



Middletown train station site narrowed to 2 options

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The Middletown Amtrak station. (The Patriot-News/file)

A decision on which of two sites will be chosen for the new Amtrak station serving the Middletown area is expected in the next two weeks, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

While PennDOT officials previously thought the site decision would be announced in September, development details are taking more time than originally expected, said spokeswoman Erin Waters.

“We are still hammering out some details with potential land issues regarding the final pros and cons with the sites,” Waters said. “It’s just been a long process when you’re talking about land acquisition and appraisals.”

The station will be a state-managed site, built with a combination of state and federal funds. PennDOT is not yet releasing proposed cost figures for the sites, she said.

Middletown residents and officials are hoping for the Ann Street location, said Diana McGlone, borough council president.

“We think it will be a tremendous economic boost for the borough, and will create jobs,” McGlone said. The Ann Street site is within walking distance of downtown Middletown and close to residential areas, McGlone said. “My fingers are crossed,” she said.

Ann Street is where the Westporte development is planned at the A. P. Green warehouse by Abbco Real Properties Corp. The project is to include expansion of the adjacent Middletown Plaza shopping center and other commercial development.

That site would require moving one of the railroad tracks to the north side of the Ann Street overpass, and a below-level parking garage may be needed to provide sufficient parking, which would add cost, said the engineering study.

Harrisburg International Airport has favored the site across Route 230 from the airport, “but we are willing to accept whatever decision PennDOT is going to provide,” said spokesman Tim Edwards.

“We have always been strong proponents of the multi-modal transportation facilities concept and linking all transportation facilities and services,” including airport, buses, trains, parking garage, Edwards said.

That site would use airport-owned land next to another Abbco project — the Olmsted Plaza shopping center expansion and hotel project called Linden Centre. It would include a pedestrian bridge to reach the train platform on the other side of Route 230, and would also involve relocating a track.

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Lower Swatara Twp. wants “what better serves the region and is adequate,” said Ron Paul, township manager. Ann Street “might make a little more sense if logistically you can shoe-horn it in,” he said. There may be more room for parking at the Olmsted site, but the bridge over Route 230 is a costly proposition, Paul said.

Penn State Harrisburg feels “for the benefit of our students, the closer to campus the better,” said Don Holtzman, senior director of student services. “We’re just supportive of Middletown having a station. We prefer it being closer, but we support either location,” he said.

Upgrading the existing Amtrak station has been ruled out by consultants because it would require a new bridge over the Swatara Creek, which would be too costly. The station is on a curve, and to move it and lengthen the platform would place it on the bridge, studies concluded.

A fourth airport site on Route 230 was also studied but ruled out due to lack of room to move tracks.

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