

Raritan Valley Rail Coalition “We Need a One Seat Ride!”

The advocacy of a “one seat ride” into Manhattan for Raritan Valley riders has a long history. In 1998, the late Congressman Robert Franks fostered the establishment of the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition (RVRC), a bipartisan group formed for the specific purpose of seeking a “one seat ride” into Manhattan.

Currently, Raritan Valley line commuters destined for Midtown Manhattan must exit their diesel-powered train at Newark Penn Station and change to another train operating on the Northeast Corridor, often on a separate platform and requiring two level changes, to take them into Midtown’s Penn Station New York. Diesel-powered trains are not permitted to operate in the Hudson River tunnels.

RVRC supported the Access to the Region’s Core (ARC) project from its inception to the project’s cancellation in 2010. That project would have created two new tunnels under the Hudson River, more than doubling the number of peak hour passenger trains that could cross the river from New Jersey. Part of that project was the acquisition of unique dual-powered (diesel and electric) locomotives which would have made it possible for the Raritan Valley Line to have a one seat ride into an expanded Penn Station New York. Despite the cancellation of the ARC project, NJ Transit has gone forward with the acquisition of the dual-powered locomotives at a cost of approximately \$360 million.

After a lengthy period of testing and “debugging” these locomotives, NJ Transit has indicated that it will deploy them to the Raritan Valley, on a “pilot basis,” on certain midday off-peak weekday trains. The RVRC advocates that “one seat ride” service, should, with all deliberate speed:

- be made permanent on the midday off-peak weekday trains;
- be introduced on the balance of off-peak weekday service;
- be introduced for all weekend trains; and
- be equitably allocated to peak period weekday service

The RVRC recognizes that all the peak hour slots into and out of Penn Station New York are currently fully subscribed by other lines. (Peak hour is defined as arriving in NYC between 7:30 am and 8:30 am.) The RVRC estimates that since the Raritan Valley Line represents 10 percent of the ridership that could theoretically reach Penn Station New York, an equitable allocation to the Raritan Valley Line of peak period slots would be two peak hour trains the morning and two peak hour trains in the evening.

The RVRC will continue to engage NJ Transit management and advocate the deployment of dual-powered locomotives to achieve this level of “one seat ride” service on the Raritan Valley Line.