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2nd Hudson Rail Tunnel Clears Key Federal Hurdle

By [KEN BELSON](#)

The prospects for a second rail tunnel under the Hudson River to Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan received a major boost on Wednesday when federal authorities approved an environmental assessment for a \$9 billion tunnel planned by [New Jersey Transit](#) and the Port Authority.

The agencies can now apply to get their final design accepted and lobby the federal government for the remaining \$3 billion needed to begin work on the project, which is expected to be completed by 2017. If all goes well, the agencies believe they will be able to break ground in the summer.

Known as [Access to the Region's Core](#), or ARC, the tunnel would double the number of trains that can travel under the Hudson between New York and New Jersey to 48 per hour, from 23 now. The extra train service is expected to eliminate 22,000 automobile trips a day.

The new service also would allow more New Jersey Transit riders to reach New York without having to change trains in Newark or Secaucus. A second tunnel would also relieve pressure on the century-old tunnel that New Jersey Transit shares with [Amtrak](#). The project's six new tracks in Manhattan, which would terminate beneath 34th Street, would also allow commuters to [connect underground to the subways and PATH](#) trains at Avenue of the Americas.

With the approval on Wednesday by the Federal Transit Administration, the Port Authority and New Jersey Transit are optimistic that they can receive the remaining money they need from the federal government, partly because [President-elect Barack Obama](#) has said he is committed to spending billions of dollars on large infrastructure projects to revive the economy.

"The timing couldn't be better, because the region could benefit from a project like this," said Anthony R. Coscia, the chairman of the [Port Authority of New York and New Jersey](#), which has contributed \$3 billion to the project. "In the near term, it will put a lot of people to work, and in the long term, it will revolutionize

how people get into the city.”

The project is expected to generate 6,000 jobs a year during construction. An additional 44,000 jobs could be created because the tunnel would provide easier access to New York City, according to New Jersey Transit.

“By putting boots on the pavement and shovels in the dirt, this project will employ thousands of workers and help jump-start the economy,” said Gov. [Jon S. Corzine](#) of New Jersey.

Critics contend that the new six-track annex under 34th Street is too deep and would be difficult for some people to escape during a fire. They also say that passengers whose trains stop there would have to walk an extra full block to get to Penn Station, where they would be able to catch subways running on the West Side of Manhattan.

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