

VERNOTICO -- WE NEED TO CONTINUE OUR FIGHT TO STOP THE FREIGHT TRAIN

Article by Liz Keill, The Independent Press, September 12, 2007

SUMMIT — Converting abandoned freight lines to hiking/walking trails could protect Summit from the reactivation of freight trains, Common Council learned at its Tuesday, Sept. 4, meeting.

Resident and local businessman Hugo Pfaltz told the council, "Now is the time to move." He said the national "rails to trails" program has supported many communities in providing bicycle, hiking and cross-country skiing trails

that are level and attractive. Coordinating with the Union County Parks Commission would provide a buffer to impending plans for the Morristown & Essex freight line to re-open abandoned tracks in Summit, he said, adding, "Let's get it going."

But Councilman Michael Vernotico cautioned, "We have a temporary reprieve." The freight train initiative has been stalled in Springfield and Summit, with talks from Port Authority officials that the line might not go through either community. In addition, funding

has temporarily dried up. "I'm urging people to e-mail Assemblyman Eric Munoz (a Summit resident) with their objections to the freight line," Mr. Vernotico said. "This fight is far from over."

East Summit Association president Bob Sheehan said he sees several complications regarding the freight line going through. One is the increase in commuters on Midtown Direct. "The demand for ridership is going up," he said, "and it's becoming costly to drive to New York City." Mr. Sheehan referred to New York City's

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has proposed charging fees to those who drive into Manhattan, similar to a recent, and apparently successful, approach in London and other cities.

"People will be more dependent on trains," Mr. Sheehan said. In addition, the infrastructure necessary for freight line reactivation, which would involve replacing abandoned railroad bridges and tracks, would need considerable work, with "skyrocketing costs," he said.

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