



FACT SHEET: GOOSE CREEK VALLEY SHUTTLE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

West Chester Borough Council ■ Advisory Ad-Hoc Committee to Reestablish Rail Service to West Chester

The *Goose Creek Shuttle Demonstration Project* is a possible tourist train under consideration by the Committee, in coordination with the West Chester Railroad Heritage Association (WCRHA). The Shuttle would operate on weekdays only and offer a distinctly different “living history” experience than that offered by the tourist trains currently operated by the West Chester Railroad (WCRR) predominately on weekends.

As conceived, the Shuttle would travel back and forth between West Chester and the new Middletown Station several times a day, making positive, enforced connections with SEPTA trains. As such, it has the potential to demonstrate the viability of a future, more formal shuttle service operated by SEPTA or WCRR.

The Goose Creek Valley Shuttle Demonstration Project is a work-in-progress in the early stages of development with many elements still under investigation. The Committee can neither confirm nor deny its support for the concept until those investigations are complete.

SEPTA suspended Route R₃ train service to West Chester on September 16, 1986, due to deteriorated track conditions. A decade later, West Chester Borough, concerned over the condition of the unattended right-of-way and the potential threat it posed to public safety, determine to see to its upkeep and protect it for the future restoration of passenger rail service.

The Borough leased 7.2 miles of the rail line from SEPTA and concurrently sublet it to the West Chester Railroad (WCRR), a private railroad affiliated with the West Chester Railroad Heritage Association (WCRHA), a non-profit 501(c)3 educational organization. WCRR agreed to maintain the line on the Borough’s

behalf in return for permission to run tourist trains in accord with WCRHA’s educational mission to enact “living history” experiences that echo the golden age of railroads in Chester and Delaware Counties and foster an appreciation in the younger generations for the sounds and the soul of railroading.

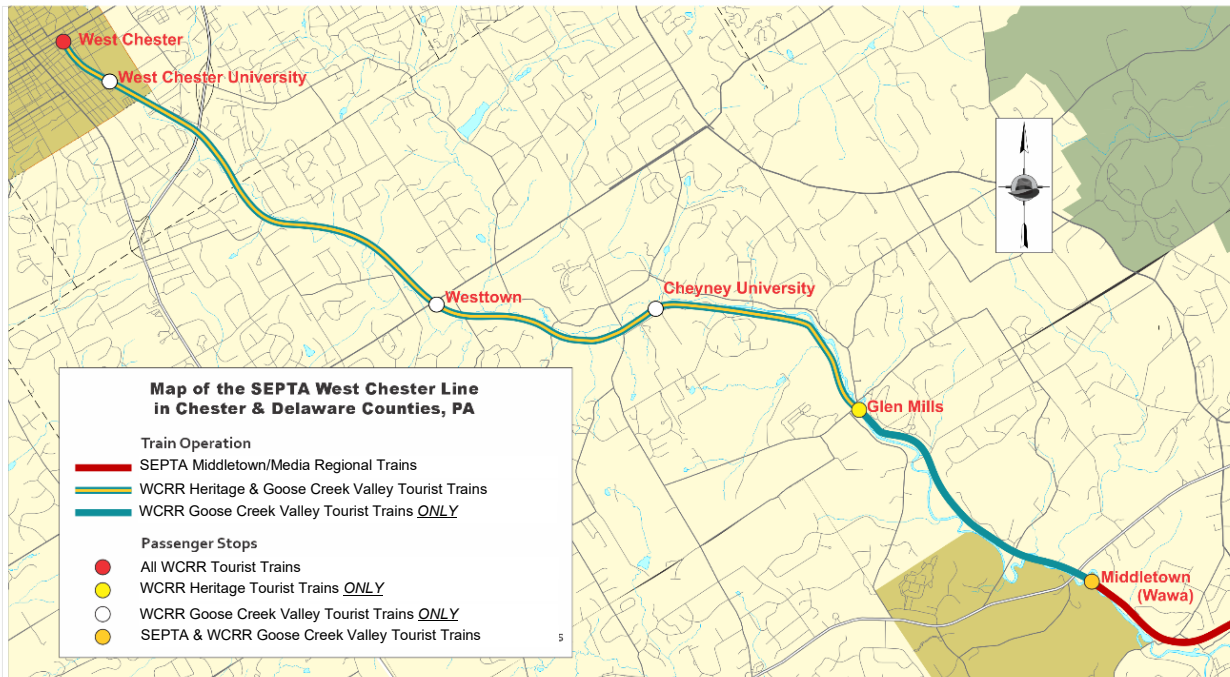
This public-private partnership has gone on for a quarter century.

On July 12, 2021, the Borough applied for federal funds under the USDOT *Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)* program for an accelerated program of corrective track maintenance that would incrementally stabilize existing track conditions and rehabilitate drainage systems, resulting in a safer, more resilient physical plant that would be easier and less costly to maintain in the long run.

If approved, the corrective maintenance program would restore track to a condition consistent with FRA Class 3, as it was in 1986. An unintended benefit of the upgrade would be a maximum authorized speed not to exceed 60 mph, enabling a tourist train to make the run from West Chester to Middletown in as little as 12 minutes with three intermediate stops.

Prior planning and engineering studies by the Borough, SEPTA, and PennDOT focused on scenarios that would provide direct service to Center City, which attracted the greatest ridership albeit at a cost that far exceeds available regional resources. Shuttle options only attracted 70% of the ridership of Through-Service options but at-best a minor reduction in capital costs.

Working with WCRHA, the proposed Shuttle demonstration would offer a platform to test those hypotheses while offering commuters, students, and Borough residents with a new way to access SEPTA train service that does not



require a car or burden SEPTA with the cost of new bus services.

While the current WCRRA tourist train experience evokes early 20th Century railroading, the *Goose Creek Valley Shuttle* would reflect the 1960s, using the ubiquitous Rail Diesel Car (RDC), a self-propelled diesel railcar manufactured from 1949 to 1962 by the Budd Company of Philadelphia. Despite their age, RDCs remain a flexible and reliable service platform that offers commuters a comfortable, climate-controlled ride but also furnish tourists with the historical authenticity desired by WCRHA for true “living history” experience.

The Committee has contacted other tourist train operators to ascertain the availability of RDCs and drafted schedules to demonstrate that a single Shuttle train could reliably connect with all SEPTA trains at Middletown. But there is still much work ahead before the viability of the concept can be determined, including approvals from SEPTA, West Chester Borough, WCRRA, WCRHA, and the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission. And that is all predicated on approval of the 2021 RAISE grant.



A pair of streamlined RDCs tourist train service.



The 1960-era Modernaire styling of the RDCs provide a vintage “retro” look and feel to the tourist trains.

For additional information, contact
 RAIL@WEST-CHESTER.COM