



Rail tunnel project breaks ground

Monday, June 08, 2009

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STATEHOUSE BUREAU

NJ Transit broke ground Monday on an \$8.7 billion mass transit tunnel that state and federal officials say will be the most transformational in New Jersey's history.

The project is planned to double rail capacity between New Jersey and Manhattan. When completed, the tunnel will provide a one-seat ride from all of the agency's railroads serving midtown Manhattan, including Bergen and Passaic lines.

FUNDING:

— The Federal Transit Administration announced Monday it will provide \$400 million in federal funding on top of the \$330 million that the Obama administration already has committed toward the project

— The Obama administration will also sign an "early systems work agreement," signaling it will eventually meet NJ Transit's request to provide a total of \$3 billion toward the project, said Peter Rogoff, administrator of the Federal Transit Administration.

— The project has received funding commitments from several local agencies: \$3 billion from the Port Authority, \$1.5 billion from the state and \$1.25 billion from the New Jersey Turnpike Authority.

SCHEDULE:

— NJ Transit will lay railroads tracks under a Tonnelle Avenue overpass in North Bergen this summer and then start digging in the Palisdes mountains in North Bergen.

— NJ Transit plans to knock down an abandoned warehouse within the next two months, and the agency is in discussions to purchase a McDonalds and a Public Storage facility on Tonnelle Avenue that are in the tunnel's path.

— Tonnelle Avenue will remain open to traffic during daytime hours while construction workers move utilities and clear brush during the summer. Rail service will not be interrupted.

— Tunnel drilling will dig a tube under the Hudson River using a "boring machine" that could weigh as much as 100 tons. That isn't expected to begin until early next year, said Rich Sales, NJ Transit executive director. The boring machine will move about 50 feet each day.

— The project is expected to be completed by 2017.

QUOTES

"Today's groundbreaking represents an historic \$8.7 billion dollar transit infrastructure project, the largest in the nation," Governor Corzine said. "It will create thousands of jobs for hardworking families across the region, promote better mobility and provide enormous environmental benefits."

"The tunnel doesn't meet any of the major goals other than the fact that we'll have another tunnel," New Jersey Sierra Club Director Jeff Tittel said. "Instead of connecting to Penn Station or the new Moynihan Station, the tunnel dead ends 180 feet below the ground, two blocks from Penn Station. It cannot even be expanded to the east because it dead ends at a water tunnel."