Resolving New Jersey Transit's Conflicting Train Schedule

(The Proposal)

Ethan Le

Montclair State University

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Professor Martin

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1. Introduction:

Commuters on the Montclair-Boonton line of New Jersey Transit are facing a traversal problem: there are not enough trains that travel inbound as much as outbound from Hoboken. In this proposal, a researched plan is put forward to resolve the problematic NJ Transit train schedule on the Montclair-Boonton line. The purpose of this proposal is to design a schedule so that commuters will have more flexibility toward traveling inbound, while retaining a big portion of the schedule for outbound trains. This way, there would be more trains going to the cities and local areas inbound instead of a fixed morning inbound and afternoon outbound schedule. There is a multidimensional aspect to solving this transit issue. The solution would not only encourage the reduction of emissions from private vehicles, it could promote local businesses that lay in the surrounding areas of the stops on the map. Public transportation is a necessity for commuters, especially ones that do not own a vehicle. A way to increase the vitality of commuting is to create more accessibilities for the NJ Transit train schedule—one that benefits both the NJ Transit group and the public.

2. Description of the Problem:

The Montclair-Boonton line is featured as a brown line on the NJ Transit train map, including stops such as, Hackettown, Dover, Boonton, Wayne (both Mountain View and Route 23), Montclair State University, Newark Broad Street, Secaucus, and Hoboken (the last stop on the inbound train towards New York City)—Hackettstown would be the final stop when going outbound. As previously noted, the Montclair-Boonton line's schedule is fixed with inbound trains exclusively traveling in the morning while outbound trains going in the afternoon till night. The schedule poses some obstacles for the commuters between the stops of Hackettstown and Montclair State University. The last train departing the Hackettstown terminal to Montclair State

University station on the Montclair-Boonton line is at 8:22 a.m.—there are no more inbound trains after that time. A couple of issues arise for commuters, not excluding:

- The schedule creates travel disruptions as it limits its passengers to travel inbound later in the day.
- College students who have classes in the afternoon, or at night, withstand multiple hours of stagnancy, waiting for the start time of the class.
- The schedule has even fewer inbound trains on the weekend, causing complications for commuters to travel to the city.

A researched solution needs to be formed to address these problems: why are there so few trains traveling inbound, as well as why is there a fixed separation between morning and night? There should be an even flow of trains, going both directions throughout the day. Limited inbound train rides will cause a decrease in passengers—which will be a salient factor in deciding the abolishment of a train station. If the issue is not resolved, commuters will have to accept other expensive and time-consuming alternatives to rail travel; the outcomes may likely decrease commuters' odds of future endeavors in urban areas. A reduction in inbound trains will also drastically add more to traffic congestion in local areas, highways, and school zones.

3. Client Analysis:

The proposal primarily targets commuters, especially college students that are departing from the stops between Hackettown and Montclair State University. The Montclair-Boonton line consists major colleges on its rail track—this includes: Montclair State University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rutgers Newark, and Steven Institution of

Technology—along with other major colleges located in New York City via Secaucus Junction or Hoboken PATH trains. College students are among the largest demographic that ride the trains to schools/institutions. Most colleges on the line also offer housing; on-campus students often struggle traveling to outbound areas that offer better markets for shopping, food, and necessity. With the inflationary prices of gas, diesel, and fuel, commuting has become more vital for the public to get to places without spending an obscene amount of money at the pump. The economy is constantly shifting unpredictably, so creating more options for commuters will be beneficial to most groups; they could even make a profound impact on people's livelihoods.

4. Methods and Research:

To pinpoint the success of creating better flexibilities for commuters, research would be conducted in these areas:

- Researching the frequency of trains traveling inbound between the stops of Hackettstown and Montclair State University.
- Researching the traffic flow on highways, local streets, and school zones around the major colleges and urban areas.
- Researching the NJ Transit's budget distribution among its services—noting how the trains, the rail tracks, and the stations are factored into their budget spending.

The research will be conducted in three simple stages:

- *Phase One – Gathering data on the most popular hours that trains going inbound across multiple lines.*

- A survey will be organized, asking questions to determine how frequently college students and commuters use the railway to travel inbound. Train riders that go back from Montclair State University to Hackettstown and Dover will be the primary demographic to survey—secondary data will be based on commuters traveling from Hoboken. Additionally, suggestions and feedback about NJ Transit's decision for the schedule will be asked of surveyed participants. This is done to gather any further insights that would be added to the current research. From the surveys, a better picture can be formed as to how the public feels about traveling using NJ Transit's train service, and the common issues faced while commuting.

- *Phase Two – Collecting statistics on highways toward urban areas—this includes Montclair, Newark, Hoboken, and Secaucus.*
  - Traffic data of roads and highways in major colleges' routes, urban areas, and school zones will be thoroughly researched and studied. Maps of the railroad lines will also be used in studying the high traffic congested areas. Through this data, statistics about the travel time by car will be closely examined and compared with the travel time by trains. Thus, the research will display insights in how the railroad affects traffic in local areas as well as urban areas.
- *Phase Three – Contacting NJ Transit headquarters directly to get a clearer view of the NJ Transit system's operations and budgeting.*
  - NJ Transit personnel and/or representatives are contacted to inquire about why the train schedule has so many conflicting issues for commuters.

Explanations and answers will be used to clear out any confusion about the way NJ Transit decides its schedule and its closure on certain stations. This inquiry will lay further into how a better system can be developed, so that both NJ Transit and the public have more benefits than losses.

Research Schedule:

11/4 – Proposal submitted

11/7 – Phase One: Survey the students that travel outbound from MSU's station and Montclair Height Station.

11/8 – Compile the gathered data into a document—determining the popular hours of travel and suggestions about the train's schedule.

11/9 – Traveling to Hoboken to survey the commuters that go to school/work in the city (if needed).

11/11 – Phase Two: Contacting local city towns of busy urban areas and school areas to obtain the local map. Plus, online research for popular traffic congestion areas on the highways.

11/14 – Data analysis for Phrase Two.

11/17 – Phase Three: Contacting NJ Transit's headquarters/representatives to conduct a questionnaire.

11/19 – Data analysis.

11/22 – Start the Recommendation Report.

11/29 – Recommendation Report Draft Submission.

12/9 – Recommendation Report (Final) Submission.

5. **Cost and Resources:**

The process will primarily involve surveying and researching, so there are no necessary costs. Most of the process will only involve research and investigation into NJ Transit's decision about the Montclair-Boonton line train schedule. Phone calls to NJ Transit's customer service and representative will be free of charge as well as surveying commuters at the school's train station. There might be a travel cost to Hoboken if further research needed to be made. Maps of local areas near Montclair State University, Rutgers Newark, and other colleges on the Montclair-Boonton line can be obtained through respective city government as well as online databases. The team will use Google Docs, Google Excels, and Google Slides to conduct the research, which require no costs as everyone in the team has a Google account.

6. **Benefits and Feasibility:**

The research will deliver impactful benefits to most groups. Of course, commuters will be the ultimate beneficiary of this research, having more flexibility to travel. The reduction of traffic in local/urban areas will increase as trains become more accessible throughout the day—creating a better traffic flow for commercial and emergency vehicles on the road. Plus, with lower traffic congestion, the environment will be directly impacted as there would be less emission of greenhouse gasses being released into the atmosphere. With trains traveling more frequently inbound, commuters will cut costs in their budget as if they would have driven to school and the city. Moreover, the local

businesses residing around these train stops would have a boost in their revenue as more people from the city travel outbound to explore and dine, knowing there would be a train back to their homes later in the day.

As for feasibility goes, the focus will be primarily on commuters around major colleges as well as city goers. The cost of performing research and study about trains' operations will be close to zero dollars. Thus, the research presents a low risk factor with minor challenges arise when surveying and questioning. There is a considerable factor of some promising participants being nervous or timid to answer these questions, but overall, the research prompts no major obstacles.

7. **Conclusion:**

The outcomes of this project will create tremendous impacts for commuters. This is low-risk research with advantageous rewards, so it can deliver absolute results without putting a dent to the budget. In the hope of data and analysis, the research will surely generate a bigger demography for rail travel. The alternative option will cut back on traffic congestion as well as reducing greenhouse gasses being produced. As always, more insights and perspectives will be appreciative in discovering ways to reform NJ Transit's train schedule. Your time and your feedback on the process will be highly regarded by the team. If you have any further questions or request additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out to the team at let3@montclair.edu.

References

Montclair-Boonton Line Master File. https://www.montclair.edu/inserra-chair/wp-content/uploads/sites/71/2019/06/Montclair-Boonton-Line-train-schedule.pdf