

The idea of a Galloway train stop has come back out of mothballs

Vincent Jackson

GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — An idea that has come up periodically since at least the 1990s — a train stop in Galloway Township's Pomona section — has been revived with a greater chance of happening this time.

The Atlantic City Rail Line Coalition was formed recently to focus on the short- and long-term improvement of access to and service along the Atlantic City Rail Line, which stretches from the resort to Philadelphia.

Also, the Galloway Township Council adopted a redevelopment plan last month for the proposed Pomona Commons at Route 30 and Pomona Road by ARK Innovations LLC, which includes space for both a train stop and parking for the cars that would use it.

Deputy Mayor Mary Crawford has lived in Galloway for 20 years. She remembers the idea receiving some media attention at least 10 years ago. She attended a developer meeting at least three months ago that included a NJ Transit representative where everyone was in agreement that it was a good idea.

"A lot of connections are being made. A lot of different entities seemed to be for it," Crawford said, counting Stockton University among them. "It makes me hopeful it could potentially happen for us."

The Atlantic City Rail Line Coalition started in February with founding members from the Greater Atlantic City Chamber, the Cooper Levenson law firm, multimedia company Triax 57, the Fox Rothschild law firm, the Atlantic County Department of Regional Planning and the Atlantic County Economic Alliance, said Lauren H. Moore, the alliance's executive director.

Reliable rail service and increased ridership will lead to additional economic and travel improvements, the coalition said in a statement.

"Improved infrastructure and economic development will lead to increased freight cargo and the associated jobs that come with it," the coalition said. "In addition, future expansion to Atlantic City International Airport and to the National Aviation Research and Technology Park can become a reality."

The Economic Alliance is working on several new projects, one of which is a train station at Atlantic City International Airport at a site to be located in Galloway, Moore said.

"We have an international airport in the South Jersey region, and we need a rail stop that connects us to the Philadelphia region and connects us to Atlantic City," Moore said. "We will continue to focus on this and work with our partners at the South Jersey Transportation Authority and our partners at NJ Transit to get a rail stop here."

The Greater Atlantic City Chamber is trying to improve the Atlantic City Rail Line in partnership with the Rail Line Coalition, said Michael Chait, president of the chamber.

"A train station that ties into the airport is a fantastic idea," Chait said.

The benefits of improving the rail line go beyond economic gains for the region, the coalition said.

"By improving mass transportation options and connectivity along the corridor and in surrounding communities, an enhanced Atlantic City Rail Line will lead to reduced passenger vehicle trips, and with them, a reduction in emissions," the coalition said a statement.

A Galloway train stop does not have to be an elaborate structure like Penn Station in New York City, Moore said. It can be a train stop with a roof like what exists in Absecon and Egg Harbor City.

Coalition members plan to meet with municipal officials at the stops that already exist along the line, including Absecon, Egg Harbor City and Hammonton, Moore said.

The coalition is seeking other people, businesses and nonprofits with a vested interest in making the rail line the backbone of transportation in South Jersey to join them.

In 1990, NJ Transit mulled over a proposal to extend the Atlantic City Rail Line to the airport but abandoned the idea.

In 2009, a multi-agency task force focused on transportation improvements targeted to meet the future needs of Atlantic City and to encourage more investment in the resort identified the need to invest in improvements to the rail line, including adding stations, such as at the airport.

A report was completed in 2013. At that time, it was estimated that an Atlantic City airport station would cost \$32 million.

A train stop in the township may be years from becoming reality, but the Economic Alliance is aware of multiple projects that would bring new business to the county.

Besides Pomona Commons, site work started in recent weeks on a development called Nantucket Galloway that was last before the township Planning Board four years ago.

Jack Morris, a partner in the Atlantic City Hard Rock casino project and CEO of Edgewood Properties in Piscataway, Middlesex County, is behind the development, which would result in more than 32,000 feet of restaurant and retail space on 100 acres of vacant land that surrounds the CVS on the White Horse Pike.

Moore appeared in person at a meeting last month during which the Egg Harbor Township Planning Board gave final major site plan approval to a four-phase, multimillion-dollar commercial development with the working title of the Airport Business Center that would include a four-story, 111-room hotel, restaurants, a convention center and light industrial warehouse buildings.

All of this activity is taking place within the Aviation Innovation Hub, New Jersey's only designated aviation district, which links the FAA William J. Hughes Technical Center, Atlantic City International Airport and the surrounding one-square-mile area, which encompasses parts of Galloway, Egg Harbor and Hamilton townships.

The National Aviation Research and Technology Park is also located within the Aviation Innovation Hub. NARTP's first building opened in 2019 in Egg Harbor Township and is fully occupied by 11 tenants, including the Federal Aviation Administration, Rowan University and NASA.

Plans to break ground on a second building are scheduled for later this year, with an anticipated opening date of early 2023.

"All these bits and pieces all fit together with our economic development strategy to diversify our economy," Moore said. "You saw what happened during the pandemic. Sixty percent of our economy depends on hospitality and tourism, and we got clobbered."