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## Passenger Rail Analysis Maps 10-to-12-year Process for Restoring Passenger Rail to Lehigh Valley

Restoring passenger rail to the Lehigh Valley will likely take more than a decade and have capital costs between \$552 million and \$841 million but could provide thousands of travelers new options to get to New York, Philadelphia or Reading.

The Lehigh Valley Passenger Rail Analysis was released Wednesday by Pennsylvania Department of Transportation-commissioned consultant, WSP, during a special meeting of the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study's (LVTS) Technical and Coordinating Committees. The LVTS took no action and made no decisions about the report. Formal discussion of the report will happen at a later meeting, after board members have at least 30 days to digest the analysis.

WSP's analysis laid out a 14-step, 10-to-12-year process that includes selecting a rail carrier, additional market study, environmental clearances, engineering, design and construction.

The full report, led by Director of Rail, Freight, Ports & Waterways Angela Watson, can be found at [lvpc.org/passenger-rail](http://lvpc.org/passenger-rail).

During its more than yearlong study, WSP analyzed a dozen corridors and settled on these five potential route candidates. Each is projected to have three round trips, seven days a week, with four-to-eight rail cars each:

- **New York via Hackettstown** – With capital costs estimated at \$474.9 million, it would require an additional \$145 million for rolling stock (rail cars), and \$23.6 million to \$28.8 million in annual operating costs. The travel time is estimated to take 2 hours 30 minutes.
- **New York via High Bridge** – With capital costs of \$469.9 million and rolling stock of \$145 million, this route would have annual operating costs of \$16.5 million to \$20.1 million. The travel time is estimated at 2 hours 20 minutes.
- **Philadelphia via Landsdale** – With capital costs of \$635.8 million, and rolling stock costs of \$102 million, this route would have annual operating costs of \$5.1 to \$10.2 million. The travel time is estimated at 1 hour 46 minutes.
- **Philadelphia via Norristown** -- With capital costs of \$739 million and rolling stock costs of \$102 million, this route would have annual operating costs of \$5.5 million to \$10.8 million. The travel time is estimated at 1 hour 52 minutes.

- **Reading** – With capital costs of \$450.3 million and rolling stock costs of \$102 million, this route would have operating costs of \$2.2 million to \$4.3 million. The travel time is estimated at 46 minutes.

None of the operating costs include the cost of maintaining a station, financing, utility relocation or environmental mitigation. All of the routes would be over Norfolk Southern tracks that are currently busy with freight traffic, and some would be over tracks that have been converted to hiking and biking trails. Those are among the many hurdles that WSP said would have to be cleared before passenger rail could become a reality.

Other hurdles include finding a sponsor and operator, acquiring right-of-way, environmental challenges and navigating difficult issues such as historic properties and farmland in the path of some of the routes. The New York routes would require cooperation with New Jersey authorities.

LVTS and PennDOT will consider some of those issues in the coming months as they determine whether to forge ahead with the effort.

The Lehigh Valley Passenger Rail Feasibility Analysis was commissioned by PennDOT in late 2022, amid growing public support for restoring passenger rail service. That sentiment was stoked with the 2021 adoption of the \$1.2 trillion federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which allocated \$66 billion into improving and enhancing passenger rail service nationwide.

According to Census data, 7,923 Lehigh Valley residents work in Philadelphia, 3,747 work in New York City and 634 work in Reading.

Passenger train services from New York to the Lehigh Valley ended in 1967 when the Central Railroad of New Jersey ended service west of the Delaware River. The last passenger train to Philadelphia ran in 1979.

Ultimately, the Pennsylvania Legislature would have the final word. Because passenger rail lines do not turn a profit, legislators would have to agree to cover operating shortfalls in any new line created. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) runs passenger rail in Philadelphia, and Amtrak runs the Keystone line from Harrisburg to New York, and the Pennsylvanian line from Pittsburgh to New York.

Anyone with questions should contact the LVPC at 610-264-4544 or [planning@lvpc.org](mailto:planning@lvpc.org). Comments can be made at [lvpc.org/passenger-rail](https://lvpc.org/passenger-rail).