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Letters to the Editor

County Should Consider Diesel Cars To Ensure Light Rail Becomes Reality

The proposed Union County light-rail line will truly be a project for the people — if Union County officials will consider a compromise proposal advocated by concerned citizens. If they won't, it may be a pipe dream.

The original, and exciting, concept of the cross-county rail link was to unify Union County by rail from Plainfield and the western towns to the emerging growth centers in Elizabeth and Elizabethport, as well as to connect with Newark International Airport and a ferry to lower Manhattan.

In this concept the light-rail line would add stops in the west end of Plainfield and at Garwood, which now has limited service; riders from the west heading for Trenton, Philadelphia, or the shore would be able to transfer to the Northeast Corridor or New Jersey Coast line in Elizabeth; congestion on our over-crowded roads would be relieved; and, with airport access, property values across the county would rise.

This concept now seems to be lost, however, in the county's current focus on parking decks and electric light-rail shuttles from Elizabeth to the airport to ease airport parking.

They call this shuttle piece Phase 1 of the project. Phases 2 (Elizabeth to Cranford) and 3 (Cranford to Plainfield) are supposed to follow sequentially as extensions of Phase 1, but there is no definite plan or funding allocation for either of them.

The cost and time involved with electrification mean that it will take hundreds of millions of dollars and another 10 years or more to run an electric line all the way to Plainfield — if, in fact, it ever gets there.

As a further complication, electric light-rail cars do not meet Federal Railroad Administration safety standards for sharing tracks with heavy rail.

Thus, Phase 3 could not run on the Raritan Valley tracks between Cranford and Plainfield, and no feasible alternative route has yet been, or is likely to be, identified.

Phase 1, in the current plan, will probably take five years to complete at a cost of \$200 million or more, with no direct benefit at its completion to residents west of the Elizabeth River.

During these five years passengers on the Northeast Corridor line (including Middlesex and Mercer County residents) will obtain the benefits of airport access via an extension of the airport monorail to their line. Union County residents will have to wait.

Proposed solutions to these problems meet both the original and the new county goals. First, proceed with Phase 1 as planned, but for Phases 2 and 3 (Plainfield-Cranford-Elizabeth) use diesel cars (called DMUs).

There are DMU cars now available that meet Federal safety standards, so the line can use Raritan Valley tracks between Plainfield and Cranford and eliminate the need for new construction there. The old Jersey Central tracks between Cranford and Elizabeth will

still need to be rebuilt, but the time and cost of electrification will be eliminated.

Second—and key, start both ends of the line at the same time. Some Federal money has been allocated for a cross-county rail link, so split it between Phase 1 and Phases 2 and 3 to get both projects going.

With the implementation of these solutions Phases 2 and 3 could be up and running by the time Phase 1 is complete, and a fraction of the cost of Phase 1. Leasing rather than purchasing DMU cars could lower the cost still further.

Therefore, we urge the County Manager and the Board of Chosen Freeholders to give top priority to the needs of the Union County residents they serve and consider these proposals seriously.

Residents can make their wishes known by contacting their county government, their mayors, state legislators and Congressional representatives. Together, we can achieve what's best for Union County.

Paul Mulligan,
Rahway
Phyllis Mason, Plainfield



FALL GUY

Early in this century, professional wrestling was a highly honorable and legitimate sport. Promoters, however, bent on improving the spectacle's popularity, took steps to assure that matches would be more exciting. The result was the fall guy, and the fans certainly "fell" for it.

A fall in wrestling is registered when the ultimate winner causes the loser's shoulders to touch the mat for a count of three. When promoters decided to make the matches more theatrical, one wrestler was selected in advance to deliberately take a fall. By so doing, the loser, who was called the fall guy, made the champ look good and improved the entertainment value and, thus, the monetary draw of the matches.

Fall guy is no longer confined to wrestling parlance. It has become a figure of speech that is defined as "a scapegoat; gullible victim or dupe." What this world really needs is not more fall guys, but more people who are, figuratively speaking, not afraid to stand up and fight for their beliefs.

Preserving Traffic Circle is Futile; Let's Move Ahead With D.O.T. Project

I was stunned at the positions of Bonnie Danser, Chairwoman of the Westfield Preservation Commission, and Dorothy Guzzo, of the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, with regard to the Westfield traffic circle in *The Westfield Leader's* article of June 17.

It's quite apparent that these women do not commute through the circle on their way to work each day.

They are worried that a proposed D.O.T. project aimed at smoothing traffic flow would have "adverse architectural effects," and claim that the circle itself is a historical place.

To these women, I ask, "What is it about this circular mass of concrete and asphalt that we need to preserve? Did Washington hold off the British at this location, or was this the site at which Westfield was incorporated in 1794?"

Each day, I pass through the circle twice, and every time I traverse it unscathed, I thank the Lord and assume that today must not have been the day on which fate has not scheduled my accident. But it's only a matter of time for every motorist, bicyclist and pedestrian.

East Broad and West Broad Streets, South Avenue and Waterson Street and Westfield Avenue all converge at this spot — a place where law, order and courtesy are no where to be found. Defensive driving will only get you so far at this intersection.

I can't speak for the "ambiance" that Ms. Danser says the circle provides,

but I do know that I've been cut off, flipped off, yelled at, delayed, inconvenienced and almost hit on many occasions.

Her claim that the circle should not be altered because it is only a problem during rush hours is like saying we shouldn't spend money on snow plows, because we only need them when it snows. Let's have a reality check and move forward with the D.O.T. plan.

Jeff Forbes
Westfield

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Graduation Time Gives Communities A Chance to Focus on Achievements

Over the past few months, the mass media has been bogged down by stories of school violence and now on gun legislation. Thus, it is refreshing that we can focus on graduation season, which is now in full bloom.

The blowing of horns and decorating of cars are only the visual part of graduation night. The countless hours high school students spend today on studying and athletics, holding down part-time jobs and playing an active part in their community, often go unnoticed. Graduation night is a chance for our schools to recognize the achievements of this year's graduating classes as a whole.

The past 13 years have just been a starting point for the Class of 1999 graduates. For those headed to college, the next four years should be a very rewarding experience. We encourage this fall's freshman college students to get involved in extracurricular programs and to take advantage of available internships. Remember, this time in life only occurs once.

To mark the achievements of this year's graduates, this newspaper has been publishing articles on the many scholarships that have been awarded to Westfield and Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School seniors, as well as honors received by those already in college, over the past few weeks.

Whether it be the local Rotarians, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Scholarship Foundation, the Woman's Club of Westfield, College Women's Club of Westfield, the Westfield Boosters Association, the Scotch Plains Business and Professional Association (SPBPA) and the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Veterans of Foreign Wars, just to name a few, it is nice that local students' academic achievements have been fully recognized by these groups.

The annual Pancake Day sponsored by the Westfield Rotary Club and the yearly Dinner-Dance and Clas-

sic Car Show hosted by the SPBPA are just two examples of the many groups which conduct fundraisers to generate moneys for college scholarships.

This past Sunday, Westfield High School held its commencement exercise for 289 graduates. Listening to the words of alumnus Richard H. Bagger, now a State Assemblyman, the class members were encouraged to chart their own destinies. Additionally, they were told to find careers they enjoy and also to be active participants in their community.

Dr. Robert G. Petix, Principal of WHS since the early 1980s, cited the Class of 1999 as being "one of inclusion." Their open-mindedness, he observed, is a legacy they have left for underclassmen at their school.

Meanwhile, 240 graduates will don caps and gowns tomorrow night as they graduate from Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School. This graduation is the first for Principal Dr. David Heisey since he succeeded Dr. Terry K. Riegel, now retired. Dr. Riegel had served as Principal for 26 years.

Eighty-six percent of the senior class will continue their education in the fall, with the bulk of that number attending four-year colleges. The Westfield High School Guidance Department will release information on graduates headed to college within the next two weeks. Ninety-four percent of the 1998 graduates at WHS continued their education.

We encourage this year's graduates to stay focused on their chosen career path. Also, by getting involved in a college activity, such as sports or student government, students will learn the importance of balancing their time constraints between course work and other obligations. This will help set the course for successful careers.

Best of luck to the Class of 1999.

Teacher at Brunner Elementary Thankful for Planters of Garden

Thanks to many who helped our garden and our children grow.

In 1996, funds that I was awarded for a district mini grant enabled me to begin creating a garden outside my classroom. The following year I was able to continue and expand the project with grant funds from the Education Enrichment Foundation of Scotch Plains and Fanwood.

The outdoor space adjacent to my pre-kindergarten classroom has become an integral part of our learning environment. Concepts like caring, patience and commitment sprout up alongside math, motor skills, language skills and social skills.

Here, science is learned through exploration and discovery. Love and care for the world blossom along with self-esteem as the children enjoy the results of their work.

This year, we were able to keep on growing with the help and support of many wonderful people in the community. Through the AT&T Cares program, Sandra Cepparulo, an AT&T employee and pre-K parent, adopted our garden project. She was instrumental in making contacts for donations and organizing a garden work day at school.

She spent many hours working with me and with the children in the garden. Randall Miller, General Manager of Parker Greenhouses Farm and Garden Center in Scotch Plains, shared his expertise and ideas and helped us make contacts in the community.

The very generous donation of perennials by Williams Nursery in Westfield made it possible for every child in each of the eight pre-K classes at Brunner School to actively participate in the Garden Work Day.

Resident Thanks Councilman Albano For Acting on Repair of Gallows Hill

I would take this opportunity to thank a member of our Town Council, Matthew P. Albano (Ward 2). The residents of Gallows Hill Road learned that the road was being considered for repair and widening by the town.

We became quite concerned, as we did not want to see increased speed and traffic, as well as tree and property loss. I immediately telephoned Matt to discuss this with him. Matt was extremely responsive and suggested that all the residents sit down and discuss it with him.

In this preliminary meeting, we voiced our concerns and Matt suggested a second meeting be held with key players in town. He arranged this meeting to include himself, Chief of Police Anthony J. Scutti, Town Engineer Kenneth B. Marsh and Councilman James J. Gruba, also of the Second Ward.

This second meeting proved to be quite productive. It allowed us to view and discuss the road plans directly with Mr. Marsh to voice our concerns about the speeding that occurs on the road to Chief Scutti, as well as to come up with

some suggestions to curtail it. Everyone concerned left the second meeting quite pleased with the new road plans and the solutions for the speeding issues.

We now have additional speed limit and children crossing signs as well as an increase in police presence on the road to catch speeders. Trees have been planted to make up for the few that we will be losing and we will have a smooth road and new cubing.

Hats off to Matt for cutting through the red tape and getting the job done efficiently and to everyone's satisfaction. Also, a special thank you to Chief Scutti and Sergeant Carl Geis for acting quickly and getting additional traffic signs posted. I have to say I am quite impressed with Councilman Albano for his responsiveness to his constituents and to Chief Scutti and Mr. Marsh for taking the time to come out, to not only speak with us, but to listen and respond to what we had to say.

Karen Masciale
Westfield

Letters to the Editor

Program on Hate, Discrimination Was Indeed a Valuable Experience

I am writing in response to the letter in the June 10 issue regarding Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School's recent all-day program on hate and discrimination.

The author claimed that the school has overstepped the line and suggests that this kind of program is not beneficial, but harmful to the children.

I am a freshman at the high school and I participated in this program. I couldn't disagree more with this point of view. I think the goal of the day needs to be defined. Its sole purpose was to increase student awareness about hate, its causes, and its effects on people's lives.

A series of 41 programs led by teachers and guest speakers, including 12 JSA (Junior Statesmen of America) debates run by students, was planned to accomplish this.

Was this goal achieved? Definitely. In a wrap-up session, students shared "I learned" statements. These statements were not only plentiful and very diverse, but they showed a deeper understanding of what other people go through,

current and historical issues, and hate itself.

It surprised and gladdened me to see how enthusiastic everyone was to praise the program and share what he/she had experienced and learned. This was proof that the day was a success.

Did everyone get the same thing out of this day? No, of course not. Some were unable to take anything beyond new facts and statistics from these programs. Though many were turned around, others entered the day with a closed mind, ensuring a wasted day.

As for the argument that an important day of academic studies was missed; shall we talk about what is accomplished on the typical school day? Let's not. There were plenty of academics mixed into this program. Who can deny that the Holocaust and the Japanese internment during W.W.II are not historical and educational?

And, unlike the facts that we are demanded to memorize day after day, the things I learned that day are still in my mind.

The issues that we were informed on are also a lot more relevant to our lives as teenagers (then, say, geometry theorems).

As opposed to departmentalizing people, this day brought students closer together. It was amazing to see how different everyone was once the pressures of classes and grades were removed. People who don't usually talk talked. As I helped run a workshop on anger, I was surprised to see how eagerly people participated and how much they were learning from each other.

So, if nothing else, students were given a new look at each other, some food for thought, and some factual information on current issues that had previously been neglected.

As for the argument that students were told what to think, anyone who was there would know that this couldn't be farther from the truth. For once, absolutely nothing was presented from only one side.

It was mentioned in the previous letter that children should be taught morals by parents, not by school. This is irrelevant since no one attempted to teach morals during these programs. Also, how could a child learn the same things from a Holocaust survivor, physically-challenged person, or counselor on abusive relationships as from their parents, who don't have the same experiences and knowledge as these people.

I would like to congratulate everyone who put an incredible amount of time and effort into the extremely difficult task of making this day a success.

You did a tremendous job.

Ray Kalainikas
Toms River

Caitlin Mahoney
Scotch Plains

More Letters On Page 5

Bill to Require Kids To Say 'Declaration' Violates First Amendment

Pledging allegiance is a religious matter that does not belong on a government or public school agenda.

Many years I called for replacing the flag pledge at a government meeting with the clerk of the meeting reading that portion of the Declaration of Independence beginning with "we hold these truths..." and ending with "...safety and happiness," followed by a brief period allowing comment on these words by anyone present.

Never would I call for an oral recitation of these words, for to have those present recite these words would have those present engage in a religious exercise.

Assembly Bill No. 1293, calling for the oral recitation of a portion of the Declaration of Independence in elementary and secondary public school, violates the religion clause of the first amendment.

The alternative to the flag pledge and any oral recitation on the part of students is to have a statement read at the beginning of each school day declaring for students their rights concerning the expression of their religion in the public school setting.

Lead Poisoning Must Be Confronted For the Best Health of Our Children

By Senator Robert G. Torricelli

Lead poisoning today poses an alarming and unnecessary risk to our children. It impairs their physical development, slows their intellectual development and causes behavioral problems.

Extreme lead exposure can cause seizures, brain damage, comas, and even death. An estimated 890,000 children across the country suffer from elevated lead levels in their blood.

Thankfully, the federal government has the means to confront this challenge. Seventy-five percent of children most at risk are enrolled in federal health care programs. These programs provide an opportunity to screen them for lead poisoning and provide treatment to those who need it most.

Since 1992, the federal government has required that states test children on Medicaid under the age of two for lead poisoning.

But that mandatory screening is not happening. Two-thirds of children on Medicaid have never been screened and only 20 percent of all children in federal programs have been screened. In New Jersey, only 39 percent of children covered by Medicaid have been tested for lead. It is time that we make a full commitment to detecting, treating and preventing lead poisoning.

First, we must meet our current obligations for lead screening. State Medicaid contracts should explicitly require

that health care providers adhere to federal rules for screening and treatment. We should require that states report to the federal government the number of children on Medicaid who are being screened.

Second, every federal program that serves kids at risk must be involved in the testing process. Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) centers and Head Start facilities must assess whether a child has been tested and provide the necessary referral and follow-up to ensure that those who have not been tested are tested.

Third, we must encourage testing by reimbursing WIC and Head Start for screening costs and creating a bonus program that will reward states for every child they screen above 65 percent of their Medicaid population.

But more testing is only a first step. We must expand Medicaid coverage to include treatment for those suffering from lead poisoning and must support environmental investigations to determine its sources.

The Centers for Disease Control should develop information-sharing guidelines for state and local health departments, labs that perform lead blood tests and the federal programs, which will ensure testing.

We should act quickly to confront a problem that can be addressed so easily, especially when it means so much to the health of our children.

