

A Train Station in Atglen Is Still a Ways Down the Tracks

By: Meghan Miller

For over sixty years, Atglen has been deaf to the sounds of train whistles and the screeching of wheels against the metal tracks.

Atglen's railroad passenger service ended in the 1950s. The train station remained in existence until its demolishing in 1965. But over the past few years, plans have been discussed to bring a rumbling rattler back to Atglen.

The possibility of constructing a train station in and SEPTA extending to Atglen as the last stop on the Paoli-Thorndale line is contingent upon additional transportation funding and becoming a priority on SEPTA and the region's improvement programs. Railroad service in Atglen would bolster small businesses and improve the housing market.

Back in 2007, the Chester County Planning Commission (CCPC) partnered with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to evaluate the possibility of extending SEPTA service on the Paoli-Thorndale line beyond the current terminus in Thorndale. The 2007 effort proposed returning service to Coatesville and Parkesburg (which were served by SEPTA until 1995) and constructing a new station in Atglen Borough.

In 2012, the CCPC worked with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, SEPTA, and the Atglen Borough to develop plans for a station in Atglen. The study was completed last June, producing the full Atglen Station Concept Plan. The plan estimated the cost of constructing a new station and associated rail improvements at \$14.3 million.

The plan outlines extending a SEPTA line to Coatesville and Parkesburg (where currently only Amtrak runs) and Atglen, with the main focus on the Atglen station. The old Atglen station existed on the north side of the tracks, along Zion Hill. But this plan puts the new station on the south side. According to Randy Waltermeyer, Transportation Services Director of CCPC, “it is more advantageous to locate the station on the south side.” This new location would be more accessible for riders who plan to walk to the station.

The team made projections for ridership which show a steady increase each decade, starting in 2020 and going to 2040. The team made the most recent estimate in 2012 which projected 1082 trips amongst the three stations – Coatesville, Parkesburg, and Atglen. This number is based on trips per rider (round trips count as two).

Because of this increased ridership, the CCPC team drew up plans for additional parking. A parking lot would be added on the north side of the railroad tracks, where the old station stood. The parking lot behind the Atglen Borough building would extend back to accommodate more riders.

But the process to put this plan into motion is grueling. Waltermeyer explained the steps for the concept to take shape. For any project to get started it must reserve a spot on DVRPC’s 25-year long-range plan. From this list, SEPTA selects projects for its 12-year capital plan. The third step is DVRPC’s 4-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Once a project is programmed on the TIP, engineering, right-of-way acquisition, permitting, and ultimately construction can commence.

The Atglen Station Concept Plan is currently on the 25-year long-range plan. Yet like many other projects, the Atglen Station struggles to make it on SEPTA’s 12-year capital program

or DVRPC's four-year TIP due to limited capital funding. SEPTA operates on an annual capital budget of approximately \$300 million. SEPTA would draw from this budget to fund the Atglen Station if it moves through each step of the process.

This whole project hinges on funding. There is a bill in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives involving increased transportation funding. This bill passed in the Pennsylvania Senate and its equivalent must pass in the House with the governor's signature before the end of the session. If the bill passes, funding for transportation would significantly increase. This would allow SEPTA to complete projects and take on more items to its improvement list.

Hypothetically, if the Atglen Station Concept Plan is programmed on DVRPC's TIP, the project would take approximately 4-8 years to reach completion. This includes the time to complete an environmental assessment, secure right-of-way, and complete construction on the station. PennDOT and Amtrak already upgraded the railroad tracks to meet standards.

"The County Commission sees this as an excellent and necessary project. It speaks to at the moment how limited our resources are," said Waltermeyer, "This is the poster child for what additional funding could do."

For a more comprehensive look at the Atglen Station Concept Plan, please visit

<http://chesco.org/DocumentCenter/View/2406>