

# ALVIN LEE'S DIRECTIVE IN SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF NO TRAIN SERVICE IN DOWNINGTOWN



## DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

I was stunned to hear that the Thorndale/Paoli Line may be terminated.

I believe it is a bunch of hocus pocus, but you never know. After pondering it a little more, I wanted to share my two cents. If you recall, I initiated the proposal to extend the rail line from Philadelphia to Phoenixville.

Manny DeMutis asked me to work on the project, and I turned it into my consultancy report for the London School of Economics. One thing led to another, and we got caught up with the Reading initiative. They wanted AMTRAK, so my proposal was set aside. I thought it was a mistake, but it didn't concern me much. They hired my staff, and I moved on to a flood project in Downingtown.

It took me about four hours to write something and submit it to the hearing master for the public hearings on operational funding. Primarily, I aimed to avoid creating another authority and involving county planning departments, even though they are all nice people. Thus, I submitted the following:

The plan to include the counties of Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery:

(Merion, Narberth, Wynnewood, Ardmore, Haverford, Bryn Mawr, Rosemont, Villanova)

(Radnor, St David, Wayne, Stratford, Devon, Berwyn)

(Daylesford, Paoli, Malvern, Exton, Whitford, Downingtown, Thorndale, and Coatesville)

Three counties work with SEPTA to create the three county plans initiated by sub-agreements with all political subdivisions and school districts. If they do not want to participate, the station is deactivated.

The plan aims to adapt the PennDOT strategy for extending rail service to Reading. Local funding sources have been identified, including property taxes, income taxes, sales taxes, parking and fuel taxes, utility taxes, business activity taxes, license and user fees, and other taxes. In other words, if the rail line is desired, communities along the route must be included in the scenario.

The financing scenario in the PennDOT report is both exciting and adaptable. DCED has a program known as the City Revitalization and Improvement Zone (CRIZ). The Thorndale-Paoli Line would establish a multi-jurisdictional linear CRIZ project, involving 22 municipalities and connected by a rail line. Each county could develop its own linear CRIZ and collaborate with SEPTA to help preserve the Thorndale-Paoli Line.

This would require legislation, and CRIZ would be a model for the legislation, which could be called the Transit Revitalization Investment Zone (TRIZ). The adaptive connection by rail line could be achieved, and the precedent for connection was established in the Downingtown Keystone Opportunity Expansion Zone (KOEZ).

**Property Taxes** – The Econsult 2018 (attached) delineated the justification for communities to participate, showing a rise in the value of properties near a station.

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**Income Taxes and Sales Tax** Increments in sales tax could provide significant income if the communities seek to create transit-oriented development projects within the zone.

A sales/income tax baseline must be established, with the year of zone approval serving as the tax baseline year for the program. Local tax reports must be filed with the relevant taxing entity. Certified eligible local state zone taxes could establish a maximum of \$15,000,000, which would be allocated to each of the 22 participating Transit Revitalization and Improvement Zones. This presents a potential total of \$330,000,000, excluding property tax.

Other taxes such as parking and fuel taxes, utility taxes, toll revenue reallocation, and business activity taxes. Taxes, License and User Fees, and Other Taxes and fees could be calculated similarly.

This outline defines the local contribution and presents an opportunity to direct a different type of commonwealth funding towards transit. The PennDOT report on the Reading Line was provided

in response to Phoenixville's proposals to extend local service. The proposal was adopted but later abandoned in favor of pursuing an AMTRAK line.

Communities must reaffirm their commitment to rail instead of passively pursuing commonwealth funding driven by political considerations rather than merit. Concentrating new development within the zone could offer a fresh start for Main Street communities still striving to recover from the virus lockdown. It may also lead to fewer stations, as some communities might not want to participate.

I included the Econsult report and the Penn DOT report with the following email note:

Hello Operations

I do not want to see train service interrupted to Downingtown. Here is an outline that I was about to use on the Phoenixville to Philadelphia line, which was then included as the Reading to Philadelphia line, which used traditional funding. My idea was abandoned.

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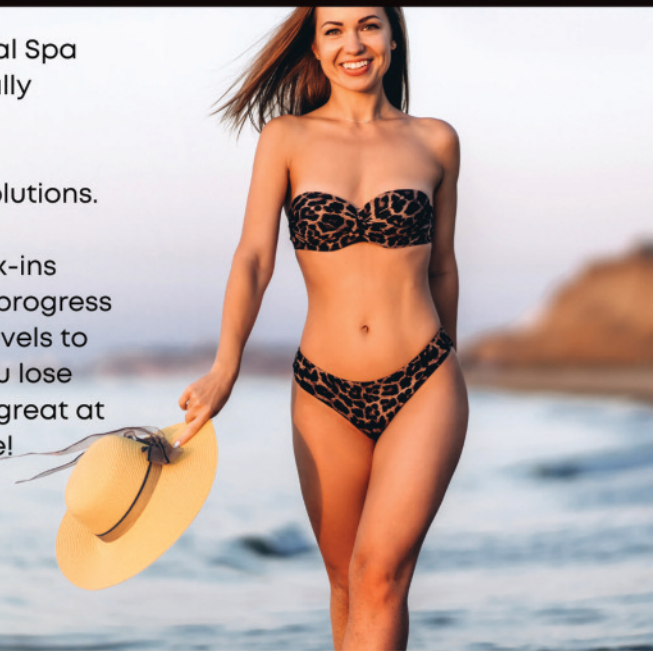
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It was initially brought as a pure TIF to SEPTA, who wrote a letter of support. Jeff Knuettel liked the proposal we made to SEPTA but then retired. I believe he wrote the Penn DOT proposal.

So, when you asked for proposals, I was sitting here in Downingtown working on a flood mitigation project.

Since I am old... I remember Reagan doing something similar to what Trump is doing now. It may seem dark this time, but instead, it opens opportunities you could have never initiated. It is a time of opportunity, read this, and even if you think it is nonsense, look to synthesize ideas into a more decentralized effort and

maybe a slimmed-down effort. By placing the burden on the communities that are impacted, you could do things that are a win for all.

Good Luck to you

I am sure they will reject it if they do not understand or reject it because they do understand it. Either way, I am fulfilling a life's dream to do what Alvin Lee told me once during a psychedelic experience ... "I'd love to change the world, but I don't know what to do, so I leave it up to you."

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