

February 17, 2012

Linda A. Mosch, P.E.
Project Director, Northern Branch Corridor EIS NJ
TRANSIT Capital Planning & Programs
One Penn Plaza East
Newark, New Jersey 07105

Re: Northern Branch Corridor EIS (Light Rail Project)

Dear Ms. Mosch:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Leonia Board of Education (“Board”) in connection with the above-referenced project. The Board has a number of serious concerns relating to the introduction of light rail service in the Borough of Leonia, specifically as it will impact the instructional operations of Leonia High School and the safety of its 704 students.

The project proposes light rail activity that will result in grade crossings approximately every three minutes during the peak period and every six minutes during off-peak period. As you are aware, the railway that will be used runs west of Leonia High School, and is located directly between Leonia High School and a section of Overpeck Park that the High School students use during every school day for physical education classes and after school for extracurricular activities (pursuant to a long-standing agreement between the County of Bergen and the Board). The Board is very concerned that the DEIS does not adequately address the impact that the introduction of light rail service will have on this highly student-trafficked route, and it fails to offer sufficiently appropriate mitigation measures.

As stated above, students must cross the railway every day for physical education classes. During each period, nine times each day, approximately eighty students (including students with disabilities) must cross the railway. The mere installation of a pedestrian gate and flashers, given the frequency of the light rail service, makes the proposed mitigation as outlined in various sections of the DEIS¹ insufficient to ensure safe crossings.

¹ Section 3.2.6, Page 3-8; Section 8.3.6.2, Page 8-14; Section 12.3.5.2, Page 12.3.6; Section 22.3.5.2, Page 22-10; and Section 25.4.2.2, Page 25-16.

Additionally, the frequency of the rail crossings will have an impact on the orderly operation of these classes, specifically the ability of the High School to have its students on the field and ready for instruction as they wait for the light rail to pass by, and the ability to return these students to the High School in a timely manner. The proposed mitigation measures outlined in the DEIS do not, in the Board's opinion, adequately or appropriately address these issues.

Moreover, we believe that the increase in traffic that will be caused by the multiple crossings at Fort Lee Road will only add to the already difficult task of ensuring student, staff and parent safety in connection with the vehicular and pedestrian traffic that takes place at the High School during student arrival and dismissal. Unfortunately, we do not believe that the DEIS adequately addresses these safety concerns insofar as the increased traffic will affect the High School's arrival and dismissal of students.

Finally, even though the DEIS addresses the concept of instituting a "Quiet Zone," which the Board feels is absolutely necessary in order to ensure that it can properly instruct its students (both in the high school *and* outside during physical education classes), the DEIS does not explore the mitigation measures that would be necessary should this "Quiet Zone" application be denied or revoked in the future. We believe that the Final Environmental Impact Statement needs to take such a possibility into account and incorporate measures to reduce the impact of the increased noise on the school's students.

In light of the above, I am attaching for your consideration and review a report authored by Neglia Engineering Associates that specifically addresses these concerns. As you will see in the attached report, our engineers believe that the only way to appropriately address student safety is to construct an above-grade crossing (pedestrian overpass) between the High School and the fields located west of the railway. Additionally, they have proposed to restrict access from Fort Lee Road to the High School, and funnel all ingress and egress through Christie Heights Street, in order to alleviate the traffic and safety issues that will arise from the Fort Lee Road intersection. Finally, our engineers are also recommending specific measures to be taken in connection with potential noise pollution (in the event that a "Quiet Zone" application is either denied or subsequently revoked) in order to ensure that the High School students are able to properly focus on their studies during the school day.

We request that you take this report into account and adopt the recommendation set forth therein to ensure that the impacts of this project on Leonia High School are properly mitigated.

In summary, we believe that without the mitigation measures proposed by our engineers, Leonia High School's students will be adversely impacted and their safety unacceptably compromised by the introduction of light rail service as proposed in the Project.

Should you require additional information regarding the issues raised either in this letter or in the attached report, please do not hesitate to contact the Superintendent of Schools, Ms. Joanne Megargee, at (201) 302-5200, extension 1200. We would certainly be willing to meet and discuss this matter further if you prefer.

Sincerely,

LEONIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

By: _____
Jeffrey McCartney, President

cc: Ms. Joanne Megargee, Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Julia Perez, Business Administrator/Board Secretary
Mayor & Borough
Vittorio S. LaPira, Esq.