

## NJ SIERRA CLUB ENDORSES THE NORTHERN VALLEY GREENWAY BUT ASKS THAT A PORTION OF THE RIGHT OF WAY BE RESERVED FOR FUTURE LIGHT RAIL EXPANSION

The New Jersey Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly advocates increasing the number of bicycle and pedestrian pathways and reaffirms its support for the Northern Valley Greenway in Bergen County.

The project will increase recreational opportunities including bicycle and pedestrian access to the network of trails in Rockland County and Westchester County by way of the new Tappan Zee (Mario Cuomo) Bridge.

The Northern Valley Greenway will make bicycle and vehicular traffic safer on Route 9W, County Road and Piermont Road by reducing the volume of bicycle traffic on those roadways.

Currently, the plan will use the entire rail right-of-way for active walking and biking paths. However, because the Greenway's proximity to the Tenakill Brook and how it traverses wetlands, we strongly recommend that a minimum 12-15' landscaped natural strip remain unpaved to reduce impervious surface while reserving a strip, if possible, for future passenger rail service (if ever it is deemed viable) as a "rail with trail".

Although the project plan states that one of the goals of the Greenway project is to preserve the rail corridor for future passenger rail service as required under federal rail banking regulations, current designs will use the entire rail right of way for active walking and biking paths. It is unlikely that once this property is actively being used for recreational purposes, that the public will allow this amenity to be taken away for the restoration of light rail. The landscaped area could then be repurposed for this use should the need ever arise to accommodate single rail passenger service in the future, and to permit passing sidings at locations deemed appropriate by NJ Transit for future rail service

The Sierra Club acknowledges that restoration of rail service north of Englewood Hospital is not a practical reality in the near future, given the lack of infrastructure funding and the vociferous opposition to rail expansion of some communities north of Englewood when the Hudson Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) extension was first proposed. However, we believe that this could change sooner than the 30-40 year time frame envisioned by the Northern Valley Greenway project.

As an example of the increased interest in light rail, it was recently announced that Gwinnett County, GA, which had long resisted joining the Atlanta MARTA system, is now considering joining the regional transportation system. Light Rail projects in Camden County which had been rejected in the past are also being reconsidered.

We believe that once the HBLR is in service to Englewood, the economic and transportation benefits to the communities north of Englewood may become more apparent and attractive to residents farther north. Light Rail has proven to be a popular transportation mode in many communities around the country in recent years, including Jersey City, Minneapolis and Los Angeles, contributing to the tax base and economic viability of downtown commercial areas.

Since the HBLR and the Greenway were first proposed over a decade ago, the reality of climate change and the public's perception of the automobile as the primary choice for mobility has undergone a major shift. Young families now want to live and work in walkable communities with transit, and car ownership in this age group is declining. At the same time, awareness of the impact that auto pollution has on climate change has grown, as has greater acceptance of public transit and ride share options. It would be prudent to design a greenway that preserves the option for future rail service along this corridor.

We note that the Rails to Trails Conservancy, a national multi-use recreational trail builder, now has a transportation systems project, Rails With Trails, that demonstrates how trails can be built to sustain

communities alongside active rail lines. An example of a rail line with an adjacent trail here in New Jersey is the Morris Traction Trail between Madison and Morristown.

We strongly encourage the County of Bergen and the municipalities of Northvale, Norwood, Closter, Demarest, Cresskill, and Tenafly to acquire adjacent open space to preserve the view-shed and allow for additional access points to the Greenway.

Finally, we strongly encourage the Greenway planners to add substantial bike parking where the Greenway and HBLR meet to encourage commuters to bike to the HBLR when the extension to Englewood is completed.

*Adopted by the New Jersey Chapter Executive Committee March 4, 2019*