

COMMUNITY NEWS ***(GARFIELD/WALLINGTON)***

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Take the train to the Wesmont Station

NJ Transit officials announce a new hub in the community by 2011

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New Jersey Transit officials have announced a joint venture with developers of the future Wesmont Station to build a new train hub in 2009.

Developers of Wesmont Station, a mixed-use community planned for the former Curtiss-Wright aeronautical plant on Passaic Avenue in Wood-Ridge, have long promised a new train station for their ambitious development project.

The announcement on June 11 came after transit officials and representatives from Wood-Ridge LLC, the management firm overseeing the Wesmont project, agreed on a timetable for the station's construction.

NJ Transit anticipates a construction start date in 2009, with completion scheduled for sometime in 2011.

Confirmation of the rail hub construction, as well as its association with NJ Transit, validates some of the promises made by Wesmont's developers. Somerset Development, the parent company behind the Wesmont concept, has pledged to turn the deteriorating industrial complex into a bustling, transit-friendly community.

The station's location in Wood-Ridge along the Main Bergen County Line is a lucrative hotspot for both NJ Transit and the future tenants of the Wesmont downtown shopping plaza. With the construction of Wesmont, developers are anticipating between a 26- to 40-percent increase in the borough's total population.

According to data collected by NJ Transit, the third largest transit system in the country, the average weekday passenger trip for the Main Bergen Line in the transportation entity's 2007 fiscal year was estimated at 24,800 riders. The line ranks fourth in ridership among the state's eight train routes.

Transit officials said the project, which will include a new infrastructure maintenance facility, will become a \$37 million asset for NJ Transit.

"With more demands on our system, this plan will help us to better maintain our infrastructure to ensure safe, reliable service for the thousands of customers who use the Bergen County Line each day," said NJ Transit Executive Director Richard Sarles.

New Jersey Transportation Commissioner Kris Kolluri commended the project's organizers and alluded to the developers' promotion of green business practices.

"This project builds on the principles of transit-oriented development by converting an existing brownfield into a thriving community," said Kolluri.

The Wesmont developers expect to build more than 700 residential units and a downtown commercial district in close proximity to the housing village.

According to Ralph Zucker, president of Somerset Development, Wesmont's design is a product of the New Urbanist residential design movement, which aims to eradicate suburban sprawl. The New Urbanists believe in building tightly knit communities with a variety of services within walking distance, a stark contrast to the current suburban grids in North Jersey.

Opposition to the mixed-use style of community building comes from architectural and political parties, like the Libertarians, who believe the agenda of the New Urbanists is too homogeneous and dismisses all other kinds of public and private construction.

Zucker believes strongly in the mixed-use concept, and has called communities like Wesmont an "environmental home-run." Taking more cars off the road, he said, tackles the problem of North Jersey's congested and polluted roadways.

"A single person, commuting alone by car, who switches a 20-mile round trip commute to existing public transportation, can reduce his or her annual CO2 emissions by 4,800 pounds per year," reads a report released by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), an organization that lobbies for the advancement of public transportation.

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