

# Scranton to New York Penn Station Rail Service Development Plan

## Purpose and Need Statement

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## 1.0 Introduction

This draft Purpose and Need Statement is for the Scranton to New York Penn Station Rail Corridor Service Development Plan (SDP) which is being prepared as part of Step 2 of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor Identification Program (Corridor ID). The draft Purpose and Need Statement is the foundation for the SDP and will be used to guide the analysis and evaluation of proposed infrastructure improvements.

### 1.1 Project History

The Scranton to New York Penn Station Rail Corridor (Corridor) was last served by passenger trains in 1970. Since then, the Corridor has been the subject of numerous studies and long-range transportation plans that show growing demand for intercity passenger rail service along a corridor between northeastern Pennsylvania and New York City that has heavy auto traffic and unpredictable travel times. These past studies included:

- **2008 Environmental Assessment:** NJ TRANSIT and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) completed the *New Jersey-Pennsylvania Lackawanna Cut-Off Passenger Rail Service Restoration Project Environmental Assessment* which evaluated extending NJ TRANSIT commuter rail service beyond Port Morris, NJ to Scranton, PA. The FTA issued a Finding of No Significant Impact.
- **2009 Supplemental Environmental Assessment:** NJ TRANSIT and the FTA revised the *New Jersey-Pennsylvania Lackawanna Cut-Off Passenger Rail Service Restoration Project Environmental Assessment* to evaluate a minimal operating segment (MOS) and a non-MOS segment. FTA issued a revised Finding of No Significant Impact.
- **2016 PennDOT Evaluation:** PennDOT conducted a study, *New Jersey-Pennsylvania Lackawanna Cut-Off Passenger Rail Service Restoration Project – Task 1.1 Data Research Memorandum*, to assess what would be needed to continue planning and development of the Corridor based on the 2008-2009 environmental documents.
- **2019 PNRRA Report:** The Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Railroad Authority (PNRRA) led an infrastructure concept study, *Lackawanna Cut-Off Restoration – Commuter Rail Study*, for approximately six miles in Pennsylvania (PA) to a potential new station in Delaware Water Gap, PA.
- **2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan:** The 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan (Plan) describes the proposed PNRRA and NJ TRANSIT passenger commuter rail service project between Scranton, the Poconos, New Jersey, and New York City and indicates project completion is uncertain. The project is classified in the Plan as a Vision project.<sup>1</sup>
- **2023 Amtrak Report:** Amtrak completed a planning study, *Analysis of Options for Scranton-New York Amtrak Passenger Rail Service – Preliminary Service*

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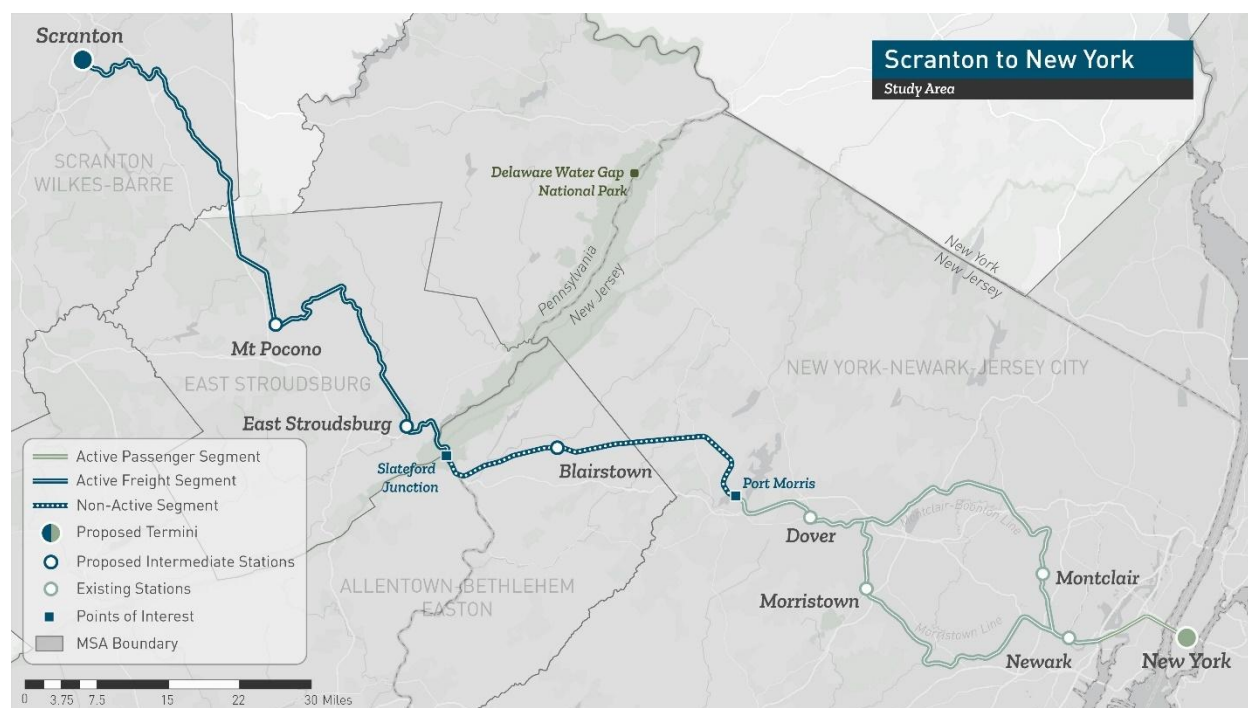
<sup>1</sup> The 2025 State Rail Plan is currently in development.

*Plan and Financial Analysis*, examining the re-establishment of intercity passenger rail service from Scranton to New York Penn Station, including an infrastructure assessment between Scranton and Delaware Water Gap.

## 1.2 Project Description

The Scranton to New York Penn Station Corridor is proposed to re-establish intercity passenger rail service between Scranton, PA, and New York Penn Station via New Jersey, a route length of approximately 140 miles (Figure 1). The proposed Corridor would connect Scranton, PA, and New York, NY, with potential intermediate stops at East Stroudsburg and Mt. Pocono, PA, and Blairstown, Dover, Montclair, Morristown, and Newark, NJ. The proposed Corridor would provide new service (three daily round trips) on mostly active rail lines, plus rebuild infrastructure that has been abandoned.

**Figure 1. Project Location**



The Scranton to New York Penn Station Corridor route comprises four distinct segments (Figure 2):

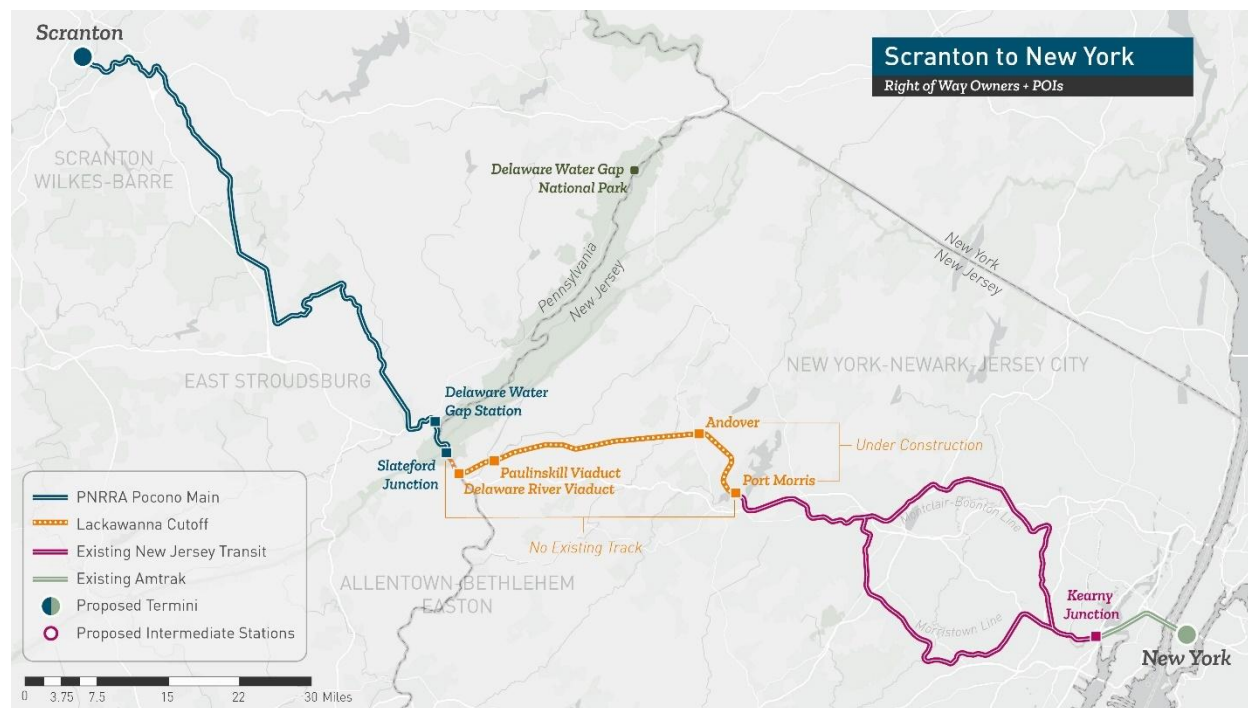
- Scranton, PA to Slateford, PA (60 miles): This segment is owned by PNRRA and hosts local freight service operated by Delaware-Lackawanna Railroad and excursion trains from Steamtown National Historic Site.
- Slateford, PA to Port Morris, NJ (28 miles): This segment, known as the Lackawanna Cutoff, is owned in part by PNRRA and in part by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT). It was abandoned in 1979 by then-owner Conrail. Although the track was removed, the right-of-way is still intact across the

entire segment. The eastern seven miles from Port Morris to Andover are currently under re-construction by New Jersey Transit (NJ TRANSIT) to extend commuter rail service to a new station in Andover.

- Port Morris, NJ to Kearny, NJ (approximately 43 miles): This segment is owned by NJ TRANSIT and predominantly serves NJ TRANSIT commuter rail into New York City. On this segment, there are two route options between Denville and Newark, the Morristown Line and the Montclair-Boonton Line, both of which are potential candidates for the proposed Scranton corridor.
- Kearny, NJ to New York Penn Station, NY (8 miles): This segment is on Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor (NEC) and serves a mix of Amtrak intercity trains and NJ TRANSIT commuter trains.

Notably, the entire right-of-way for this route is under public agency or rail agency control. The primary stakeholders in the development of this Corridor are PennDOT, the Corridor ID project sponsor and grantee; right-of-way owner PNRRA; right-of-way owner NJDOT; right-of-way owner and commuter rail operator NJ TRANSIT; and right-of-way owner and proposed operator Amtrak (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Right-of-Way Owners**



### 3.0 Purpose of the Proposed Action

The purpose of the Scranton to New York City Corridor ID project (Project) is to improve travel between Northeast Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York City by restoring

intercity passenger rail service to the region. The Project would upgrade and invest in existing railroad rights-of-way to allow intercity passenger rail service to operate and to limit environmental impacts while benefiting the region's economy by providing a new transportation choice for travelers. The Project would improve the connectivity of the region by restoring intercity passenger rail service, promoting resiliency, addressing existing travel concerns, and increasing rail usage in a growing region.

## 4.0 Need for the Proposed Action

The Project aims to address longstanding challenges in the Corridor. The needs for the Scranton to New York City intercity passenger rail service project are:

### Need 1.

#### Existing infrastructure unable to meet the travel demand.

The region has experienced increases in population, employment, tourism, and changes in travel preferences which has led to an increase in intercity travel that cannot be supported by the existing transportation network. The Corridor links the Scranton-Wilkes-Barre, PA and Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ metropolitan areas with the most populated metropolitan area of the US, New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ. The metropolitan areas population and rank are: New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ (20,000,000, #1); Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ (886,000, #66); and Scranton-Wilkes-Barre, PA (574,000, #102). The Study Area includes three Metropolitan Statistical Areas and one Micropolitan Statistical Area, with population estimates from the most recent US Census Bureau ACS 5-year data (2022):

- 1) The Scranton-Wilkes-Barre metropolitan area (population 567,000) of northeastern Pennsylvania, which includes the City of Scranton (population 76,000; 6th largest city in PA). This area has no passenger rail services.
- 2) The East Stroudsburg micropolitan area (population 167,000) of northeastern Pennsylvania, which includes the Borough of Mount Pocono and the Borough of East Stroudsburg. This area has no passenger rail services.
- 3) The Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton metropolitan area (population 871,000) includes counties in both eastern Pennsylvania and northwestern New Jersey. A proposed station on the corridor is at Blairstown in northern Warren County, NJ. The only passenger rail service in Warren County is NJ Transit serving Hackettstown on the eastern edge of the county.
- 4) The New York City-Newark-Jersey City metropolitan area (population 19,909,000) includes New York City, and the cities of Newark, Montclair, Morristown, and Dover in northern New Jersey. This area is heavily served by passenger rail systems including Amtrak's NEC and NJ Transit commuter lines. New York Penn Station also provides connections to MTA Long Island Rail Road commuter rail and MTA subway services. Construction is underway to extend Metro-North Railroad commuter rail to Penn Station, and Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH) rapid transit is available near the station.

Approximately one in 16 Americans live in this region. Because many residents of northeastern Pennsylvania and northwestern New Jersey routinely travel to New York City, travelers in the Corridor experience reduced mobility as a result of increasing demand on limited modal connections between major airports, transit systems, and passenger rail. Intercity passenger rail trip times are anticipated to be competitive with automobile and intercity bus; however, rail travel times would be more reliable as they would not require use of the highway network which is subject to congestion. There are no air connections between Scranton and New York City.

While intercity travel in the corridor is primarily via the highway network, many of these roadways cannot be expanded to meet increased demand. Interstate 80, constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, has mostly maintained its original configuration and size since it was constructed. Due to natural geographic challenges and topographic constraints, Interstate 80 configuration and size through the Pocono region of Monroe County has remained largely unchanged. Travelers in this area of Interstate 80 experience congestion during peak travel times for work trips on weekdays and recreation trips on weekends, particularly during the summer months. Traffic volumes on Interstate 80 in Monroe County over the next 20 years are projected to nearly double, growing by 90 percent by the year 2045.<sup>2</sup> On the New Jersey side, Interstate 80 connects the Delaware Water Gap Bridge to New York via the George Washington Bridge or to the Lincoln Tunnel using U.S. Route 46, NJ Route 3, and NJ Route 495. Because of the terrain and dense development along this section of Interstate 80, the footprint has also remained mostly unchanged as it is not financially or environmentally feasible to add highway lanes, leaving few ways to improve conditions for an ever-increasing number of travelers, resulting in frequent vehicle congestion and travel delays.

## Need 2.

### Lack of multimodal connectivity inhibits access to economic opportunities throughout the region.

The Corridor location within the megalopolis region of the eastern U.S. enhances the ability to access the region's economic opportunities and to attract business, industry, and investments. For example, 15 percent of all tourism dollars spent in Pennsylvania are used in the Northeastern Pennsylvania region.<sup>3</sup> A reliable and efficient multimodal system that connects to businesses, recreation, and natural areas is needed to support economic development and help attract new visitors and jobs. Economic benefits would include increased tourism and creating new jobs in the growing tourism, service, and hospitality industries. To take advantage of the existing high tourism rates, the corridor would help promote local redevelopment opportunities near passenger stations, historic rail districts, and downtown redevelopment areas. This is essential to the area's economic health as it would enhance existing attractions nearby proposed stations such as the Steamtown National Historic site, Electric City Trolley Station and Museum,

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<sup>2</sup> Calculated from traffic volumes from the PennDOT, 80 Reconstruction Project at [www.i80project.com](http://www.i80project.com).

<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania Office of Tourism, Economic Impact of Visitors in Pennsylvania, 2023.

Kalahari Resort, Camelback Mountain Adventures, Great Wolf Resorts, Mount Airy Casino Resort, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Appalachian Trail, and Shawnee Mountain Ski Area. Ensuring mobility and access is crucial for enhancing economic competitiveness, and transportation plays a significant role in achieving this. More options for travelers could further maximize the attractive qualities of the Corridor and strengthen its economic competitiveness.

### Need 3.

#### Regional travel suffers from lack of resilience and redundancy along the existing transportation network.

The unreliability of travel, caused by congestion, delays, weather, and other unexpected disruptions, negatively impacts the quality of life and economic well-being of Corridor residents, businesses, and tourists. Travel times and delays for automobile travel can vary significantly from the estimated free-flow of 2 hours and 45-minute travel time between Scranton and New York City due to morning and evening peak congestion, severe weather, and accidents. With no passenger rail or air services and limited intercity bus service in the Corridor between Scranton and New York City, personal vehicles are the primary mode of travel. Increasing demand and worsening congestion have resulted in travel conditions along the Corridor from Pennsylvania to destinations in New York and northern New Jersey that are often poor for significant segments of the trip, resulting in increased travel time for users. In addition, according to the National Safety Council, intercity passenger rail travel is significantly safer than automobile travel on the Interstate Highway System; the fatality rate for passenger vehicles is over 20 times higher than that for intercity passenger trains, with passenger vehicles accounting for 1.11 deaths per 100 million passenger miles, as compared to just 0.05 for passenger trains.<sup>4</sup>

The Corridor is vulnerable to disruptions due to weather events that occur in northeastern Pennsylvania and northwest New Jersey such as flooding, snowfall and ice accumulation, and fog conditions. Weather is the cause of an estimated 26 percent of all congestion in northeastern Pennsylvania.<sup>5</sup> The terrain of the Corridor makes it particularly susceptible to winter weather conditions such as snow squalls with zero visibility that have required the closing of interstates. One notable weather event was the nor'easter on March 2, 2018, which stranded hundreds of travelers on Interstate 80 in the Poconos for over 24 hours.<sup>6</sup> All lanes were shut down due to disabled vehicles, caused by two feet of snow and powerful winds. A lack of system and modal redundancy is a challenge for travelers during these weather events. There are no current alternatives for travelers in the Corridor that are not impacted by highway congestion, weather, or other disruptive events that would be more reliable and resilient

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<sup>4</sup> National Safety Council, 2023

<sup>5</sup> Northeastern Pennsylvania Metropolitan Planning Organization 2050 Long-Range Plan, January 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Nicole Radzевич, The Morning Call, I-80 travelers stranded overnight as Gov. Wolf sends Pennsylvania National Guard troops to Poconos, March 3, 2018, <https://www.mcall.com/2018/03/03/i-80-travelers-stranded-overnight-as-gov-wolf-sends-pennsylvania-national-guard-troops-to-poconos/>, retrieved 10/21/25.

than highway travel. This Project is an opportunity to restore rail in a cost-efficient way by operating service within the existing railroad right of way with few freight rail conflicts, negating the need for costly and long acquisitions and operational negotiations with freight railroads.