

Amtrak Plans a Stop in Yonkers

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SIXTY parking spaces and a few signposts are all that stand in the way of new Amtrak rail service at Yonkers, according to Amtrak officials and Mayor Nicholas C. Wasicso of Yonkers.

Amtrak has given preliminary approval to a new stop at Yonkers, but before the 18 Amtrak trains that roll through the station daily can stop for passengers, a few details must be

worked out. The city must build the parking lot and put up new Amtrak signs, while Amtrak negotiates particulars of scheduling and ticket sales with Metro-North, the commuter railroad that owns the tracks and the station at Yonkers.

Service at the station will probably begin next October, an Amtrak spokesman said last week.

"We just have to make sure the city will do the things it needs to do, and then we have to negotiate with Metro-North," said David Carol, director of government affairs for the rail line. The city is negotiating with the

Parking Authority, said a mayoral spokesman, Steven Cohn. Yonkers officials said they hoped that the new stop would help revitalize the downtown neighborhood of the station.

Announcing Amtrak's decision last week, Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato and Representative Joseph J. DiGuardi, both Republicans, praised Amtrak's decision and predicted quick approval by Metro-North. Mr. D'Amato also said the additional passengers using the station could help the neighborhood. The Senator set up the first meetings last year between rail officials and former Mayor

Angelo R. Martinelli of Yonkers.

The new stop "is great news for the residents of Westchester — it will be a major convenience for area residents," Mr. DiGuardi said. He added that the Yonkers stop would complement the Amtrak station already operating in Croton-on-Hudson.

One critic is the State Department of Transportation, which is worried that the extra stop on the New York to Albany line will cause delays and scheduling problems.

After spending nearly \$100 million to upgrade the tracks and trains three years ago, the Transportation Department is balking at the five-minute stop at Yonkers, fearing it will snarl connecting schedules.

"We cut nearly 40 minutes out of

to a crawl there, so a Yonkers stop would not drastically impact running time.

Amtrak's staff was impressed. Earnest discussions began but soon came to a halt when one senior staffer broke the news.

"Mayor, we have pretty much committed to Tarrytown for our new stop."

Tarrytown! We were flabbergasted. Tarrytown was served by only one public bus line, and the station was on a high-speed section of track, meaning all trains would need to brake dramatically in order to stop at the station — a significant loss of running time.

On the bright side, the rest of the meeting focused on what Yonkers had to offer. We left with a commitment by Amtrak to visit Yonkers Main Station and tour Yonkers.

A few weeks later, two Amtrak officials joined us at the station and then for their tour, during which we highlighted the advantages in public transportation routes and the new arterials leading to or near the station. We had made our pitch in Washington and again at home.

We waited. Time passed. We figured hearing nothing meant a lack of interest. Then I received a phone call from Amtrak's Government Affairs officer, Jim Barber.

"Is there a restaurant the Mayor likes near Yonkers City Hall?" he asked.

"Louie's Italian Restaurant on South Broadway," I replied. "Everyone eats there."

"You and Mayor Martinelli, please meet us for lunch on Thursday at noon."

We were on pins and needles. Good news? Lunch and a polite letdown?

On Thursday, we entered Louie's. The two Amtrak officials were already seated in a booth by the window. As we approached they both rose. Jim Barber extended his hand.

"Congratulations, Mr. Mayor!" he said, "You have won an Amtrak stop for your city. Now let's have lunch!"

The mayor was close to tears. He celebrated with his favorite dish, pasta with sauteed broccoli rabe.

At lunch, the Amtrak officials reviewed their research and



Phil Pepe, Jr. with former Yonkers Mayor Angelo R. Martinelli, on June 28, 2018, at a ceremony in which Yonkers Station was dedicated to Martinelli in an effort spearheaded by Pepe and current Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano.

ridership predictions, which were high. In an understated way, they thanked us for bringing the advantages of Yonkers to the fore, and not Tarrytown.

Finally, after years of failed attempts. We were indebted to Senator D'Amato, and in a different way to W. Graham Claytor for his off-hand remark about living on Riverdale Avenue years prior.

I'm pretty sure the mayor would say that the pasta and broccoli rabe at Louie's that day, was the best he ever had! It had a secret ingredient, the sweetness of a hard won victory.

Now retired, Phil Pepe, Jr. served as Assistant to Yonkers Mayor Angelo R. Martinelli, where he developed and oversaw the mayor's downtown development projects from 1982 to 1986. He then went on to be the principal of a public policy and government affairs consulting practice, with clients in manufacturing, rail freight, communications and power generation in the U.S. and Canada.