

10. Transit and Freight Rail

10.1. Chapter Overview

10.1.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the changes to the potential for adverse impacts to transit and freight service arising from the implementation of the SDEIS Preferred Alternative. Revisions affecting transit and freight service are limited to changes in North Bergen relating to the alignment of the Northern Branch light rail service between the connection to the existing Hudson-Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) at Tonnelle Avenue Station and the separation of the Northern Branch running track from freight tracks at 85th Street in North Bergen:

- Light rail connection from HBLR to West Side Avenue (Viaduct over CSX North Bergen Yard): the proposed light rail service would cross the existing CSX North Bergen Yard on a flyover. Instead of running within the facility on the western edge, the proposed service would run along West Side Avenue, west of the yard facility.
- Light rail connection from West Side Avenue to the Northern Branch (85th Street Viaduct) and 85th Street Extension: to minimize impacts to existing and future freight services, the proposed Northern Branch alignment would travel along the west side of West Side Avenue, removing a travel lane from the roadway. In the vicinity of 79th Street, it would begin to climb on a second viaduct, pass over the freight facilities, including the at-grade NYS&W alignment and the elevated CSX River Line embankment, return to grade on the east side of the CSX River Line in the vicinity of 90th Street, and connect with the Northern Branch running track. A new underpass is proposed under the CSX River Line tracks to extend 85th Street through to West Side Avenue. The 85th Street extension was presented and assessed in the DEIS.

Comments submitted during the DEIS public comment period pertaining to transit and freight service focused primarily on freight operations, including disruptions to existing freight customers resulting from the switch to overnight freight service, noise impacts to study area communities associated with overnight freight activity, and a request to shift the alignment to not be within or adjacent to the rail yard. Noise impacts are addressed in Chapter 12. Freight operations comments were submitted primarily by the two freight rail operators, NYS&W and CSX. NJ TRANSIT worked collaboratively with the freight railroads in the development of this SDEIS Preferred Alternative.

10.1.2. Summary of Findings of the DEIS and SDEIS

Impacts are confined primarily to freight rail service and are the result of the required shift in freight operations from daytime service to overnight service. Impacts to transit service are primarily modifications of existing bus service to reduce duplication and improve operational efficiency. NJ TRANSIT regularly assesses the performance of its bus service and adjusts service in response to ridership and demand. The impacts associated with the Preferred Alternative are as follows:

- The Preferred Alternative would add ridership to the existing HBLR service operated by NJ TRANSIT, but the increase in ridership would not cause the HBLR service to exceed its capacity.
- The proposed realignment of service in North Bergen along West Side Avenue would provide greater separation between light rail service and freight service in the CSX North Bergen Yard. This realignment addresses freight operator concerns raised during the DEIS public comment phase.

- By grade-separating the proposed Northern Branch light rail service, the West Side Avenue viaduct eliminates an operational conflict that would have otherwise resulted from the proposed light rail service's crossing of the CSX and NYS&W's alignment south of 83rd Street.
- During the construction phase of the Northern Branch Corridor project, including the construction of the 85th Street extension and required rail rehabilitation, there would be temporary impacts to freight delivery service due to temporary closure of the CSX River Line, as well as sidings currently serving freight customers. NJ TRANSIT would work with NYS&W, CSX, and affected freight customers to develop mitigation plans during the construction period.
- As a result of the need to temporally separate freight service and light rail service, the Preferred Alternative would result in the shifting of freight deliveries to overnight hours from their current daytime service. Although this change may have operational or fiscal impacts on freight customers, no mitigation is proposed.
- The proposed passenger rail service duplicates NJ TRANSIT bus lines #127, #165, #166, and #168, and Coach USA/Rockland Coaches #14. Local duplicative bus service could provide commuters with access to points between stations and therefore benefit passengers who use the services in conjunction. However, NJ TRANSIT would coordinate with the bus providers to identify changes in the bus routes that would improve access to the stations and/or reduce duplications in service.
- No changes would occur on the existing Pascack Valley Line commuter rail service operated by NJ TRANSIT.

10.2. Methodology

Preliminary design drawings were used to identify potential physical impacts to freight rail infrastructure. Mapping of existing bus service routes and proposed station locations was used to determine existing bus service and the potential for duplication. The SDEIS reanalysis indicated that there have been some bus service changes for routes serving the study area. The most recent service schedules and route mapping were used as the baseline for the reanalysis. For NJ TRANSIT bus service, it was assumed that any bus route that had an official stop within two short blocks or one long block of a proposed Northern Branch Station was considered to serve the station. Within the study area, the street grid orients the short side of city blocks north and south, parallel to the Northern Branch, and long blocks run east and west, perpendicular to the Northern Branch. Private bus carriers have more limited stops than NJ TRANSIT service. Several of the private lines make one stop in Tenafly before continuing south and east to Port Authority. The elimination of service to Tenafly resulted in the elimination of several private bus routes previously reported in the DEIS as serving the study area.

To provide greater accuracy and meaningful assessment of bus service, frequency was provided for both inbound and outbound service in the morning and evening peak for bus service that provided bi-directional service throughout the day. Some routes, such as Coach USA #20, provide only peak direction service through the northern portions of the study area. In those instances, only one entry is provided in each frequency column.

Freight service was updated through direct consultation with CSX Transportation, as they provide the freight service on the Northern Branch running track potentially affected by the proposed light rail service.

10.3. Environmental Review

10.3.1. Existing Conditions

10.3.1.1. Bus Transit Service

Table 10-1 summarizes the existing bus service and bus route stops proximate to station sites.

Table 10-1: Existing Bus Routes and Frequencies

Station Area	Nearest Bus Stop	Bus Route	Frequency (weekdays)	
			a.m. Peak Hour (terminal)*	p.m. Peak Hour (terminal)**
91 st Street	Tonnelle Ave/ 91 st Street	NJT 83 – Hackensack to Journal Square	4 (Hack.) 3 (Journal Sq)	3 (Hack.) 3 (Journal Sq)
	Tonnelle Ave/ 91 st Street	NJT 127 – Ridgefield to PABT	1 (Ridgefield) 3 (PABT)	4 (Ridgefield) 1 (PABT)
Ridgefield	Broad Ave/Marion Place	NJT 165 – Westwood to PABT	6 (Westwood) 3 (PABT)	3 (Westwood) 7 (PABT)
	Broad Ave/Marion Place	NJT 166 – Cresskill to PABT	8 (Cresskill) 3 (PABT)	3 (Cresskill) 6 (PABT)
	Broad Ave/Marion Place	NJT 168 – Paramus to PABT	1 (Paramus) 0 (PABT)	0 (Paramus) 1 (PABT)
Palisades Park	Broad Ave/West Ruby Ave	NJT 166 – Cresskill to PABT	8 (Cresskill) 15 (PABT)	8 (Cresskill) 7 (PABT)
	Broad Ave/West Ruby Ave	NJT 751 – Paramus-Cliffside Park-Edgewater	1 (Paramus) 1 (Edgewater)	1 (Paramus) 1 (Edgewater)
	Grand Ave/Central Blvd	Coach 11A – Stony Point (Rockland County) to PABT	3 (PABT) 1 (Stony Pt)	2 (PABT) 1 (Stony Pt)
	Grand Ave/Central Blvd	Coach 21T – New Milford (Rockland County) to PABT	2 (both directions)	2 (both directions)
	Grand Ave/Central Blvd	Coach 20 – West Nyack (Rockland County) to PABT	1 (W. Nyack)	1 (PABT)
Leonia	Fort Lee Rd/Grand Ave	NJT 182 – Hackensack to GWB Bus Terminal	3 (Hack.) 2 (GWB)	2 (Hack.) 2 (GWB)
	Fort Lee Rd/Grand Ave	NJT 751 and 755 – Paramus to Edgewater	1 (Paramus) 3 (Edgewater)	1 (Paramus) 1 (Edgewater)
	Grand Ave/Fort Lee Rd	Coach 21T – New Milford (Rockland County) to PABT	2 (both directions)	2 (both directions)
	Grand Ave/Fort Lee Rd	Coach 11A – Stony Point to PABT	3 (PABT) 1 (Stony Pt)	2 (PABT) 1 (Stony Pt)
Englewood Route 4 Station	Route 4/Grand Ave	NJT 178 – Hackensack to GWB Bus Terminal	3 (Hack.) 2 (GWB)	2 (Hack.) 2 (GWB)
	Route 4/Nordhoff Place	NJT 171 – Paterson to GWB Bus Terminal	1 (Paterson) 2 (GWB)	2 (Paterson) 2 (GWB)
	Route 4/Nordhoff Place	NJT 175 – Ridgewood to GWB Bus Terminal	1 (Ridgewood) 2 (GWB)	2 (Ridgewood) 2 (GWB)
	Route 4/Grand Ave	Coach 21T – New Milford (Rockland County) to PABT	2 (both directions)	2 (both directions)
	Route 4/Grand Ave	Coach 11A – Stony Point (Rockland County) to PABT	3 (PABT) 1 (Stony Pt)	2 (PABT) 1 (Stony Pt)

Notes: (NJT) = New Jersey Transit Bus Route (Coach) = Coach USA/Rockland Coaches Bus Route (PABT) = Port Authority Bus Terminal
a.m. Peak Hours (8-9 a.m.). p.m. Peak Hour (5-6 p.m.) for all stations.

Source: NJ TRANSIT; Coach USA/Rockland Coaches, 2015

Table 10-1: Existing Bus Routes and Frequencies (Continued)

Station Area	Nearest Bus Stop	Bus Route	Frequency (weekdays)	
			a.m. Peak Hour (terminal)*	p.m. Peak Hour (terminal)**
Englewood Town Center	North Dean Street/E. Demarest Ave	NJT 166 – Cresskill to PABT	9 (Cresskill) 18 (PABT)	8 (Cresskill) 7 (PABT)
	North Dean Street/E. Demarest Ave	NJT 756 – Paramus to Englewood Cliffs	2 (Eng. Clfs) 2 (Paramus)	2 (Eng. Clfs) 2 (Paramus)
	North Dean Street/E. Demarest Ave	NJT 178 – Hackensack to GWB Bus Terminal	3 (Hack.) 2 (GWB)	2 (Hack.) 2 (GWB)
	North Dean Street/E. Demarest Ave	NJT 780 – Passaic to Englewood	2 (Passaic) 2 (Englewood)	2 (Passaic) 2 (Englewood)
	Palisade Ave/Dean St	Coach 14E/K – Westwood to PABT	2 (PABT)	1 (Westwood)
	Palisade Ave/Grand Ave	Coach 20 – West Nyack (Rockland County) to PABT	4 (PABT) 1 (W. Nyack)	1 (PABT) 1 (W. Nyack)
Englewood Hospital	Dean St/ Brownes Terrace	NJT 166 – Cresskill to PABT	9 (Cresskill) 8 (PABT)	6 (Cresskill) 7 (PABT)
	Dean St/ Brownes Terrace	NJT 780 – Passaic to Englewood	2 (Passaic) 2 (Englewood)	2 (Passaic) 2 (Englewood)
<i>Notes: (NJT) = New Jersey Transit Bus Route (Coach) = Coach USA/Rockland Coaches Bus Route (PABT) = Port Authority Bus Terminal a.m. Peak Hours (8-9 a.m.), p.m. Peak Hour (5-6 p.m.) for all stations.</i>				

Source: NJ TRANSIT; Coach USA/Rockland Coaches, 2014

10.3.1.2. Passenger Rail Transit

No changes have occurred to passenger rail transit in the Northern Branch study area.

10.3.1.3. Freight Service

Freight operations in the study area are unchanged with the exception of the loss of one freight customer served by CSX on the Northern Branch. Previously, five customers were served between North Bergen and Northvale; today only four are actively served, although sidings remain for multiple inactive uses that could be served by freight. CSX Transportation does not release the names of customers for privacy reasons.

10.3.2. Potential Impacts and Mitigation

10.3.2.1. No Build Alternative

Bus Transit Service

It is expected that all existing bus routes would continue to serve the study area, mostly likely with an increase in service to meet growing transit service demands in lieu of other transit options in the study area. It is also anticipated that without transit options, bus service would experience growing schedule issues as a result of roadway congestion stemming from growing numbers of personal vehicles and buses on the constrained study area infrastructure and capacity issues at the Port Authority Bus Terminal (PABT) and the George Washington Bridge (GWB) Bus Terminal in Manhattan. Expansion projects are planned at the PABT to accommodate additional bus service, but the improvements would not alleviate the anticipated traffic issues within the study area.

Passenger Rail Transit

No changes to passenger rail service are anticipated in the Northern Branch Corridor under the No Build Alternative. Given the development pattern and urban density of development in the study area, acquiring land for rail transit anywhere but within the Northern Branch Corridor would require significant real estate acquisition, displacement, and community disruption. The extreme southern sections of the study area would continue to be served by the HBLR and the Pascack Valley Line would be available to the west of the corridor.

Freight Service

Rail freight operations and infrastructure are not expected to be affected under the No Build Alternative. Freight delivery by rail would continue along the Northern Branch Corridor while the demand for such service remains. Under this alternative, CSX is expected to maintain its current roster of rail freight customers along the corridor.

*10.3.2.2. Preferred Alternative***Bus Transit Service**

NJ TRANSIT is proposing to add a bus feeder service between Teaneck and Englewood Town Center to minimize the parking demand at this walk-on station. The service would run two buses during the peak period and one bus during the off-peak period. There are no other substantial changes between the DEIS and SDEIS in regard to existing bus service in the Northern Branch study area.

All station sites are located within walking distance of an existing bus stop used by either NJ TRANSIT or Coach USA/Rockland Coaches. Although the majority of bus routes in the study area are oriented toward New York City and travel express once on the highways, local riders can still use the service to reach a proposed Northern Branch station if they are traveling within the study area. Ridership modeling performed by NJ TRANSIT anticipates that 1,300 light rail passengers would access the stations via bus service. The bus transfers are distributed throughout the corridor.

The Northern Branch service duplicates portions of NJ TRANSIT bus line #127, #165, #166, and #168, and Coach USA/Rockland Coaches #14. Local duplicative bus service, as appropriate, has the potential benefit of providing commuters with access to points between stations. However, NJ TRANSIT would coordinate with the bus providers to identify changes in the bus routes that would improve access to the stations and/or reduce duplications in service. Any adjustments to NJ TRANSIT bus schedules and routes would be undertaken at the discretion of NJ TRANSIT after a thorough review of existing ridership and travel demand patterns in the study area.

Consequently, as a result of the population density and existing transit and mobility demands in the study area, the operation of the Northern Branch rail service under the SDEIS Preferred Alternative would serve as a complement to existing bus service. By diverting drivers to rail service, the Northern Branch would help alleviate some of the traffic congestion that creates service inefficiencies for bus service. Although the rail service duplicates some public and private bus service, the population density of the area and the need for transit access to the proposed stations represents an opportunity to adjust bus service to better meet the needs of the community. As a result, the Preferred Alternative would not result in significant impacts to the operation of existing bus service in the study area.

Passenger Rail Service

Pascack Valley Line - NJ TRANSIT's Pascack Valley Line would continue to serve rail transit customers in its service area. The ridership populations for the Pascack Valley Line and the Northern Branch service are geographically different. As a result, the proposed Northern Branch service would not adversely affect the viability of the Pascack Valley Line.

Hudson Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) – Twelve HBLR trains would pass through Tonnelle Avenue Station (the present northern terminus of the HBLR) in the peak hour. Of these 12 trains, nine would continue onto the Northern Branch, and three would start their service at Tonnelle Avenue without crossing onto the Northern Branch. The proposed 91st Street Station would be the southernmost station on the Northern Branch before the service transitioned onto the existing HBLR. A passenger count of 3,062 passengers would be on board the trains at 91st Street Station during the peak hour, leaving capacity for 838 passengers to board from the existing HBLR Tonnelle Avenue Station and south to Weehawken. The three HBLR trains departing from the existing Tonnelle Avenue Station in the peak hour would be destined for Jersey City and would have capacity for 1,200 passengers.

Together, the Northern Branch-originating HBLR trains and the Tonnelle Avenue Station-originating HBLR trains would have capacity for 2,038 passengers after all Northern Branch passengers are accommodated. Existing ridership on the HBLR adds 689 passengers from Tonnelle Avenue to Weehawken, which would be the segment with the highest number of passengers. In 2030, the total non-Northern Branch ridership is expected to total 735 passengers. This number is below the projected capacity of the HBLR during the peak hour. Consequently, the Preferred Alternative would not have an adverse effect on the capacity of the HBLR.

Freight Service

Potential impacts to freight service under the SDEIS Preferred Alternative are similar to those described for the DEIS. Freight service would be required to shift to the overnight hours. This shift in operating hours is necessary to maintain temporal separation between freight and light rail as described in Chapter 3: Alternatives Considered. Current FRA regulations require that vehicles not meeting specific structural requirements must operate with either a physical or temporal (time) separation from freight operations. The light rail vehicles do not meet the specific structural requirements to travel within the railroad right-of-way at the same time as freight trains. As a result, temporal separation is a baseline assumption for the proposed Northern Branch light rail service. Without it, the project cannot operate and would not advance to construction.

The freight operating window has been reduced from that proposed in the DEIS to allow passenger service to have the opportunity to operate until 1:00 a.m.. Freight service is proposed to operate on the Northern Branch Corridor between 1:30 a.m. and 4:30 a.m.. The three-hour window for freight service may be too restrictive for CSX's freight customers' operations; however, this scenario was assessed for this SDEIS as a best case scenario for passenger rail based on public comment, and as a worst-case scenario for the analysis of noise effects of the light rail operations. The exact schedule would be developed during negotiations with the freight railroads during Final Engineering and Design. Shifting freight service to overnight may result in the same potential for economic impacts to freight providers and freight customers, and, without mitigation, may result in noise impacts along the Northern Branch Corridor (as discussed further in Chapter 12: Noise) as described in the DEIS.

Mitigation

NJ TRANSIT would work with NYS&W, CSX, and affected freight customers to develop mitigation plans for the construction period. Possible mitigation includes staggering construction on the freight lines and allowing NYS&W and CSX to use the other's rail line during closure of 83rd Street and construction of the 85th Street extension's railroad underpass and grade crossing. No additional mitigation is proposed for the operations period.

10.4. Summary of Potential Environmental Effects of the DEIS and the SDEIS

The Preferred Alternative would not result in impacts to bus or passenger rail transit. There is a potential for impacts to the freight service customers along the Northern Branch. These impacts are an unavoidable result of the need to separate light rail service from freight service. In considering these impacts, it is important to bear in mind that freight providers are a small percentage of the total number of commercial and industrial businesses along the Northern Branch Corridor, and the effect of the switch to overnight service would affect each freight customer differently. As such, while the freight impacts resulting from the implementation of the Preferred Alternative cannot be mitigated, the impact is concentrated on a few operations, and those few may not find that the impact is great enough to result in actual adverse effects on their business operations.

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