

## Gov. Jon Corzine, officials break ground on transit tunnel to NYC

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BY RUDY LARINI

TRENTON -- The nation's largest public works project officially began today when state and federal officials ceremonially broke ground in Hudson County on a second passenger rail tunnel under the Hudson River.

Almost a century after the existing trans-Hudson rail tunnel opened in 1910, speaker after speaker stepped to the podium behind a warehouse on Tonnele Avenue and hailed the tunnel project as a mass transit legacy to future generations. The project, which will take eight years to complete, will double capacity on NJ Transit trains.

### The tunnel project by the numbers

"We are making a contribution to the future that I think is untold. A hundred years from now, the nation and its Northeast corridor will be a better place because of the decisions and the actions we're taking today," Gov. Jon Corzine said.

The event was orchestrated to maximize the political power of a massive stimulus project in a downturn, with a gaggle of politicians and a huge American flag draped over two pieces of heavy construction equipment. Bleachers held a crowd of cheering union workers, some of the roughly 300 people who gathered for the event. And behind it all, a steady stream of NJ Transit trains rolled into and out of the existing tunnel just to the north.

Federal Transit Administrator Peter Rogoff called the tunnel project "a breakthrough like no other we've had in this country in some time."

"This project is truly a historic one. It's been roughly 100 years since the last rail tunnel under the Hudson was opened," he said. "A new tunnel has been talked about for 80 years. So this event is many decades overdue."

Rogoff also used the groundbreaking to announce the federal government's commitment to provide the full \$3 billion it had pledged toward the \$8.7 billion project, which also is being funded by NJ Transit, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the New Jersey Turnpike Authority. The funding includes \$130 million in federal stimulus funding.

Scheduled for completion in 2017, the project is expected to generate 6,000 construction-related jobs and 44,000 to 50,000 new permanent jobs. It will double NJ Transit's operating capacity from 23 to 48 trains an hour during peak commuting periods.

The first phase will carve an underpass beneath Tonnele Avenue, also known as Route 1 and 9, to the foot of the Palisades rock formation, where boring is expected to begin sometime next year for the tunnel under Hudson County and under the river. Work will be done simultaneously from the New York side.

In Manhattan, the tunnel will end deep below 34th Street in a new two-tiered station from Sixth Avenue to Eighth Avenue, giving passengers access to 14 subway lines, PATH trains and the Long Island Rail Road.

Critics have questioned the design, which dead-ends at the new station in New York without a rail connection to the old Penn Station or the east side of Manhattan. That means Amtrak trains won't be able to use the new station, which would be exclusively for NJ Transit.

"With this alignment, it's just not going to meet the transportation needs of the region," said Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, which was originally in favor of a new tunnel.

"Today was more of a rush to do a groundbreaking than people at rush hour," Tittel said.

A rail connection to the existing Penn Station had to be scrapped because unstable rock above the new terminal forced NJ Transit to lower the depth of the new station to 150 feet.

A connection to Grand Central Station in Manhattan was scuttled because New York City would not allow digging near a 92-year-old water tunnel serving much of Manhattan, but Coscia said an eastern extension of the new tunnel could be revisited once a new water tunnel now under construction opens and the old one is decommissioned.

He defended the current design.

"It meets all the major objectives. The major objectives were to get into New York, to double capacity and to provide a connection with the existing diesel lines so people have a one-seat ride into New York," Coscia said, noting diesel trains will be converted to dual diesel-electric ones permitted into the city. "It does all that."