

CHANGE IN TRANSPORTATION ALONG THE 422 CORRIDOR



DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT & CHANGE

By Barry Cassidy

Recently I returned to Philadelphia after being in Pittsburgh the better part of the last three years looking after my father. Any of you that have elderly parents will soon find out choices in your life will sometimes take a back seat to what you have to do as a responsible family member. Although Pittsburgh, to me, is like being in social Siberia, I would not change a moment of sharing my father's last days.

In my desire to return to civilization, I called my friend Manny DeMutis and we worked out a plan for me to return and hang out with him while I worked on a couple of projects, and finished up my Master's Degree program in "Cities" at the London School of Economic and Political Science. One of the projects was to work on the electric line relocation with PECO and Verizon, and provide my government relations skills.

The second project was to look into the *greenline* Project which entailed running a train line from Phoenixville to Paoli. After I spoke with some of my industry contacts, it became apparent that we had to move quickly, because of the nature of the right of way that would be used to provide the train route after the Norfolk Southern DeVault line ends (in Devault). So, we put together a scope of services, and discussed the chances of that line becoming a reality.

The issue of a trail was discussed for that line recently and I believe it was kind of a follow up to the talk about the "Patriots Trail" which I encountered when I tried to

do the *greenline* the first time. I will never forget when Norfolk Southern called me and told me I had a competitor for the purchase of the rail line. I asked, "Who?" I was told the Chester County. I soon found that there was a study underway for the Patriots Trail that was not public knowledge... which I labeled a secret plan.

Then we could not get the support of the Borough of Phoenixville. That plan at that time was doable, and I was sure I could have financed it. Now, years later, we will study it, but the window may have passed. The consultants asked me a question, "Why would you go to Paoli when you could go to Philadelphia?" My response was kind of stupid I guess, because I replied, "I like Paoli!"

After some thought, I agreed going into the city would probably be a better alternative. Considering all of the housing being built in the area, it would be good to have a train into the city. It would allow for an entirely new cohort group to live out in the Phoenixville suburban area.

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DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT & CHANGE

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One has to admit that the downtown revitalization was a success, and people like to live near the arts and entertainment district that was created, largely due to the efforts of Robb Frees and Manny DeMutis.

I brought up to the consultants that the much sought-after King of Prussia/Casino line was already in the works, and we could tag on to that. The response was puzzling, as they said, "Why would you want to go to Upper Darby?" I remembered Mike Chitwood was the officer in charge of South Street right before I got there and I always liked talking with him, and he was now the Chief over in Upper Darby. Also, I went there once to see Steely Dan at the Tower Theater, but other than that I was at a loss. I was soon to find that the KOP/Casino line went to 69th Street Station.

They said that we could look at an extension of the R-6 line... now renamed something else but I am going to go with R-6 here in this article. Then it occurred to me they were talking Schuylkill Valley Metro light. "Heaven to Betsy" I replied, as I remembered all the controversy and how people were trying to get me to pull the *greenline* and go with the Metro. I kind of wanted no part of re-creating that

project, but was told this one would be different.

It was explained to me that this project could utilize technology currently in use in Europe that used an engine that went from Diesel to Electric. Kind of the hybrid solution that could have worked for the Metro and eliminated the cost of electrification of the rails. I remember some of the discussions I had in London with the people that were creating the Crossrail, which will make one of my school projects accessible from center city London. They told me this kind of innovation had been done before, while discussing financing of railroads and how it affected my taskforce project on the Royal Docks, in East London.

So, I started drinking the Koolaide and brought it to the attention of Phoenixville Borough Council, which already was predisposed to that plan. Seems like I was jumping on a train that others were waiting to arrive. The Mayor jumped on board with a "Mayor's Taskforce" and the project was officially born. We assembled a committee, voted on the scope of the project and awarded the contract to veteran railroad consultant Thomas Frawley.

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I had originally thought about forming subcommittees at that meeting but thought twice. This is a month and a half long study, and before everyone gets excited, let's see what facts relating to the project will be presented. People look at me sometimes as "wide eyed" and a "dreamer" and I am sure there is some truth to that. I always feel that hard work and effort can sometimes make dreams come true.

It is apparent that Manny DeMutis has a dream for the city he is creating in the once downtrodden Borough of Phoenixville. I was able to play a small part in helping him once. Maybe we can make it happen again. By the time this article comes out in the *Route 422 Business Advisor* we should be close to understanding what the results of the study will show.

Of course, it appears there is a grant for that... it is a demonstration program grant... section C looks like the eligible section and the narrative will read something like this:

The demonstration project would illustrate a means by which to expand the electrified SEPTA regional rail service network into the rapidly growing US 422 corridor, without the need to make very large capital investments in new electrifi-

cation infrastructure. The demonstration project would provide passengers with one-seat ride between Phoenixville which is a key population node along the US 422 corridor and Philadelphia, at Capital, Operations and Maintenance cost levels significantly lower than for other rail alternatives.

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