



### **The Port Authority's Deal with the Devil**

After all the hype about how wonderful it would be to have light rail service to the North Shore to serve the bustling development and entertainment venues, the Port Authority (PAT) just demonstrated how silly those claims were and will continue to be. Last Saturday night fans exiting concerts and a Pirates game found long waits at the T station as service was inadequate to move them all quickly across the Allegheny to Downtown and beyond.

Let's be clear about PAT's difficulty. The system is not designed to handle massive numbers of riders all showing up at one time wanting to board a T car. Light rail cars can hold around 200 people jam packed, 400 on a double car train. If 4,000 people arrive at the stop nearest PNC Park in a short period wanting to get on arriving inbound service with empty double car trains, it would take ten trains to serve them all. Thus, even if cars arrived every five minutes, riders at the tail end of the long queue would have to wait almost an hour for a ride. And providing trains every five minutes is very fast service given the logistics involved in getting trains to the North Shore and turning them around to head southbound.

So what will happen when 10,000 or 15,000 Steelers fans clamor to get on a train following a game? Chaos. The people who envisioned the T system as a big city way to serve ballparks forgot a very important difference. Light rail is not the New York subway or Chicago's commuter rail that operate long trains capable of carrying thousands away from a station. Moreover, the stations are not end-of-the-line stops so passengers can board trains going in both directions to reach final destinations.

The PAT light rail system carries on average about 24,000 riders on a weekday. That's roughly 12,000 in each direction to and from the South Hills with the bulk of those trips occurring during morning and afternoon rush hours that extend over two and a half to three hours. If a third of inbound commuters all showed up at one station at the same time during the period of maximum available service, those at the end of the queue would wait a long time, and even longer if the station was not the first inbound stop because the cars would be partially full already.

In short, the T system is constrained by an ultimate limit on how many people it can accommodate per unit of time. When the numbers are arriving at a station at a rate faster than the system's carrying capacity, the lines will begin to grow and will grow exponentially if the rate of passenger arrivals continues to exceed the capacity to move riders. Folks riding the T over to the North Shore for an event will board in smaller numbers over a period of time, maybe hours. After a game they will want to leave at about the same time. They should be prepared to endure a long wait unless they leave the game early, as many people who drive and want to avoid parking garage and on street delays often do.

Then there is the free rider problem. Passengers from hotels or locals who park in town and ride free over to the North Shore and look forward to the free ride back are a huge problem. During periods when cars are relatively empty the free rides are not a great issue since the cars are going to the North Shore anyway. But during the evening on an event day, large numbers of Downtown parkers and hotel stayers taking advantage of the no- cost rides from downtown stops will add substantially to the paying ridership coming in from the South Hills.

This creates a two- fold problem for PAT. The Downtown boarders are not paying for the trip so a lot of people will choose the PAT ride as opposed to the 15 minute or less walk to the ball park. Since those people are not paying, it is not in PAT's interest to incur more cost in overtime for operators along with the other costs of running trains resulting from adding more service. At the same time, by substantially expanding the total number of riders beyond the number of paying passengers, wait times to board will be increased dramatically for all riders after events are over.

So the deal made with the Steelers, the Casino, the Stadium Authority and a parking company to offer free service to and from the North Shore has and will continue to exacerbate the problem that inevitably happens when the flow of riders to a station is greater than the capacity to move them at a pace that avoids long wait times for some.

Here is a reasonable suggestion. On days or evenings when there is a North Shore event, impose a fare of \$4 per round trip for those boarding in town. Folks who don't want to pay can hoof it over the river or find parking on the North Side. They have done that for many years.

Why should taxpayers subsidize people going to a Pirates game in the form of free rides to and from Downtown? The \$300,000 or so paid by the sponsors is not nearly enough to cover the cost of all the no-fare passengers who will use the system for events.

How is the \$517 million overhyped and unwarranted Connector looking now? All-in-all, a true fiasco. And all the bluster coming from the County Executive will not contribute positively to ending the problems stemming from the system's carrying capacity.

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