

# Atlantic City Rail Line needs improvements after its return, says Joseph Kelly

Joseph Kelly For The Press

One of Gov. Murphy's first agenda items after taking office was fixing NJ Transit. He ordered an audit of the agency. More than a year later and NJ Transit has new leadership. He then signed a law to overhaul management and oversight at NJ Transit.

Days before signing the bill, Murphy said, "In one sentence, this reform puts into law the simple concept that NJ Transit works for commuters and not the other way around."

Less than nine months later the Atlantic City Rail Line was completely shutdown for much needed installation of positive train control, the automatic braking system that engages in emergency situations. After multiple delays, the rail line is scheduled to open in May.

Last week Gov. Phil Murphy joined legislators and state transportation leaders to highlight "critical investments" that his FY2020 budget proposal will make in NJ Transit. The budget includes a \$100 million increase in the subsidy (to \$407 million) for NJ Transit and a commitment to no fare hikes.

Murphy stated, "We need to get NJ Transit right to make sure that people can get around our state and get to work without the constant fear of delay or cancellation."

"Gov. Murphy's continued commitment to NJ Transit has been crucial to our efforts to begin restoring the transit system into the world-class organization our customers deserve," said NJ Transit Executive Director Kevin Corbett. "We will expand upon the successes we achieved last year with a continued focus on our core mission of providing safe and reliable transportation throughout New Jersey."

The Greater Atlantic City Chamber applauds Murphy for this renewed focus on safe, affordable and efficient mass transportation. And we greatly appreciate the commitment to this effort by Rep. Jeff Van Drew, state Sen. Chris Brown and Assemblymen Vince Mazzeo and John Armato.

We urge Murphy, legislators and state transportation leaders to not forget about South Jersey and a rail line that accommodates three quarters of a million commuters on an annual basis. And there is potential to grow.

NJ Transit hired LTK Engineering Services to complete a 2014 study "focused on transportation improvements targeted to meet the future needs of Atlantic City" that identified needed investments in the Atlantic City Rail Line (ACRL), including adding stations, such as the Atlantic City International Airport, and more train service. Various scenarios were suggested. None were implemented.

At the very least, these three should be seriously considered:

Make the Atlantic City Rail Line, with a complimentary bus or shuttle schedule, commuter-friendly. The service needs to provide efficient arrival and departure times as well as increase frequency. A schedule must accommodate casino employees coming into Atlantic City and commuters going to Philadelphia in the morning.

There are hundreds of job openings in the casino and hospitality industry. Having a friendlier schedule would provide some of the New Jersey's largest employers a greater pipeline of potential employees and Philadelphia with additional workforce opportunities. It is impossible to increase ridership without an effective schedule.

Enhance the promotion of the rail line for tourism purposes. Entertainment. Dining. Nightlife. Retail. Arts and culture. Professional sports. The beach. The city. Both cities have a plethora of tourism attractions of high interest. Events like the Philadelphia Flower Show and Atlantic City Airshow would benefit from this service. Create a joint campaign between Philadelphia and Atlantic City to encourage the use of rail service as an easy mode of transportation to get to and from favorite activities.

Connect to Atlantic City International Airport. The proposed Atlantic City Airport Rail Station is projected to attract significant new ridership to the ACRL by providing access to major regional employment and education centers at the airport, Stockton University, AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center in Galloway, and the FAA Tech Center. The proposed station would enhance multimodal connections in southern New Jersey and provide convenient access to the airport from both Philadelphia and Atlantic City.

Investing in NJ Transit is a good thing. However, the devil is in the details. What will the AC Rail Line look like when it gets back on track May 23? What will it look like in the future?

We must continue to fight for this rail line, so the economic growth and stability of our region doesn't get derailed.

Joseph Kelly, of Mays Landing, is president of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber.