



September 30, 2024

**To: Senator Wayne Langerholc, Jr., Pennsylvania Senate
Transportation Committee**

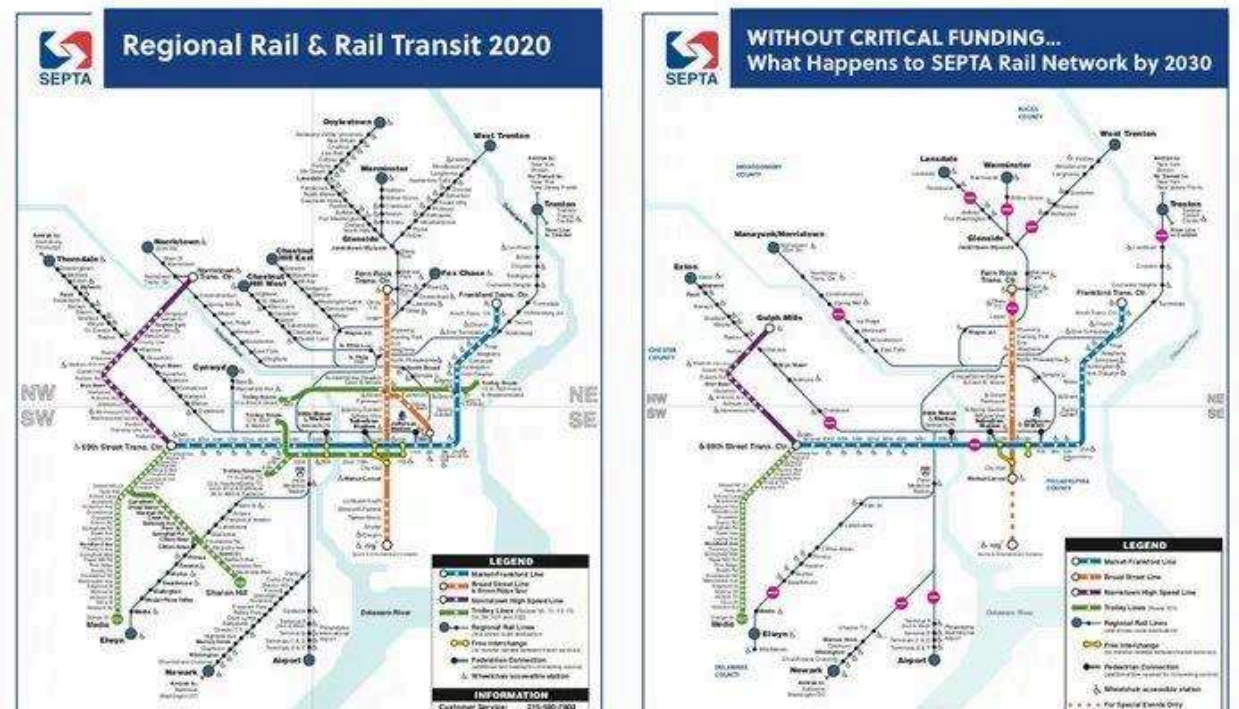
**From: Bob Previdi, Policy Director, Save the Train, West Mt Airy
Neighbors, Philadelphia, PA**

**Subject: Public Transit Investment - Post-COVID - Preparing for 2026
and Beyond**

Dear Senator Langerholc, Jr.,:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Save The Train Coalition, an ad-hoc group of members from Nicetown, Germantown, Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill formed to fight the closure of the Chestnut Hill West Regional Rail line and other service cuts that will be necessary if SEPTA's budget gap isn't closed this year.

Late last year, we got a copy of SEPTA’s “doomsday map,” which you can see on the screen. It’s a stark rendering of severe cuts we may face if you and your colleagues don’t provide additional support for the 2025 budget.



Our 8,000 members and over 70 organizations from Northwest Philadelphia support the Governor’s proposal to save our public transportation. We are counting on you to help preserve this crucial service during a pivotal time. It’s true that the Covid pandemic hurt ridership, and we agree that SEPTA needs to evolve. But SEPTA is already reviewing its bus routes and exploring more efficient ways to use the Regional Rail system. This effort needs to be encouraged by investing in more frequent and efficient service and safety initiatives, not draconian cuts.

Each element of SEPTA's extensive network of trolleys, buses, trains, and subways face its own challenges. But we cannot simply accept declining ridership as an insurmountable problem. This system is too vital to our city and region, preventing gridlock and supporting economic activity.

And we have other strong reasons to support transit on the horizon. In 2026, Philadelphia will be in the global spotlight. Are we ready? No. Can we be? Absolutely.

America's 250th birthday celebration, the Major League Baseball All-Star Game, and FIFA's six World Cup matches will draw hundreds of thousands of visitors, and they'll both want and need to take transit. We must ensure our public transit system can handle this influx effectively, efficiently, and comfortably.

Without full funding for this year's budget, SEPTA must divert attention to balancing the books by cutting services — jeopardizing our ability to make a positive impression to the thousands of visitors in 2026.

Starving SEPTA right now is like an Olympic marathoner cutting calories right before a race. At the same time, our region — from Doylestown to Thorndale — depends, and deserves a strong transit system. Rail and trolley service helped build Philadelphia and its suburbs, and SEPTA is critical to continuing that growth without clogging our roads and highways with endless traffic. Other cities are spending billions trying to put transit systems back that were ripped out in the 50s but we already have a system. Why not take advantage of this amazing infrastructure by improving it?

Yes, there are problems: Our members say service frequency and safety are major obstacles to riding transit. To address these issues, we propose the following recommendations with an eye towards supporting SEPTA in the short and long term:

- 1. Legislative Support: We need your commitment to secure funding that prevents service cuts, and allows for increased frequency, and manages the safety issues that hurt ridership.**
- 2. Fix City Hall/Suburban Station: While a full station rehab before 2026 is not feasible, the City Hall and Suburban Station complex needs a refresh. It sits at the heart of the transit network and the empty storefronts, bad signage, and an atmosphere of lawlessness need to be dealt with. The station experience must be more fun and inviting for visitors and citizens alike. It's depressing, fix it by inviting the Mural Arts Program and students to put more fun 1776-themed artwork on blank walls.**
- 3. Focus on supporting Septa's efforts to help the homeless and helpless who are riding trains with no place else to go. Crime was down 37% on SEPTA systems during the first half of 2024, thanks to efforts by the agency and the SEPTA police. But SEPTA still suffers from a perception of safety as a major problem. This is why the physical environment, signage and communications are all pivotal parts of the equation and support a comfortable environment, and must be improved, especially at key transfer hubs.**

Finally, the City and Commonwealth also must do much more to support SEPTA's outreach programs. SEPTA is not a social services agency and can't be expected to go this alone. But what they have accomplished so far is an impressive first step.

We must help SEPTA in assessing just how large the problem is and find ways to support the human beings who are suffering and riding the system. And we need to do it 24/7.



Drawing on historical examples, we know change is possible. In the 1970s and 80s, NYC Transit faced a collapse with severe ridership declines due to rising crime and dirty stations, and malfunctioning trains and buses. Under David Gunn (who used to lead SEPTA) and Police Commissioner Bill Bratton, initiatives to reduce crime and fix the physical conditions of trains, buses, and stations helped ridership surge back from 3.3 to 5.5 million daily riders. We should aim for a similar transformation that revitalizes how we view and use our

existing system in Philadelphia. If you have not seen 5th Street on the Market Frankford Line, go take a look, it is what we should aim for.



At Save The Train, we believe our public transit system is a crucial part of Pennsylvania's multimodal transportation network. While COVID has negatively impacted ridership, we cannot simply give up.

In fact, we must double down on assessing problems and making changes that will draw riders back, and use 2026 as a rallying cry to make those changes happen, in much the same way as Los Angeles is using the 2028 Olympics to build out its transit system.



SEPTA has a vast network that supports southeast PA and is the best way to reduce traffic congestion and is an important part of the Commonwealth's multimodal transportation system that includes roads, bridges, airports, and seaports. I know the legislature is working on fixing long term funding for transportation but we can't forget SEPTA's budget this year - we need to make it whole. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you.

Submitted by,

Bob Previdi

Policy Director, Save the Train, West Mt. Airy Neighbors, Philadelphia, PA 19119

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Community Comments for Senate Transportation Committee

From: The Save the Train Coalition (savethetrain.org)

Why Do You Take Transit, and What Would You Do If Service Is Cut?

Lindsey Lubow: I ride SEPTA's buses and trains because I'm not able to drive. My neurologist was relieved to learn towards the beginning of our partnership that I did not already have a license that she'd need to talk me into yielding. Even if my condition improved, the medications involved are messing with my reaction speed. I cannot envision myself safely operating a motor vehicle.

I have only ever managed to work part time due to my disabilities, so SEPTA fares are much more affordable than trying to get around by rideshare.

Mark Rivinus: I am a 100% disabled veteran who rides the Chestnut Hill West line to get to my medical appointments at the VA Medical Center. The loss of this line would make getting to my medical care difficult. I served my country, and am hoping that my state and city will continue to meet my transportation needs.

Taryn Dalius: I ride the train to get to my office in Center City. I'm a landscape architect, and I design playgrounds in Philly. I also use the train to get into the City for museums, restaurants and events.

I'm not sure what I'll do if there are cuts. As a working mom, riding the train has enabled me to balance my job and parenting. I'm concerned that a less-efficient means of transit will take more time I don't have, and I'll be forced to look for new work.

Sarah Winawer-Wetzel: To work in University City. I would have to start driving. It would pretty much force us to get a second car — we can make do with one only because I can walk to the train from my house. I hate driving to work! It's so stressful, gas is expensive, and parking is even worse. I love knowing that I'm doing my part to fight climate change by not commuting via car. We need MORE public transit, not less!

Sydney Potter: To explore the city, access to Amtrak for work trips, grocery runs & shopping. SOLE way of travel.

I wouldn't have a way to get to the Amtrak for work trips in an efficient way. Uber is too expensive.

Ben Nitkin: I use the train to get to center city events in the evenings. It's faster than the bus, I don't need to transfer, and I never even think about parking!

Matt Shoemaker: Primarily to commute, but also for leisure and other reasons to get between Mt. Airy and Center City.

[Service cuts or closure] would be very difficult. We would likely have to buy a 2nd car, and I don't know what it would do to our childcare. It would definitely make things much worse for us.

Anonymous: I take the train to work. I love the stations. I'd either lose my job or have to move from the house I recently bought by selling at a loss as I am disabled and I cannot walk to another nearby train station or have the money to Uber daily.

Dara Chase: I take the train every day to get to school, to get to work, to go volunteer, to meet friends in center city. It's a huge part of why I chose to move to Philadelphia and start my career as a lawyer, because the train makes the city so connected, and when it goes past the zoo and over the river and you can see the skyline it's just beautiful!

Without CHW I would have no way to get to work or school, I don't know what I would do. I guess I would have to double my commute by taking the bus, but that rarely comes when it says it will.

Leah Shafran Topaz: I ride it to 30th st station and take Amtrak to NYC from there once a week for work. My 14 yo daughter rides it daily to school at Springside Chestnut Hill Academy. I hate driving so every time I ride it it's a favorite moment.

Without it, I would have to take Uber to 30th St. I have no idea how my daughter will get to school.

Jennifer Keene: To avoid traffic and expensive parking when going to Center City. I love being able to be there in 20-25 minutes. Plus, it's fun!

If service is cut, I'd be really sad and disappointed. Access to the station is the main reason we chose our house. I would do less business in Center City.

Anonymous: Using transit to commute to University City makes my life easier and keeps me safer than a drive does. I love my train commute, as does my toddler son who often rides into the city with me. I grew up in a small town dependent on cars and have come to be a huge transit advocate because of my experience having a faster, safer, and more efficient way to get to and

from work each day over the last few years. When we first moved to Philadelphia my infant son and I would ride the train together every day so I could take him to daycare in the city. The memories he has of those years are priceless to me and he still talks about when he would ride the big train with mom.

I would need to drive into University City each day and significantly change my lifestyle to afford the cost of parking because Penn currently subsidizes my transit costs.

Erika Morgan: An intergenerational group of neighbors rode the CHW train to Jefferson Station for a night out on the town.

My husband and I moved to Mount Airy for the train and nature access as well as the walkability and the small neighborhood feel. I use the CHW to get to work, doctors appointments, theatre performances, sporting events, and to visit friends and families. Plus I have many friends and family members who do not drive and can only visit me by taking the train. CHW is a lifeline to enjoying life. Driving or walking to CHE is not an option for everyone. This is a neighborhood with an older population who cannot do the walk or drive, but need to take the train. The bus takes much longer than the train. Plus a route 23 bus driver was shot, so many people are afraid to ride the bus. Rideshare is prohibitively expensive. Many large scale apartments are currently being built in Mount Airy and Germantown. I am sure there is more on the way. This area needs good train access to allow for people to live affordably and to limit an increase in traffic.

Rob Hewitt: Our family of four (2 adults and 2 kids) does not own a car. We rely on the CHW train and all the local buses to go to school, work, groceries, and everything else. I would have to take the H bus to the CHE line or solely rely on buses.

Emma Ditnes: I recently calculated the approximate number of hours I've spent on the CHW in my life (since it was the R8) and it came out to around one month. Since riding the train to and from high school every day and then commuting to and from various jobs for a number of years, I've spent approximately 30 days of my life on trains going to and from Carpenter station. As someone who does not have a driver's license and does not wish to get one due to personal reasons, the train has allowed me to travel safely back and forth across the city at a reasonable price for more than half of my life. I currently live in center city and my parents live in Mount Airy. The Chestnut Hill West allows me to visit my elderly parents on a regular basis without breaking the bank. As an early childhood educator with a modest income, this is incredibly important to me.

Without it, I'd be reliant on expensive ride share services.

Megan Seubert: I use transit to get to my company's office in Center City. Without it, I would have to look for another job after two years in my position. I am required to be onsite 2-3 days per week. My older car would not make it to Center City, and taking an Uber is neither practical nor affordable. Losing the Chestnut Hill West Regional Rail line would be devastating for me. I also chose my apartment partly because of its proximity to the Chestnut Hill West stop.

Ellie Jackson: I ride the train to get to work! My work commute (and the commute of my colleague) would double in time, and in cost. It would also decrease the customers in our retail shop.

Linda Elgart: I use transit to go into Philadelphia and not have to drive the car! We just moved here, and one reason we did was to be so close to a train station. Soon we'll take the train to the airport.

Joe O'Brien: I use transit to get to work, to hang out with friends across the city, to show visitors incredible views of the city they can't see anywhere else. And because it's so convenient, although it should be much more convenient and reliable. I moved to this part of Mt. Airy a couple years ago because of the promise of more frequent service after COVID. The train is the key to unlocking this area's potential as an affordable, vibrant, and desirable place to live!

Without it, I'd be forced to drive more to get around the city and get downtown. Which means more wear and tear, more money on gas and insurance. And generally more hassle and frustration.

Jill Smith: I used to ride it daily when I worked in Center City. I used it to work and attend classes at Temple. Now, with my senior fare pass, I use the train for medical & dental appointments in town and for the pleasure of attending plays, concerts, museums, & galleries. I work with Read by 4th, an early literacy program housed at the Free Library, and rely on the train to get to training presentations.

If there are cuts, I would be angry. I would feel cheated. I'd wonder why one of the strongest selling points of living in NW Phila. is being abandoned. I'd question the wisdom of forcing commuters to use cars on already-crowded roadways. I'd resent paying for parking in Center City when I could use CHW with my senior pass. I would reluctantly consider taking the bus into town if CHW is shut down. I would pay an additional, minimal fee to augment my senior pass if that would keep the line running.

Niko Hilgerdt: I take the train from Chestnut Hill to Germantown everyday for work.

I don't know what I would do if service is cut. That would be a big problem for me and my family. When we moved to Chestnut Hill from out of state, we sold one of our cars because I can take the train to work.

Lila Bricklin: I've been riding the CH West line since I was a kid in the 1960s and lived in the adjacent suburbs near Chestnut Hill. As an adult, I've lived in Chestnut Hill, Mt. Airy and Germantown. I have used all of the stations at one point or the other. It's literally been a lifeline for work, going to the orthodontist as a kid, job interviews and tons of recreation. As a senior citizen now, most of my neighbors don't drive and depend on the train to get into town.

David Adams: I moved to the house I live in mostly because it was close to the train. No one in my family drives, so the train gives us easy access to center city and around the northwest part of Philly. My daughter was dependent on the train to get to High School in center city at CAPA. It would have taken her hours to get there using the bus. Not sure how we are going to survive out here without the train service.

Helen Peterson: Being retired I ride mostly for pleasure but it's one of the best amenities living in this community. It's the best way to go into center city to save the hassle of parking and as a senior I ride for free.

Caleb Mactavish: I ride the CHW line to visit friends and family in Germantown, Mt Airy, and Chestnut Hill. And I ride the train downtown to conduct business, explore, and stay connected to the city. I enjoy not participating in the vehicular traffic that's become increasingly slow and dangerous. I ride because it allow me to take my bike to distant places. I ride because I need to.

My favorite memories are at only 12 years of age, meeting friends on the train and riding downtown for \$2.50 with no real plans other than to window shop and to buy a slice of pizza. It showed us how to be independent and responsible before cell phones. Our parents trusted that we'd be safe riding the R8. We were always comfortable and glued to the window, watching the city scape pass by, wondering what the future would bring for the city. We dreamed of growth and rebirth. Renovated factories and new train stations. Never did we imagine that our train line would be abandoned. Such regression was unfathomable and it's sad to think that kids may not get to ride through their city and dream of a better future.

Dr. Marion Frank: We have used the Chestnut Hill West train for over 30 years and loved it. It takes us to work and play in the city and even to the top of Chestnut Hill for shopping. Now we are in our 80's (still working) and cannot believe this ("life") line may be discontinued, as we depend on it more than ever.

Without it, we would feel stranded in our homes or forced to drive on Lincoln Drive in all weather, which jeopardizes our safety. Plus, we would have to drive and try to park or pay to park in center city. We already feel despondent about this possibility. We would cut dread going into the city and only go when necessary. This idea of closing our beloved train hurts many residents here, drastically changes our lifestyle (we may stop going into the city) and harms the environment by increasing traffic and car use. We love that it is free to seniors but believe that many would pay something to keep it going.

Sam Mcilvain: Whenever I go downtown during the day, I use the train! And my two sons use the train every day to come home from school. Apart from the convenience, public transportation is essential for limiting congestion and pollution not to mention indirect things like fewer accidents (less traffic = fewer accidents) and lower costs for road maintenance (less traffic = fewer potholes, repavements, etc).

The biggest difficulty would be how to get my kids home from school... I work late, my wife works late... the fact that my kids can take the train home from school is huge (the bus gets them about 1/2 mile from us... the train is right there)

Alyssa Borden: My husband & I are both nurse anesthetists at Chestnut Hill Hospital. We live in center city & only own one car. Although we drive to work together, we head home at different times. We do not get done work at the same time because one of us is still in the operating room finishing cases while the other is free to go home. Every week, we utilize the CH West line to get home. Without it, we would be tremendously inconvenienced and would have to pay high costs for Uber, or take the longer, less convenient East line. Honestly, we wish the West line would run even MORE frequently (I.e twice per hour instead of once), it is tragic to think it could go away all together.

Jennifer Hubbard: I have used public transit to get to work, doctors' appointments, the airport and Amtrak stations, restaurants, museums, etc. The existence of SEPTA means that I was able to live without a car for years, and that my husband and I can currently be a one-car family. I ride transit to help the environment, and because I hate driving in traffic and hunting for parking, and as I age I know driving may become even less of an option. If it were possible, I would walk or take transit EVERYWHERE and never drive.

Nathan Long: I work 65 miles away, and though taking two trains each way adds over 2.5 hours of travel to my job, I take them whenever I can, which is almost always.

The first reason is because it's better for the planet. Trains are so much more efficient than individual cars and ultimately mass transit is the only way to reduce transit energy consumption

in the US--knowing that all forms of energy have environmental costs. Especially now, we should be doing everything we can to increase mass transit rather than reduce it.

The train is always packed when I go to work and come home, and I can't imagine what the roads, not to mention the air quality would be like if all those hundreds of people in each of the four trains cars drove to work individually.

I recall what a professor once said to our class: if trains were \$1 to NYC and left every 15 minutes, no one would drive to the city. The truth is, government subsidizes the car industry, the trucking industry, and the roads. If they instead subsidized mass transit fully, everyone would take it and we'd have a cleaner planet and less congestion in our streets and roads.

But there are many other reasons I take the train: It's a lovely experience, to see so many fellow passenger faces, to see a less traveled part of the city, to do work while commuting, and lastly, because it's safer than driving, and ultimately, with tolls and wear and tear on my car, the cost is about the same. Plus, I get a little walk in from the station to my house in the morning and evening.

I've also made several friends and acquaintances by riding the train and feel more connected to my community. It is a vibrant way to keep a community alive, help the planet, and get to where we need to go.

James Stanton: I ride SEPTA to get to work, to run errands, and to visit friends and family. I don't have the ability to drive a car due to a disability and SEPTA gives me the independence to move around the city and region and live a fulfilling life without a car.

In most cases SEPTA service runs frequently enough I don't need to plan my day around a transit schedule. If service is cut I will have to drastically rearrange my daily schedule and may possibly be more home bound. I would need to use more expensive modes of transportation such as Uber and Lyft to get around and rely on expensive grocery delivery services instead of going to the store myself.

Simon Dicker: Not all of us can drive, some through choice, others like me due to a lifelong medical condition. Until recently I got around by bike but injury now prevents that. The bus and the trains are my lifeline and are one reason I chose to live where I do - I have easy access to both. My 14 year old also uses the train to get to and from school.

David Walsh: Our son takes the train every day for high school. He is a student at Roman Catholic High and the train is the best, and by far, the most efficient way for him to reach school.

Without the train we would be forced to drive him both ways every day. The carbon footprint of that travel alone is substantial.

My name is Jayson Massey and I am a lifelong SEPTA Rider. In fact, I am on the 43 bus on my way to 2nd and Chestnut Streets as I write this!

Public transportation has gotten me to work, schools, church, social and community events. It has allowed me to go places without worrying about driving, parking, and other hassles like filling up tanks of gas.

Riding SEPTA has also made my personal carbon footprint lower, saving pollution from my own driving. The most frustrating issue I have had is the lack of range. I would love to take a train to go to Bethlehem, Allentown, or Reading, but it doesn't exist. The key to funding this system is expanding its usefulness. Public transportation has lots of gas guzzling competition, and if we don't fund it, we will be gridlocked into more pollution, higher costs, and snarled traffic. FUND SEPTA NOW!

Jayson Massey
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From: Gwen Lindgren <gwendotlind@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 1, 2024 11:06 AM
To: Ritchie, Nolan <nritch@pasen.gov>
Subject: SEPTA Budget

Ⓞ CAUTION : External Email Ⓞ

Please support frequently scheduled trains on the SEPTA Chestnut Hill West Line, as well as on the Route 23 Germantown bus line. Make it convenient for people to use it, in order to reduce gas emissions and center city traffic and parking congestion. Numerous new multi-unit constructions in Chestnut Hill and Mt Airy have avoided having parking spaces on the basis of having easy access to public transportation. We can't just reverse those building permits, now that they're built! On a personal level, ten years ago, I bought my home near the train station knowing that my vision was declining . . . soon I will be unable to safely drive, but I'll still want to go places.

Greta Stiegler:

Why do you ride the train, bus, subway, or trolley?

I'm a student at the Philadelphia school of Circus Arts. I go there 5 days a week and take classes and perform acts of contortion-lyra, which is an act where I do flexibility poses in a hoop that hangs from the ceiling! I also perform to my own music and I'm currently studying music composition at Temple University. I love doing circus and music and they're the most important things in my life.

In order to get to circus from Temple University, I take the Chestnut Hill West train. The Upsal stop of Chestnut Hill West is located right by the circus building so I never have to worry about transit plans after I get off the train.

What would you do if service was cut or discontinued on some routes?

If the Chestnut Hill West Train was discontinued I would take the Chestnut Hill East or Norristown Train the Uber the rest of the way. I would also look into getting myself a micro mobility device.

My family has had a hard time figuring out how to pay for college tuition for both me at Temple University and my brother at Drexel University. If I have to start paying money for extra Uber rides or a scooter to make up for transit cuts, then it'll be even harder for my family to figure out finances for school.

From: JOHN TORDAY <jtorday@ucla.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, October 1, 2024 4:50 PM
To: Ritchie, Nolan <nritchie@pasen.gov>
Subject: Chestnuthill West Septa Train line

Ⓞ CAUTION : External Email Ⓞ

Dear N Ritchie, I am writing in support of the Chestnuthill West Septa Train line. I use that service to get to downtown Philadelphia on a regular basis, even though I have a car. I understand that there has been a fall-off in ridership since the Pandemic, but whenever I use the train I see many of my neighbors using it. I am curious too as to how closing the Chestnuthill West line would impact on tax revenues due to loss of consumers shopping in Philadelphia? If I have to get to the Chestnuthill East line, I would be inclined to go out to the suburbs instead of going downtown. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

John S. Torday
Professor of Pediatrics
Obstetrics and Gynecology
Evolutionary Medicine
UCLA

Fellow, The European Academy of Science and Arts