



Big transit projects planned for Big Apple

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NEW YORK — In the competition for federal stimulus dollars, New Jersey and New York are brandishing a very big shovel.

Work is set to begin this spring on a \$9 billion train tunnel under the Hudson River between New Jersey and Manhattan, the first new link between the two in more than a half-century.

The nearly 3.5-mile tunnel will more than double the number of commuter trains that can cross into New York City. Trains now use a 100-year-old two-track tunnel that is at capacity, meaning that trains sometimes must wait their turn to cross into the city.

The tunnel is one of several multibillion-dollar transit projects in New York City angling for an infusion of federal money, including a new subway line and rail tunnels to bring trains from Long Island to Grand Central Terminal.

"You'd have to go back to the 1920s to see a period of so much transit being built," says Sam Schwartz, a New York transportation planner known as "Gridlock Sam."

The transit projects "are just fundamental to the future growth and the future success of the region," says Robert Yaro of the Regional Plan Association, an independent planning group for the New York metro area. The association predicts that the New York metro region will grow by 3.8 million people to 25.3 million people by 2030. "The mega-projects are at the heart of the strategy to provide mobility," Yaro says.

The new tunnel will allow 48 trains per hour to arrive in New York, up from 23, and get 22,000 cars off the road, according to NJ Transit, New Jersey's commuter transit agency. "It will have a dramatic effect" on commuting from the New Jersey suburbs, says Martin Robins, who was in charge of the tunnel project from 1994-97 and is now a senior fellow at Rutgers University's Voorhees Transportation Center.

More than a half-million people commute from New Jersey into Manhattan every day on public transit or in private vehicles, according to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council.

Adding more tracks seems like a straightforward solution, but when the tunnel project began 15 years ago, "it was actually quite controversial," Robins says. "My greatest worry was trying to keep the project alive, because it was on life support."

New Jersey residents were "lukewarm" about a project they saw as benefiting New York, Robins says. New York officials feared the reverse — the tunnel would suck jobs from the city to New Jersey.

So far, \$5.7 billion of the Hudson rail tunnel's cost has been fronted by New Jersey and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. New Jersey's congressional delegation succeeded in having an additional \$1.5 billion in transit funding included in the stimulus package signed Feb. 19 by President Obama. Now the states and the Port Authority want most of that money for the tunnel — and a federal commitment for the rest of the money as the project goes forward.

Ridership on NJ Transit has increased from 10 million trips into New York's Penn Station in 1984 to 46 million last year. It is expected to double in the next 20 years, NJ Transit spokesman Paul Wyckoff says. The tunnel is due to be completed in 2017.

The Hudson tunnel is the first river crossing from New Jersey to Manhattan since the third tube of the Lincoln Tunnel for vehicular traffic was completed in 1957.

The two new rail tunnel tubes, each of which will have one track, will run deep under the river, south of the existing train tunnel, and thread their way north through Manhattan, below the existing tracks and above a new subway line also under construction. The tracks will end in a new station adjacent to Penn Station.

The new tunnel also will allow more commuter rail expansion in New Jersey, Robins says.

New York will use new federal transit money for other projects:

- A new subway line on Second Avenue on the east side of Manhattan, which began work in 2007. First announced in 1929 and now scheduled to open in 2015, the subway line had achieved almost mythical status as a project that would never be built. New York broke ground in the 1970s for the line but had to abandon partially completed tunneling when the city almost went bankrupt in 1975. The project will cost \$16 billion.
- Extension of a subway line from Times Square to the city's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. Cost: \$2.1 billion.
- New rail tunnels on the east side of Manhattan to bring trains from Long Island to Grand Central Terminal. They now can go only to Penn Station. Cost: \$7.2 billion..

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