

# Diesel Cars Sought by Transportation Board For Proposed County-Wide Light Rail System

By SUSAN M. DYCKMAN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH — A cross-county rail link from Elizabeth to Plainfield would offer Union County residents an appealing alternative to county roadways and existing public transportation.

On paper, the proposal from Raytheon Engineers and Constructors for Union County's cross-county light rail link from Elizabeth to Plainfield looks great — with seven stops west of Elizabeth at Roselle/Roselle Park, Cranford, Garwood, Westfield, Fanwood, Netherwood and Plainfield.

A cross-county rail link will simplify commuter access to Northeast Corridor trains and the Raritan Valley train line. It will also facilitate residents' movement through towns across Union County to the new Elizabethport Jersey Gardens mall, to ferry service to New York City and to Newark International Airport.

The proposed three-stage project was designed by Princeton-based Raytheon which also created the Hudson-Bergen light rail system. The firm's affiliation with county officials was made possible by state legislation passed in 1997 that called for formation of public-private partnerships.

Phase One will tie mid-town Elizabeth to Newark International Airport by rail. The 11-mile link would connect with Elizabethport, Lot D at the airport (where the monorail ends), businesses at Interchange 13-A of the New Jersey Turnpike and mid-town Elizabeth.

The proposed nine-mile Elizabeth to Plainfield link makes up the second and third phases of the project. Phase Two would connect mid-town Elizabeth to Cranford using the former Central New Jersey right-of-way. Phase Three would extend the line further west to Plainfield using NJ Transit property along the Raritan Valley line.

The Raytheon proposal for Union County, which calls for the use of electrified rail cars to transport passengers, was two years in the making.

Opponents of Raytheon's plan for the Elizabeth-Cranford-Plainfield link are quick to point to federal regulations prohibiting electric light-rail cars from sharing tracks with heavy rail — something they would need to do (under Raytheon's proposal) to utilize the existing Raritan Valley tracks that run west from Cranford to Plainfield.

A resolution recently passed by the Union County Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) stated: "...it is questionable that the Raytheon electric light-rail proposal would be extended west of Elizabeth to Cranford since no firm plans or allocations of resources are in place to do so, and it is highly unlikely that it would ever reach Plainfield since the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) prohibits the intermixing of light and heavy (NJ Transit commuter trains) rail on the same track with the same general time frame."

"Federal regulations don't permit light rail on heavy rail," said Assembly Richard H. Bagger of Westfield (R-22nd). "That's why public discussion on the issue has always been frustrating to me. It's always been outside the realm of possibility."

"What is an option is what the county transportation board has presented — a diesel, self-propelled train that could go back and forth between Elizabeth and Plainfield. That's a real

possibility, in connection with the light rail," he continued.

Assemblyman Bagger pointed out that the light rail project, as outlined, is likely to go ahead in Elizabeth and the port area, and "That's a good thing," he stated.

The TAB's resolution asks the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders to consider using NJ Transit-operated diesel, self-propelled cars (DMUs) that meet federal guidelines to provide one-seat service from Plainfield to Elizabethport.

Concerned that most of the focus and funding for the project is concentrated on Phase One's Elizabeth to airport segment, the board is also recommending that Phases Two and Three (Elizabeth to Plainfield) be developed concurrently with the first leg of the project.

According to Phyllis Moore of Plainfield, the obvious benefits to using DMUs from Elizabeth to Plainfield are "it's cheaper and faster."

Ms. Moore, who said she was "removed" from the TAB in April, and Rahway resident and current TAB member Paul Mulligan appealed to Union County officials to consider the needs of all residents in their recent letter to *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains and Fanwood*.

"We could get our piece done faster than Phase One," said Ms. Moore, during a telephone interview. "We would need an environmental impact study, but it's already a railroad right-of-way. The port piece is starting from scratch."

"It would provide everybody in the county with a connection to the Northeast Corridor Line. It's certainly likely that transit access to the airport would boost property values. It means added mobility," added Ms. Moore, who recalled her initial reaction to the cross-county rail link idea in 1994: "Wow, a way to get to jury duty."

In addition, said Ms. Moore, "It means economic benefits to the towns along the line. It enhances existing business and brings in new business. That enhances property values."

"It just makes so much sense," she concluded, "and it won't cost that much money, a fraction of what the other (Raytheon plan) would cost."

Under either plan, the old Central New Jersey tracks that run between Elizabeth and Cranford would need to be rebuilt, but the DMU alternative would eliminate the cost of electrification.

County administrators are expected to comment on the TAB's position this week. After that, the resolution will be forwarded to the freeholders for review.

"Westfield would be best served by a combination of both — DMUs on heavy rail, then a connection with the light rail," said Assemblyman Bagger.

"The first objective for me, as it should be for Westfield, Scotch Plains and Fanwood, is to enhance and improve our commuter rail service," he added. "No matter what we do in improving transportation around the county, nothing should have the impact of harming our rail commutation to Newark and New York City."

## Westfield Rescue Squad Organizes Blood Drive

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Volunteer Rescue Squad will host a blood drive for the Blood Center of New Jersey on Sunday, July 25, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the rescue squad at 335 Watterson Street.

All residents of Westfield are encouraged to participate.

Grace Kowalski, the coordinator for the blood drive, stated that there is always a great need for donated blood throughout the state. "The community of Westfield," she said, "can help to alleviate this need by donating on July 25 at the rescue squad building."

According to Richard Jackson

of the rescue squad, the entire country is currently confronted with a shortage in blood. Donating through the community blood bank will help to alleviate the burden on the already depleted blood supplies.

All blood drive donors will receive a free "Blood Drop Baby Beanie" as a thank you gift.

The Westfield Volunteer Rescue Squad is an all-volunteer organization serving the community of Westfield. For information on becoming a volunteer, please call (908) 233-2501 or stop by the rescue squad building.

## Scotch Plains Democrats To Honor Mayor Samuel

SCOTCH PLAINS — Scotch Plains Mayor Geri M. Samuel will be honored at a pool party fundraiser on Sunday, July 25, from 2 to 7 p.m. at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Beckerman in Scotch Plains.

"The purpose of the party is twofold," stated Dr. Walter Boright, Scotch Plains Democratic Municipal Chairman. "First the Democratic Party wishes to honor Mayor Samuel for the positive leadership she has demonstrated. Secondly, the event will be our first fundraising endeavor for the upcoming November election when voters will have the opportunity to elect someone to fill the three-year unexpired term of the late Franklin P. Donatelli."

Mr. Donatelli, a member of the Township Council who passed away this past May, has been replaced by his wife, Lorraine, to sit on the governing body for the remainder of the year. Voters will elect a council member in November to serve the remaining three years of Mr. Donatelli's term.

Dr. Boright reported that Deputy Mayor Tarquin Jay Bromley and Councilwoman Donatelli will be serving as honorary chairmen of the event.

Tickets are \$15 per person or \$35 per family.

Dr. Boright will co-chair the event along with Richard Samuel, Joyce Festa, Samuel Manigault and Ellen Baron.

For tickets, please call any member of the committee or (908) 754-7575. Checks for the number of tickets desired may be mailed to Pool Party, 1557 Ashbrook Drive, Scotch Plains, 07076.

### Area Junior Statesmen To Hold Car Wash

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Junior Statesmen of America Chapter of Scotch Plains will hold a car wash on Saturday, July 24, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Exxon on the corner of Terrill Road and South Avenue.

The car wash is a fundraiser for the group to pay for such activities as attending and sponsoring conferences and funding general operations.

The Junior Statesmen of America Chapter of Scotch Plains members participate in debate competitions and mock government events throughout the school year.

## Westfield Sidewalk Sales Set for July 15, 16 and 17

WESTFIELD — Downtown Westfield will hold the Westfield Sidewalk Sales from Thursday, July 15, to Saturday, July 17.

This summer clearance event will also feature Face Painting and Animal Balloons by "Sparkle the Clown" for children on Thursday and Friday from 1 to 4 p.m. and on Saturday from 11 to 4 p.m.

Musical performances by the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts on East Broad Street will also be held.

The Westfield Art Association,

celebrating 75 years of shows to the community, will have artists displaying their work on the sidewalks throughout downtown. Barbara Zietchick will demonstrate Gocco Printing and show her work from 1 to 4 p.m. all three days.

The Westfield Sidewalk Sale Days are sponsored by the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) and the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce.

For further information, please contact the DWC at (908) 789-9444, or the Chamber at (908) 233-3021.



LOOKING FOR SHELTER... People for Animals, a nonprofit animal welfare organization serving New Jersey, will sponsor a pet adoption event on Saturday, July 17, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the PetsMart store, 1022 Route 22 East at West End Avenue in North Plainfield. Many cats and lots of kittens will be available. Among these pets will be Allegra and Allison, nine week old female kittens who have distemper vaccinations, are wormed and test negative to Feline Immunodeficiency Virus and feline leukemia. To adopt a pet, or for information, please call (908) 688-1073 or visit [www.petfinder.org/shelters/NJ17.html](http://www.petfinder.org/shelters/NJ17.html).

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