SEPTA. We were urged to continue our planning during this period of fiscal uncertainty for SEPTA.

Staff from the CC Planning Department met with the Committee at the October meeting to provide an initial briefing of the Vision Partnership Program process outlining the responsibilities of the Borough and ESI. ESI outlined the documents to be reviewed as part of the data compilation, beginning with the 2011 DVRPC study, and the components that would be included in the proposed report. A subcommittee presented draft commentary to accompany a video describing the stations to be reopened along the line to be used as promotional material and for community information.

On November 9, 2021, members of the Committee and the Borough met with Sue Walker and John Kern, from US Representative Chrissy Houlihan's office, to brief them on Borough efforts to restore service, design station improvements, and to ask for Congresswoman Houlihan's support.

At our November 10, 2021 meeting, Al Fazio, PE, BRT Services, LLC, introduced the concept of the Pop-Up Metro, an electric transit start-up company, using refurbished London battery-operated subway cars in a lease arrangement, or an outright sale. The total package includes trainsets, charging infrastructure, temporary modular platforms, and FRA Temporal Separation Protocols and can be leased for a two-year period. Committee members visited

Committee members visited the Pop-Up Metro demonstration site in Orbisinia, PA on December 7, 2021. Members had the opportunity to view and to operate a refurbished passenger car and to inspect the charging infrastructure and the platforms. The cars were attractive and comfortable passenger vehicles; the charging infrastructure did not appear to require much space at a station.

Additional work by the Committee in 2021 included possibly creating a 501c3 for the Committee, the advisability of submitting an application to the PA Public Private Transportation Partnership program (P3), partnering with the McKees Group to prepare funding applications and to lobby State and Federal officials, and discussions to extend the Borough and WCRHA lease with SEPTA to include 2.2 miles between Glen Mills and the Middletown station. The Committee and the WCRHA agreed to share the 501C currently operated by the WCRHA, should the Committee obtain any contributions towards the project; the Borough rejected the idea of funding a grant writer and lobbyist firm. The P3 program does not provide funding but only facilitates the creation of a partnership and oversees the successful completion of any contractual agreement; the Committee did not see a benefit to pursuing the P3 program. The Borough lease will expire in 2023; discussion on terms of an extended lease are ongoing.

Media outreach: We have submitted multiple letters to the Editor and have been interviewed for news stories at the Daily Local News. We add frequent Facebook and Twitter postings, respond to emails from the community, and continually update our Borough web page.

Throughout 2021, while seeking funding opportunities, our rail service plans and station plans were continually revised and refined to reflect the economic realities of the current financial climate and to prepare for any funding that we receive so that our project can become “shovel ready.” Tom Hickey, Vice-Chair, will explain our current iteration of the type of service we envision for the line as well as station-improvement designs for the four stations to be reopened, Market Street, Niels Street, Westtown, and Cheyney University. SEPTA’s Middletown station, at Wawa, is scheduled to open for passenger service July 1, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo Ann P. Kelton, Chair