

NJ TRANSIT NEWS
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On the right track

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's decision to ante up \$2 billion toward a second Hudson River rail tunnel is good news for the region's economic growth, for current and future commuters, and for non-commuters who would reap the health benefits of fewer cars polluting the air.

The authority board authorized an initial \$1 billion Thursday and expects to allocate another \$1 billion by the end of the year. That show of commitment — along with Gov. Corzine's allocation of \$500 million in state funds and the backing of federal legislators from both states — should help get the project rolling.

Construction of the Trans-Hudson Express Tunnel could begin as early as 2009, with completion targeted for 2016. The project would double the number of commuter trains NJ Transit runs into New York, providing a stimulus for tens of thousands of jobs.

The Port Authority authorization followed the project's clearing of a major hurdle last week. The Federal Transit Administration advanced it into the preliminary engineering phase, enabling NJ Transit to compete for future federal money. The bistate pledges of financial support should help smooth passage of an FTA-NJ Transit grant agreement toward the project, estimated to cost about \$7.2 billion by completion.

While this project pushes others farther down the priority list, including the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex line, it also could provide the best hope that a MOM line — stalled in the discussion stage for two decades — could ever happen. A Boston-based group working to plot the future of rail between Boston and Washington — New Jersey's smack in the middle — said the new tunnel could spark a nationwide commitment to mass transit, spurring politicians into pledging long-term investments.

Our state, regional and federal leaders should continue to do all they can to make sure the project's wheels stay greased.