

Executive Summary

Justification of Perth Amboy Site

for a New Jersey Transportation Heritage Park

Introduction

“Few states can equal New Jersey’s rich transportation heritage, but, up to now, we have lacked the means to tell the story. New Jerseyans have had to go to neighboring states to learn about New Jersey’s transportation and its role in creating the New Jersey we enjoy today.” *A Master Plan for the New Jersey Transportation Heritage Center, May 2000 Executive Summary*, p.3. The New Jersey Transportation Heritage Park “will showcase the extensive history of surface transportation in New Jersey and its relationship to the development of the state.” Ibid. It will enable New Jerseyans to “enjoy their transportation heritage without having to travel outside the state as is now the case.” Ibid. Items of New Jersey heritage are displayed and / or operate in many other states and cities, notably California, Connecticut, Maine, Ohio, Pennsylvania, St. Louis, MO, Washington, DC as well as in many places around the globe.

Past Efforts at Establishing a New Jersey Transportation Museum

The process started in 1987 with the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Museum Study Commission. That Commission concluded that a NJ museum experience was long overdue. Subsequently, in 1993, the Study Commission considered proposals for host sites for the Heritage Center. In 1999 the Commission successfully received approval and funding from the State Legislature for development of a Master Plan for a site in Phillipsburg. Next, NJ TRANSIT authorized the preparation of a Master Plan for that site by a team led by Wallace Roberts Todd. Some of this background material is drawn from that Master Plan. Ultimately, the plan for the Phillipsburg site failed. In subsequent years, the United Railroad Historical Society of New Jersey (URHS), through its site selection committee, has continued its search for an appropriate site for a NJ Transportation Heritage Center.

The Heritage Center Mission

We would like to be included as one of the Museums of Perth Amboy. The New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Museum Commission adopted the following Mission Statement for a heritage center:

TO EDUCATE the general public about the important role that mass land-based transportation has played in shaping New Jersey’s social, economic and environmental character.

TO PRESERVE artifacts and records that delineate and dramatize this role, both to interpret its contributions to the general public and to support the research of transportation historians, whether professional or amateur.

TO FOSTER PUBLIC AWARENESS and appreciation of New Jersey's leadership role in the development of transportation technology.

Proposed Perth Amboy Site

Perth Amboy, "the City of Firsts," is an appropriate setting for a Transportation Heritage Park - visitors are greeted with banners: "Welcome to Historic Perth Amboy." Here the nation's oldest City Hall still in use. That City Hall was the site of New Jersey's ratification of the Bill of Rights as amendments to the US Constitution. New Jersey was the first state to ratify those amendments. Perth Amboy has a rich and varied transportation history that qualifies it as an appropriate site for a Transportation Heritage Park. That history is recited below.

The URHS site selection committee has identified a narrow strip of land which runs parallel to the east side of the NJ Transit North Jersey Coast Line (NJCL) south of Market Street. That property, owned by NJ Transit, was the former site of the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CNJ) Perth Amboy freight house, team tracks, and freight yard. See map, attached. It could be combined with a narrow strip of the former Goldberg Scrapyard, a vacant, fenced plot, running north from the Raritan River to produce the ultimate Transportation Heritage Park. This latter property is owned by the City of Perth Amboy. The length of this combined slim corridor from Market Street to the river bank is 1/2-mile. The Perth Amboy rail station stands immediately north of Market Street.

On the west side of the NJCL is the massive former site of the Raritan Copper Works (the now marginally active former facilities of Raritan River Steel). The Raritan Copper Works was among the largest electrolytic copper refineries in the world and large quantities of silver and gold were also refined there. [1939 *Anaconda Mining Co. report.*]

The proposed site of the NJ Transportation Heritage Park, being narrow and rectangular, has no intervening cross streets making it ideal for on-site operation of a Transportation Heritage Park. It contains adequate room for storage/display/operations of railroad, trolley, bus, truck and horse-drawn vehicles. On the west side of the property is approximately 1,000 feet of abandoned track from the CNJ freight yard. (This track is well worn and is probably a candidate for scrapping, although much might be re-usable in the proposed facility.) A sidetrack, which could be the delivery point for rail equipment destined for the proposed facility, enters the site from the adjacent NJCL. A Belgian block road entranceway leads from the north end of the site to Market Street.

With regard to the concern of flood exposure, Super Storm Sandy did not inundate any part of the of the proposed site.

Testing and documentation has been completed on the ground pollution of the former Goldberg Scrapyard site. The facility was closed in the 1980s and some cleanup was completed ca. 1988-9. Current status of the property: A mitigation plan has been approved by the Federal EPA and funding for the cleanup is available. The city would like the land to become a park.

Perth Amboy's Transportation Heritage

Perth Amboy's transportation heritage, with railroad, trolley, ferry and canal operations are all present in the vicinity is as follows:

- In 1755 a stage coach line was established stopping in Perth Amboy with regular service between New York and Philadelphia. Only the Perth Amboy – Bordentown segment was by land; boats were used at either end of the trip.
- New Jersey's first railroad, the Camden & Amboy, terminating just across the Raritan River in South Amboy, fully opened in 1832.
- In 1834 the Delaware & Raritan Canal began operations and vessels using it passed by Perth Amboy, continuing until 1932.
- The first railroad in town was an isolated line, the Perth Amboy & Woodbridge that connected the city to Rahway, and opened in 1869.
- In 1875 the inaugural train of the CNJ's new Elizabethport branch travelled through Perth Amboy on the NY & Long Branch Railroad. The line's bridge over the Raritan River was, at the time, the longest drawbridge in the world. (By an 1882 agreement between the CNJ and Pennsylvania Railroad, the NY & Long Branch Railroad became an independent entity open to trains of both railroads operating through Perth Amboy. This arrangement lasted until 1976.)
- Steam ferry service was introduced in the late 19th Century across Arthur Kill between Perth Amboy and Tottenville, Staten Island, where the Baltimore & Ohio's Staten Island Rapid Transit Line terminated. The service operated until 1963; a replica of the ticket office has been constructed and is used as a small museum.
- Streetcar lines began operating in Perth Amboy and in neighboring municipalities in 1900, when the Perth Amboy Railroad started by operating 3.8 miles of lines. The trolley system expanded and ultimately became part of the Public Service Railway. Later, Central Jersey Traction Co. provided a trolley connection to South Amboy and points south. Trolleys operated in Perth Amboy until 1933 and successor bus operations continue today.
- The first official outbound train from New York Penn Station in 1910 was a local to Perth Amboy.
- Perth Amboy claims the first airmail delivery in the world, a 1912 hydroplane trip from South Amboy to Perth Amboy.
- The CNJ's famous *Blue Comet* train between Jersey City and Atlantic City traveled through Perth Amboy on its runs between 1929 and 1941. Many special excursion trains have operated through Perth Amboy over the years.

Collections

URHS owns more than 70 pieces of railroad rolling stock, many of which are suitable for display at Perth Amboy. These include:

- a restored Pennsylvania RR GG-1 electric locomotive;
- a surviving Pennsylvania RR MP 54 passenger coach;
- the open end observation car from the CNJ's Blue Comet train.

Other available items:

- a restored trolley car, owned by the North Jersey Electric Railway Historical Society, similar to those which operated in Perth Amboy;
- a preserved trolley car, built in 1906 in Elizabeth, operated in Lisbon, Portugal
- a collection of vintage buses (most in operating condition) are owned by the Friends of the New Jersey Transportation Heritage Center (NJTHC), a number of which operated in or through Perth Amboy;
- a vintage taxi cab pledged to NJTHC;
- restored antique trucks owned by New Jersey members of the American Truck Historical Society and the Antique Truck Club of America,
- vintage fire trucks and military vehicles.

In addition, Perth Amboy would be an excellent location for the display and storage of two surviving PATH cars recovered after the collapse of the World Trade Center Twin Towers. They have been stored by the Port Authority of NY & NJ since 9-11-01 and are in need of a home.

Also, NJTHC possesses more than two miles of good relay rail, two trolley track loops, tie plates, joint bars, track bolts, spikes, switch machines, good relay ties, gauge bars and 40 original (ca. 1830) Camden & Amboy cut stone sleepers. Two other items preserved from the CNJ Elizabethport shops would be useful at the Perth Amboy site: a full set of cast iron letters "CENTRAL RAILROAD OF NEW JERSEY" and a 60-ft. tall steel flag pole.

Accessibility

Perth Amboy is highly accessible by auto via the New Jersey Turnpike, Garden State Parkway, US 1 & 9, Route 35, I-287 and Route 440 which connects to the Outerbridge Crossing to Staten Island. The proposed site is within easy walking distance of the NJ TRANSIT North Jersey Coast Line Perth Amboy station, which is frequently served seven days a week with connections to nearly all of the NJ TRANSIT rail and light rail lines (Newark LRT, HBLRT and RIVERLine) and PATH via the Northeast Corridor at Rahway, Newark, Secaucus Junction and Trenton. The site is also accessible by the #116 interstate bus from the Port Authority Bus Terminal and a number of intra-New Jersey bus routes, which stop at the Perth Amboy rail station.

Design Concept

A 1939 street scene arrayed along a linear roadway paved with Belgian blocks that could allow historic locomotives, trolleys, buses, jitneys, taxis, trucks, fire apparatus, and military vehicles, to operate in parallel;

Park advertising facing the North Jersey Coast Line; A diner / observation car for restaurant overlooking river.

Visitor Experience

Interpretative displays of rolling stock (e.g., GG-1 locomotive; MP 54 passenger coach), signs and other transportation artifacts (e.g. cast iron “RARITAN RIVER” and roadway signs; vintage mileposts; Camden & Amboy stone “sleepers”; eight tons of steel artifacts from the recently demolished Victory Bridge over the Raritan River).

Internal ride experiences such as an electric trolley shuttle and other historic vehicles between NJ TRANSIT Perth Amboy station and the river front.

Infrastructure and Industrial History: interpretative display about neighboring Raritan Copper Works (ca. 1939) and Victory Bridge.

Observation of NJ TRANSIT operations on adjacent NJCL; view of Transportation Heritage Park and displays.

Visit preserved nearby former Perth Amboy CNJ station building at 210 Lewis Street.

Permanent archive in Perth Amboy of libraries, photographs, and research materials owned by NJTHC, North Jersey Electric Railway Historical Society, and others.

Future Phases

A display building for vintage buses, a jitney, a taxi, trucks, military vehicles, fire apparatus, etc.

Replica interlocking tower built with preserved spiral stairs, the armstrong interlocking signal hardware, vintage wooden chair and CNJ coal stove.

A Model Railroad layout could be built depicting the varied rail operations in the immediate vicinity.

A Youth Transportation Technology Center would educate local high school students about past and current technologies in use in transportation modes, giving the students a strong grounding in electronics and mechanical applications as well as practical skills, OR, could be a satellite location of the nearby Rutgers University National Transit Institute / Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. Either could help in potentially leading to good careers in the transportation sector.

Heritage Tourism Opportunities

The NJ Transportation Heritage Park at Perth Amboy would encourage heritage tourism and generate economic development opportunities, especially in conjunction with the Transit Oriented Development planned for the Perth Amboy Station area. The leisure and hospitality industry, which includes heritage tourism, is New Jersey’s third largest industry, accounting for more than \$35 billion in annual revenues. According to a recent study by the New Jersey Historic Trust, \$2.6 billion can be attributed directly to heritage tourism. Of this, \$1.5 billion consists of direct labor income to approximately 38,000 workers. Moreover, in 2012, heritage tourism generated an overall tax impact of \$715 million, of which \$335 million was comprised of state and local taxes. The unique niche

of heritage tourism allows municipalities to benefit financially from the rich historic assets within their borders, while providing clear economic benefits to the entire state.

Drawing visitors from outside municipal boundaries is one of the most financially rewarding components of economic development centered on heritage tourism sites. According to the New Jersey Historic Trust, approximately 46 percent of the more than ten million visitors who come to New Jersey's heritage tourism sites come from a distance of 50 or more miles. This translates into a significant demand for goods, services and accommodations at the municipal level, paid for with dollars brought in from outside the region.

A great example of the volume of visitors that can be drawn to a historic venue is nearby Twin Lights. The site attracts more than 100,000 visitors each year. *The text in the above three paragraphs was strongly influenced by a NJ Feature article in the May 2014 issue of New Jersey Municipalities, "Maximizing the Morris Canal" by Dr. Gerry Scharfenberger.*

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