



Montclair commuters get rundown on summer train disruptions



Rep. Mikie Sherrill, standing, introduces a Q&A forum on NJ Transit's pending summer schedule change. ERIN ROLL/STAFF

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Montclair residents who work in the city [are facing a longer commute this summer](#) as NJ Transit will not offer direct-to-midtown trains during peak commuting times due to construction on two tracks.

Beginning June 17, NJ Transit will be diverting select Midtown direct rail service on the Montclair-Boonton Line (MOBO) to Hoboken. Amtrak will be repairing two tracks lines leading to Penn Station New York (PSNY), putting them out of service for the summer. Work is expected to be done by Friday, Sept. 6, with direct service to resume on the Montclair-Boonton Line on Monday, Sept. 9.

Four weekday New York-bound trains from 7:40 – 9:50 a.m., and four returning trains from 4:52- 6:41 p.m. will be rerouted through Hoboken. Train riders can use the PATH or ferry to complete their commute. While others may decide to switch to bus service for the duration.

A Q&A session to tell commuters what to expect took place at Buzz Aldrin Middle School on May 29. The session, announced on May 21, included Rep. Mikie Sherrill, NJ Transit CEO Kevin Corbett, and several members of NJ Transit's senior staff.

Due to holding the commuter Q&A during peak commuting hours, only about 50 residents from Montclair and surrounding towns, including Glen Ridge and Livingston, attended the forum.

NJ Transit announced reduced fares and combo passes that include fares for NY Waterways and PATH trains. Currently, a one-way ticket into New York costs \$5.75. For the summer, a ticket to New York via Hoboken will cost \$4.70, including ferry or PATH fare. Off peak travelers will not only get into midtown direct, but will be offered a 65 percent discount.

Monthly passes with the adjusted fares are available now.

Sherrill, a commuter, said she was furious when she learned of the pending schedule change. She met with Corbett, and the decision was made to have a town hall in Montclair to talk with commuters about what to expect.

People are moving out of New Jersey at the highest rate ever, Sherrill said citing the high cost of living and taxes. But commuting is also a driving factor, she added. "The more miserable the commute into the city gets, the more it begins to look like, 'why am I living here?'"

The entire region depends on access to New York for its economic viability, said Glen Ridge resident Kelly Conklin. Without the Gateway project, "the implications for us are terrifying."

Three years ago the tracks at Penn Station were in such poor condition that trains were derailling inside the station, causing even more delays, Corbett said.

The interlocking work is part of a series of upgrades and repairs being made over the last three years, and will

continue over the next 10 years, leading up to the Hudson River tunnel replacements in what is known as the Gateway Project.

The Hudson River tunnels are now more than 100 years old. Both tunnels also sustained heavy damage during Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

“There’s no magic wand, and you’ll see incremental gains,” Corbett said, explaining NJ Transit’s options.

In 2017, NJ Transit faced harsh criticism by rail users who termed it the “summer of Hell” due to rerouting of trains and longer commutes. Officials blamed it, in part, to a shortage of engineers. But a new class of engineers has rectified the engineer shortage, Corbett said. He acknowledged commuters’ frustrations, however. “When people’s frustration is already up to here, they don’t want to hear it.”

Montclair resident John May said he felt more residents would have attended if the Q&A was held at another time that didn’t coincide with commuting. Those in attendance however, were critical of NJ Transit’s proposal for this summer, and of the agency’s recent performance in general.

Montclair resident Bill Beren doubts NJ Transit’s ability to handle the schedule changes.

“You’re talking a good game about communication. But it’s just ridiculous...why could you not figure out a way to have some peak service into Penn Station New York?” he asked.

All of the morning and evening peak time Montclair-Boonton trains will be rerouted, while trains during off-peak hours will still be direct in and out of Penn Station. The Montclair-Boonton will be the line most affected line, but some trains on the Morris and Essex Line and the North Jersey Coast Line will also be rerouted.

In 2017, NJ Transit’s rerouting of Morris-Essex lines affected 15,000 customers. This year’s plans are expected to affect 5,000 riders, officials said.

But for long-time NJ Transit train rider Diane Vecchiarello commuting is just getting worse. “The degradation of service is atrocious. I’ve been riding this train for 26 years and I am pissed off,” Vecchiarello said.

For more information, commuters may consult NJ Transit’s website at njtransit.com/inform.