

Rep. Costello discusses passenger rail reform in Downingtown

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By Ginger Dunbar

DOWNINGTOWN — U.S. Rep. Ryan Costello was joined by borough and county officials at the borough train station on Tuesday to discuss the importance of the passenger rail reform.

Costello, R-6th of West Chester, last week joined with bipartisan colleagues in the House to pass the Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act.

“This is something that we should all rally behind,” Costello said, “and this, frankly, is something we should be very optimistic about in the years to come.”

The press conference was held at the Downingtown Rail Station because passenger rail lines and train stations are “critical to workers and sustaining communities here in Southeastern Pennsylvania,” Costello said.

He noted that people exit at the Downingtown, Exton and Paoli train stations about 310,000 times a year, which includes 60,000 times at the Downingtown station.

“It’s because of the partnership between Amtrak and PennDot, the plans are moving forward with upgrading all three train stations in the future,” Costello said. “The positive momentum for these projects is going to continue, thanks to the bi-partisan legislation that we passed in the House, and which I call on the Senate to take up.”

If passed by the Senate, it will be considered by President Barack Obama.

Costello said the act will reform fiscally how Amtrak does business, including ensuring that money generated by Amtrak in the Northeast stays in there for projects in the Northeast. He said it will help future train station projects in Pennsylvania, as well as the mid-Atlantic region.

In addition, states would get \$1.2 billion over the next four years for rail projects, such as improvements proposed in Downingtown, Exton and Paoli.

He said the study is for economic development opportunities around the station, including safer and more comfortable areas to wait for the train.

Providing more job opportunities in vibrant neighbors, Costello said, is “what the passenger rail bill as we voted on is all about.”

“I think passenger rail represents one of the best hopes for relief of the country’s congested highways and air space, and certainly here in Chester County,” Costello said. “It offers more promise for economic development opportunities around the train stations, as well as more folks taking passenger rail through the heart of Chester County.”



SEPTA CFO Richard Burnfield, right, and U.S. Rep. Ryan Costello talk at a press conference announcing the Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act at the Downingtown Train Station in Downingtown on Tuesday, March 10, 2015. (Vinny Tennis -- 21st Century Media)

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Mike Grigalonis of the Chester County Economic Development Council said the relocation of the Downingtown train station to Route 322 and Boot Road is a “fantastic opportunity” for the downtown area. He said it is a good goal to have fewer cars on the roads and more people using public transportation.

Tim Phelps, executive director of the Transportation Management Association of Chester County, said the train station provides people with accessibility within the region, which is a “great asset to the county.”

Downingtown Borough Manager Steve Sullins said that the borough is “excited” about the commitment to future funding and help with the project.

“As a small borough, we can’t do it alone,” Sullins said. “We appreciate the support of the county commissioners, Congress, state representatives and everyone involved here, we’re all a team. I think we can move it forward. I do believe that the rail transportation is very important ... (to) the region as a whole.”

State Rep. Harry Lewis, R-74th of Caln, said it “gives us confidence as a community to know that our transportation system is being supported by our government and by our local entities.”

County Commissioner Michelle Kichline said the county has supported other projects, including the new Coatesville train station concept plan.

“None of this could happen if we don’t have the support of our friends in Harrisburg,” Kichline said.

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