

# Op-Ed: Eager for light rail line in South Jersey. Here's why

JOSEPH RUSSELL | MARCH 31, 2021 | [OPINION](#), [TRANSPORTATION](#)

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Joseph Russell

For years, regional leaders have discussed plans to bring back passenger trains to the rail corridor running between Glassboro in Gloucester County and Philadelphia by way of downtown Camden, serving towns like Pitman, Wenonah, Woodbury, and Gloucester City along the way. Last month, project managers released the long-awaited final environmental impact study, an important document on the road to construction. At the same time, the South Jersey Transportation Authority committed \$200 million for preliminary engineering work, and NJ Transit announced a \$250 million project to rehabilitate Camden's Walter Rand Transportation Center into a modern

mixed-use transit hub. Taken together, these investments represent an exciting leap forward in the progress of this project.

One of the most important benefits of this line is that it will provide residents of Gloucester County with a reliable option for getting around without the need of a car. Commuters who spend time fighting traffic on Route 55 to get to jobs in Camden and Philadelphia will be able to ditch their car commutes. Workers with unreliable access to cars will have a more reliable way to get to suburban jobs. When live events come back, the line will get people there without the hassles of traffic and high parking fees. Both ends of the line will serve the growing regional educational institutions of Rowan University, Rutgers–Camden, Cooper University Hospital, with collaborations between them responsible for the current building boom in downtown Camden. And thanks to connections with PATCO, the River Line, and NJ Transit buses, riders can transfer on to Amtrak and the airport, which opens the doors to unlimited travel for business and pleasure.

These benefits will enable families to own fewer cars, if they own one at all. Having fewer cars to insure, fuel, inspect, and repair adds up to thousands of dollars of savings per year. It will also improve people's physical health and mental well-being. In a study entitled "Traffic stress, vehicular burden and well-being: A multilevel analysis," researchers at the universities of Michigan and Washington found a relationship between traffic stress and negative health outcomes.

Beyond the personal benefits, light rail stations located downtown will bolster local economies that tend to include far more locally owned businesses than strip malls on the periphery. They will help foster a pride of place, attracting people who want to live near transit and support those locally owned businesses. Transit stations can be enormous assets to local business districts, helping make them more vibrant.

## It could take more than 10,000 cars off the road

The environmental improvements are also important. The line is projected to take more than 10,000 cars off the road, resulting in less climate-changing carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere. As a growing number of young people signal climate change as one of the most important social-justice issues of our time, a step like this to curb CO2 emissions is definitely one worth taking.

Finally, projects that extend reliable transit into suburban areas work to overturn decades of disadvantage experienced by those living in urban centers. People without access to private cars will have a more reliable way to get to suburban jobs. According to a study from the Brookings Institution, more high-skilled jobs are accessible by transit than jobs in low- and middle-skill industries. This “points to potentially large accessibility problems for workers in growing low-income suburban communities, who on average can access only about 22 percent of metropolitan jobs in low- and middle-skill industries.” The report’s conclusion is that metropolitan leaders “coordinate strategies regarding land use, economic development, and housing with transit decisions in order to ensure that transit reaches more people and more jobs efficiently.”

When the trains finally start running, the Glassboro-Camden light rail line will be a benefit to workers and students, shoppers and restaurant-goers, theater lovers and sports fans. It will bring back the legacy of passenger rail that built so many of our favorite historic towns in the 19th and 20th centuries and offer a vision of a more equitable and environmentally sound future for our children and the generations to come.