

New Hudson rail tunnel has 1st contract approved

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NEWARK — It's a go.

The first contract for one of 25 pieces of the massive \$8.7 billion second Hudson River rail tunnel project was approved by NJ Transit's board Wednesday, the same day that U.S. Transportation Secretary Raymond LaHood made favorable remarks about the project while in New York.

The \$13.6 million construction contract was awarded to Ferreira Construction Co. Inc. of Branchburg, which was the successful bidder out of 10 companies seeking the contract. Ferreira will build a railroad underpass carrying Tonelle Avenue/Routes 1 and 9 in North Bergen over tracks leading to the new tunnel.

The award sets the stage for a long-anticipated June groundbreaking for the first tunnel construction work, said Paul Wyckoff, NJ Transit tunnel project spokesman. This contract will create jobs for about 100 people, he said.

NJ Transit Executive Director Richard Sarles said he hopes to announce a specific groundbreaking date in the next few weeks. That project is expected to be finished in 2012.

LaHood, speaking at the Association for a Better New York breakfast, called the tunnel a "landmark project" that is "vital to the region's future" and said he was recommending that it be permitted to move ahead with initial construction in advance of a major new commitment of federal funds.

"The president has included 200 million dollars in his budget to keep this project moving in the meantime," LaHood said. This was the first of 25 contracts to be awarded for the project to build two new tunnels under the Hudson River, a station deep below 34th Street in New York and underground passages connecting it to Penn Station New York, New York City subway and PATH rapid transit lines.

When completed in 2017, the tunnel will double commuter rail capacity into New York and extend a one seat ride to the North Jersey Coast Line, south of Long Branch and the Raritan Valley Line, through the use of dual-mode electric and diesel powered locomotives.

The first tunnel project contract, which marks the most significant mass-transit project in the country, was hailed by members of the local congressional delegation, which worked to get approvals and the bi-state agencies funding it.

Last week, LaHood announced that President Barack Obama included \$200 million in additional funding for the tunnel project in the fiscal year 2010 federal budget, bringing the total federal commitment to date to \$378 million. The \$8.7 billion project includes \$5.7 billion committed by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the state to the project. Officials are hoping for a federal commitment of \$3 billion.