A RESOLUTION

Directing the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a study of the feasibility of providing passenger rail service between Wilkes-Barre and Scranton in conjunction with the proposed restoration of passenger rail service between Scranton and New York City and issue a report of its findings and recommendations to the House of Representatives.

WHEREAS, In a letter to the President of the United States dated April 21, 2009, United States Senators Robert P. Casey, Jr., and Arlen Specter, together with Senators Charles E. Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, announced their support to restore passenger rail service from Binghamton, New York, through Scranton, to New York City; and

WHEREAS, Amtrak has agreed to conduct a feasibility study of the Scranton to New York City link, known as the Lackawanna Cutoff project; and

WHEREAS, In June 2009, the United States Environmental Protection Agency declared a finding of no significant impact for a new passenger rail line between Morris County, New Jersey, and Scranton, a vital section of the Lackawanna Cutoff; and
WHEREAS, After more than two decades, the first phase of
restoring rail service from the Poconos region to New York City
appears to be nearing the engineering and construction funding
phase; and
WHEREAS, Several extensions of service have already been
proposed and are being seriously considered, including north to
Binghamton, New York; and
WHEREAS, A previously commissioned, federally funded study
conducted by the Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority
determined that the physical track alignment is already in place
to do so, thus requiring no additional right-of-way; and
WHEREAS, New Jersey Transit has already begun construction to
restore a portion of the Lackawanna Cutoff; and
WHEREAS, As of late 2016, New Jersey Transit has cleared
trees and debris from part of the right-of-way and is one
environmental permit away from starting the construction of a
train station in Andover Township, New Jersey; and
WHEREAS, Luzerne County residents deserve the same
consideration and opportunity for employment as well as the
other economic opportunities afforded to municipalities which
the passenger line would serve as is now proposed; and
WHEREAS, Establishing passenger service between Wilkes-Barre
and Scranton would benefit economic development efforts in the
greater Hazleton area; and
WHEREAS, The former Laurel Line commuter train service
between Scranton and Wilkes-Barre operated from 1903 until 1952
and reached peak ridership of 4.2 million passengers a year; and
WHEREAS, The Commonwealth would be remiss in not determining
if continuation of this rail service to Wilkes-Barre is feasible
at this pivotal juncture, considering the relatively short
distance and minimal expense incurred in doing so; therefore be
it
RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives direct the
Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a study of
the feasibility of providing passenger rail service between
Wilkes-Barre and Scranton in conjunction with the proposed
restoration of passenger rail service between Scranton and New
York City; and be it further
RESOLVED, That the study determine if the benefits outweigh
the costs related to providing passenger rail service from
Wilkes-Barre to Scranton in conjunction with the Lackawanna
Cutoff project; and be it further
RESOLVED, That the study include a review of the:
(1) Alignment and trackage necessary to provide
passenger rail service between Wilkes-Barre and Scranton.
(2) Preferred ownership and management structure and
operational requirements to provide such service.
(3) Anticipated ridership for Wilkes-Barre to Scranton
passenger rail service;
and be it further
RESOLVED, That the committee issue its report to the Speaker
of the House of Representatives within one year of the adoption
of this resolution.