

# INSTITUTE FOR RATIONAL URBAN MOBILITY, INC.

George Haikalis  
President

One Washington Square Village, Suite 5D  
New York, NY 10012 212-475-3394  
geo@irum.org www.irum.org

## Testimony to NJ Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, March 25, 2010, Camden

The Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc. (IRUM) is a NYC-based not-for-profit corporation concerned with reducing traffic congestion and improving the livability of dense urban areas.

IRUM calls on this committee to carefully review the fiscal and environmental consequences of NJ Transit's \$10.4 billion ARC/Mass Transit Tunnel plan – the state's largest public works project. IRUM, together with many other organizations advocating for more sustainable transport in the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area, have called on the Christie Administration to reshape this plan so that it is safer, serves the riding public better, diverts more motorists from the state's overcrowded roadways and river crossings, buttresses support for longer term economic goals, and, most importantly in these times of critical shortfall in state revenues, reduces the cost of constructing this important facility by as much as 70%.

How could this committee not be willing to give a fair and impartial review to a plan that provides better service to the public at less cost to the taxpayer?

Now is the time to do this review. The two largest tunneling contracts (\$928 million budgeted) that were to be awarded in the closing hours of the Corzine Administration have been delayed four to six months due to procedural issues affecting eminent domain. While IRUM fully endorses the concept for increased rail capacity across the Hudson River, it supports a more sensible approach to linking the tunnels to existing railway infrastructure on both sides of the river.

### A better plan for the tunnels – NY side – Moynihan/Penn Station First

Rail advocates have asked NJ Transit to change the New York side of ARC – replace the current deep cavern plan with the *Moynihan/Penn Station First* alternative: the new tunnels would link directly to existing platforms and tracks in an improved and expanded Moynihan/Penn Station as a first stage to completing a longer term plan to reach Manhattan's East Side –current and future nexus of Midtown Manhattan and the destination of a large share of New Jersey commuters. The Federal government has already stepped to the plate to complete the funding of the first phase of Moynihan improvements, adding more stairways and escalators and widening concourses to improve passenger handling. Both states must work closely with Amtrak to develop a plan for a second round of Federally-funded improvements and also to advance plans for "through-running" at Penn Station, which has the potential to increase capacity through the existing tunnels by up to 25% and reduce operating costs.

Connecting the new tunnels to the existing station and moving forward with planning for the connection to East Midtown avoids the need to construct a costly deep cavern station 175 feet below 34<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. This would produce a net capital cost savings of \$3 billion and greatly reduce recurring operating costs of maintaining escalators and ventilating plants. New Jersey commuters would enjoy a four to five minute saving in travel time in each direction and ten minutes per trip when transferring to other trains at Moynihan/Penn Station. NJ Transit and Amtrak would improve service reliability with the flexibility and redundancy provided by operating trains either through the existing century-old tunnels or the new tunnels. Especially important in this age of concern about security, fire safety and emergency egress experts have pointed out the great risks involved in evacuating a deep cavern station in the event of a fire or willful act (see attached letter to U.S. Department of Homeland Security).

### A better plan for the tunnels – NJ side – the *Hoboken Alternative*

Giving serious consideration to the *Moynihan/Penn Station First* alternative requires that the New Jersey side of ARC and the ARC-required Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project (Portal) west of ARC also be reviewed – when the ARC connection to Penn Station was removed from the project, the design of the two new ARC/Portal tracks in the Meadowlands changed from creating an efficient, reliable 4-track North East Corridor (NEC) operation to a separate 8-mile NJ Transit-only railroad south of the current 2-track NEC from Harrison to Manhattan.

Given a review of ARC in New Jersey and Portal, a far reaching alternative that encompasses both projects and has the potential for cost savings in excess of \$3 billion and enormous transportation benefits – the *Hoboken Alternative* – should be developed and evaluated carefully.

When NJ Transit officials first announced their detailed plan for the new tunnels, they claimed that a “bow” was needed in the tunnel alignment to gain additional depth under the river bottom. The tunnel was to pass through the northern portion of Hoboken. Rail advocates pointed out that it was possible to continue the tunnel under the river further south and tie into existing NJ Transit rail infrastructure in New Jersey. This routing would avoid the costly and disruptive construction of new tracks and viaducts across the Hackensack Meadowlands and a new bridge across the Hackensack River.

When this plan was discussed with city officials in Jersey City and Hoboken, they quickly grasped the benefits of routing trains that would use the new tunnels through a new below-grade on-line station adjacent to the existing Hoboken Terminal, and endorsed this alternative in the environmental proceedings (see attached letters from Jersey City, Hoboken and Newport). Enhanced access to New Jersey’s economic engine – the Jersey waterfront – would strengthen the viability of this district, which is also suffering during the recession. The current plan, which bypasses Hoboken, reduces Hoboken ridership and train service, beginning a downward spiral of diminished ridership and renewed calls for more service cuts.

With an on-line through station, state-owned property at the Hoboken Terminal would be cleared of rail tracks and an environmentally sensible plan devised in cooperation with adjacent communities, maximizing the value and the value-capture potential of this asset. The historic terminal and train sheds would be restored and preserved, preferably as a working railroad museum.

With new leadership in New Jersey and at NJ Transit, the current delay in awarding ARC tunneling contracts and the request of rail advocates to implement the *Moynihan/Penn Station First* alternative on the New York side of the ARC project, now is an excellent time to give the *Hoboken Alternative* a careful review (see attached *Hoboken Alternative Report*).

### Summary

In closing, IRUM wishes the NJ Senate strength and courage as it deals with an economic crisis of unprecedented dimensions. By giving an opportunity for a wider range of voices to be heard, including those from the throughout the region, this committee can use its authority to explore fiscal options that have not been reviewed in the past.

- George Haikalis, President, IRUM

attachments