

The Claymont Station Improvement Plan

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Claymont Station Improvement Plan is to develop a concept plan to improve car and bus circulation, accommodate pedestrian and bike amenities, and provide a safe and aesthetically pleasing station for its users and the community. The station is located on the eastern edge of Claymont, Delaware, along the Delaware River. It is served by Amtrak's Northeast Corridor (NEC). The study area includes the current station site, adjacent parcels to the north and south, and the land located between the NEC and the Delaware River to the east.

Claymont is an unincorporated area within New Castle County; it is considered to be a Census Designated Place (CDP) and it is experiencing revitalization and growth related to the development of the new Darley Green development. Claymont has convenient access to both I-495 and rail service, and it is located approximately mid-way between Philadelphia and Wilmington. The NEC provides the opportunity for frequent train service on SEPTA's R2 train but it also creates a barrier between the community and the Delaware River.

The Claymont Station is the northernmost of Delaware's rail stations. The SEPTA R2 train serves 20 stations between Philadelphia's Market East Station and Newark, DE. As the demand for more rail service increases, so does the need for station improvements, amenities and expanded parking. SEPTA recognizes this need and has made improvements to other stations along the R2 line already.

This study had several phases included: identifying issues, opportunities and constraints; determining implementation policies; and developing a strategy for public participation. WILMAPCO led the development and execution of the public participation strategy that included interviews with key stakeholders and presentations to community groups and the general public to receive feedback on the improvements needed for the station.

In its current state, the Claymont Station does not provide ease of access or amenities for its patrons. Access to the northbound platform is via steep stairways and a narrow tunnel. The low-level platforms and canted tracks make boarding and alighting difficult. SEPTA's standard for new or rehabilitated platforms is that they must be high-level and are long enough to serve six car trains. This improvement would make the station ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant. The station's bus stop is not close to the platforms, and buses must maneuver through the long and narrow parking, presenting great potential for conflicts with automobiles and pedestrians, as well as lost time for buses. There are two parking lots that

serve the station; both are used heavily and nearly full on a daily basis. Pedestrians have two ways to access the station; by walking along Myrtle Avenue or by using a pedestrian overpass that crosses I-495. This overpass connects the second, smaller parking lot to the station. Both of these access ways need basic safety improvements, such as pedestrian lighting. Myrtle Avenue is the sole vehicular connection to the station from Philadelphia Pike and it has a very high traffic volume during peak hours of service and is in need of sidewalks. Bicyclists use the same two pathways. There are a limited number of bike lockers and racks on site and they are frequently full.

The community and the commuters who use the station have voiced their concerns about the station's condition in the past so public outreach was an important part of this project. Stakeholders were interviewed early during the process which resulted in many ideas on how the station could be improved. Stakeholders felt that improvements should include a new station building that houses a ticket office, concessions, restrooms and a waiting room. Community stakeholders also wanted to see development along the riverfront, including new restaurants, retail shops and the improved station, as well creating parkland and providing direct access to the Delaware River. The community felt that sidewalks and lighting that lead to the train station should be a top priority and that if there is to be development on the riverfront, additional parking and a second point of access is a necessity. The stakeholders supported a traditional architectural design which would reflect the original station building.

The comments from commuters and community members were used to create five station design alternatives. The alternatives included:

- Building new high-level platforms farther north on the existing site
- Adding a station building on the northbound or southbound side of the NEC
- Expanding parking, with an option for a two-level parking deck
- A minimum-build option that included only pedestrian improvements.

The station alternatives were presented to the community at a public workshop held in February of 2008. The community chose Option 2, which included a station building on the northbound platform and expanded surface-level parking. The community did not prefer structured parking due to concerns over increased traffic on Myrtle Avenue. A second point of access that could serve the station and any potential development between the NEC and the Delaware River was also preferred.

In order to implement this vision for the Claymont Station, a five step process was developed:

- 1) Publicize the vision and gain support for it.
- 2) Begin to include the vision into other official county plans.
- 3) Identify low-cost, early implementation projects such as improved signage, improved pedestrian access and lighting for the station.
- 4) Seek funding from varied sources.
- 5) Implement the concept plan.

In order to implement the Claymont Station Improvement Plan, multiple agencies must be engaged as partners in securing funding for this project. Therefore, Plan implementation will not happen immediately and is likely to occur over an extended period of time. WILMAPCO will assist the community in securing funding for this project and has recommended it to receive **American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA)** funding. Working closely with Delaware's Congressional Delegation will provide an additional source of federal funding.

Case studies for other rail station improvement projects within SEPTA's rail network have been included in the document as examples to help to determine the best path forward for the Claymont Station.