

Big rail tunnel dig kickoff

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NORTH BERGEN - Gov. Jon Corzine and other regional, state and federal leaders broke ground on an \$8.7 billion rail tunnel yesterday that will double the capacity to transport passengers between New Jersey and New York when completed in 2017.

Elected officials who joined Corzine described construction of the Mass Transit Tunnel, also known as the ARC Tunnel, as one of the biggest transportation projects in the nation that will cut down vehicular traffic and create 6,000 construction jobs and another 45,000 jobs when finished.

"This is an incredible project," said Corzine, accompanied by both New Jersey senators, Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez, and a host of local officials that included North Bergen Mayor and state Sen. Nicholas Sacco and Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy.

"In today's economic recession, it has the added value of creating 6,000 new jobs day in and day out for the next six or seven years," Corzine added.

Corzine and Peter Rogoff, director of the Federal Transit Administration, announced a \$3 billion commitment from the federal government.

"This is the largest commitment to a project by the Department of Transportation in the history of the Department of Transportation," Rogoff said. The rest of the funding will be split between New Jersey and the Port Authority.

"Today we are constructing something for our future, for our quality of life and our quality of air," said Menendez.

Nine miles of track, the ARC Tunnel will connect rail yards in Kearny to 34th Street in Manhattan.

The new tunnel will speed the commute between New Jersey and New York by increasing the number of NJ Transit passenger trains passing under the river during peak rush hour from 23 to 48.

NJ Transit currently has only one two-rail tunnel, which it shares with Amtrak. The Path system, which operates commuter trains for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, has two rail tunnels, each with two rails.

The new tunnel will add two more rail lines.

"We need the work right now," said Mike Pepe, of Bayonne, a member of the carpenters' union, about the ARC project. Pepe was among 500 persons who attended yesterday's ceremony, most of them from construction unions.

Not everyone supports the tunnel.

Jeff Tittel, director of the Sierra Club in the state, said the tunnel fails to meet goals that were outlined 15 years ago, including connecting New Jersey to the east side of Manhattan. The project also fails to link with other proposed railways leading into New York City, he said.

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