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Take the No. 7 to Secaucus? That's a Plan

By CHARLES V. BAGLI and NICHOLAS CONFESSORE

Ever since Gov. [Chris Christie](#) of New Jersey killed an expensive plan for a new commuter rail tunnel to Manhattan, the [Bloomberg administration](#) has been working on an alternative: run the No. 7 subway train under the Hudson River.

The plan envisions the No. 7 stretching from 34th Street on the Far West Side of Manhattan to Secaucus, N.J., where there is a connection to [New Jersey Transit](#) trains. It would extend the New York City subway outside the city for the first time, giving New Jersey commuters direct access to Times Square, Grand Central Terminal and Queens, and to almost every line in the system.

Like the project scuttled by Mr. Christie, this proposed tunnel would expand a regional transportation system already operating at capacity and would double the number of trains traveling between the two states during peak hours. It would do so at about half the cost, an estimated \$5.3 billion, according to a closely guarded, four-page memorandum circulated by the city's [Hudson Yards Development Corporation](#).

Unlike the old project, the new plan does not require costly condemnation proceedings or extensive tunneling in Manhattan, because the city is already building a No. 7 station at 34th Street and 11th Avenue, roughly one block from the waterfront. In July, a massive 110-ton tunnel boring machine

completed drilling for the city's \$2.1 billion extension of the No. 7 line from Times Square to the new station.

Still, the proposal faces a number of daunting political, financial and logistical hurdles in an era of diminishing public resources. Mr. Christie, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Governor-elect [Andrew M. Cuomo](#) of New York would have to agree to make the tunnel a high priority and work in lock step to obtain the city, state and federal money needed to make it happen.

“Extending the 7 line to New Jersey could address many of the region's transportation capacity issues at a fraction of the original tunnel's cost, but the idea is still in its earliest stages,” said Andrew Brent, a spokesman for the deputy mayor for economic development, Robert K. Steel. “Like others, we're looking at — and open to discussing — any creative, fiscally responsible alternatives.”

Mr. Christie had not yet received a formal briefing on the idea, but his office said it was curious to hear more. “We've been open to ideas for solving the trans-Hudson dilemma, ideas that are affordable and fair amongst the interested jurisdictions,” said Michael Drewniak, a spokesman for Mr. Christie.

Last month, Mr. Christie, a Republican, put an end to the long-planned Hudson rail tunnel project after the estimated cost climbed to at least \$11 billion, from an initial \$8.7 billion. The project would have created two new tracks for New Jersey Transit from Secaucus to a new station deep under 34th Street, near Pennsylvania Station. The federal Transportation Department had pledged \$3 billion, as had the [Port Authority of New York and New Jersey](#). New Jersey was responsible for the rest.

The federal transportation secretary, [Ray LaHood](#), described Mr. Christie's decision as “a devastating blow to thousands of workers, millions of commuters and the state's economic future.”

The two sides are now wrangling over Mr. LaHood's demand that New Jersey repay \$271 million the federal government has spent on the project.

City officials had initially hoped that they could recapture the \$3 billion pledged by the federal government, but that no longer seems possible, and the project will most likely have to compete with

others around the country for the money. A spokesman for Mr. LaHood declined to comment on the proposal on Tuesday.

Another obstacle is the lengthy environmental review required of such projects, but officials are hoping to be able to use much of the work already done for the tunnel that was killed.

And it is unclear if New Jersey is willing to redirect to the No. 7 train project the money it had originally intended for the tunnel plan, which was known as Access to the Region's Core, or ARC. "The issue again will come down to, what will Governor Christie say," said Jeffrey M. Zupan, senior fellow for transportation of the [Regional Plan Association](#).

It is very likely that the Port Authority would have to be involved, since it has condemnation powers in both New York and New Jersey, unlike the [Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#), which oversees the city's subways.

Lawrence S. Schwartz, the top aide to Gov. [David A. Paterson](#), said Tuesday that the Bloomberg administration had not yet formally presented the plan to Mr. Paterson, a Democrat, but that similar ideas had been discussed in the past. The governor, Mr. Schwartz said, was "intrigued" by the broad outlines of the administration's plan and looked forward to hearing more details.

"Getting cars off the road, reducing congestion and providing another access point for commuters between New York and New Jersey is going to benefit the region from a job-creation and development standpoint," Mr. Schwartz said.

A spokesman for Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, said that the proposal had recently been circulated to the governor-elect's transition team but that there had been no high-level discussions so far.

Aside from relieving congestion on the rails, the proposal also would benefit New York's real estate industry, because it would include an \$800 million subway station at 10th Avenue and 42nd Street, an area with limited public transportation and a number of new residential towers. The station was part

of the Bloomberg administration's plan for the No. 7 extension, but was cut to trim costs.

And the project would almost certainly serve as a boon for the planned \$15 billion Hudson Yards residential and office development, to be built on platforms over the [West Side railyards](#). That project has been stymied by the recession and an absence of demand for new residential and commercial space.

Senator [Charles E. Schumer](#), Democrat of New York, expressed his support for the plan.

"This is a bold idea that must be given serious and immediate consideration," Mr. Schumer said.

"Building the ARC tunnel and extending the 7 line for a second stop are both critical to growing the New York economy for the coming decades, and I will fight to deliver any available federal funds to make that happen."

At a reception in Manhattan on Monday night, Stephen M. Ross, chief executive of Related Companies and the developer for the Hudson Yards project, spoke to Mr. LaHood enthusiastically about the idea of running the No. 7 to New Jersey.

"I think it's a great idea and it could save a ton of money," Mr. Ross said Tuesday.

Patrick McGeehan contributed reporting.



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