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News for Darien

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A Better Commute, Someday: More Funding and Underground NYC Project Will Mean CT Commuters Get Faster Ride to Part of Manhattan

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Categories : [Transportation](#)

Tagged as : [Cameron on Transportation](#), [Cameron on Transportation 2021](#), [Jim Cameron's Transportation Column](#), [Jim Cameron's Transportation Column 2021](#), [Talking Transportation](#), [Talking Transportation 2021](#)

Date : November 12, 2021

Last week was a good one for our transportation future, on several fronts.

First, of course, was Congress finally passing the massive infrastructure bill. This once-in-a-generation, trillion-dollar package will bring a massive rebuilding of our crumbling bridges and highways as well as expansion of the nation's power grid and internet infrastructure. It will also invest in the ways we must prepare for the impact of global warming.

The bill will also mean thousands of construction jobs over the next decade, what the White House called a “blue collar blueprint” for decades-delayed repair and enhancement of the nation’s infrastructure.

For rail riders there will be \$66 billion invested in expansion and upgrades, the biggest federal investment since the creation of Amtrak in the early 70s. Almost half of that amount will be pumped into the Northeast Corridor from D.C ,to Boston, which already sees some 2200 trains each day.

Downbelow Station

All of this we will benefit from in the years to come. But in our more immediate future is the project that’s been happening right under our feet at Grand Central since 2006 — a new rail station.

Yes, the MTA’s much delayed, terribly-over-budget East Side Access project to bring the Long Island Rail Road into GCT is all but done and should be opened late next year. Though this \$11 billion subterranean behemoth won’t be home to any trains from Connecticut, it will have a profound effect on our train service.

The new station in Grand Central’s lower, lower, lower level is built hundreds of feet below Vanderbilt Avenue just to the west of GCT itself. It was literally carved out of solid rock and connects to a tunnel built under the Park Avenue line served by Metro-North, another tunnel under the East River and ends up in Queens.

The station will measure 350,000 square feet and serve 24 LIRR trains an hour on eight tracks. To access the station, you’ll take several escalators from GCT’s lower level, deep down into the bedrock, served by dozens of shops. The MTA says the new station will save LIRR commuters 40 minutes travel time from Queens if they’re heading to Manhattan’s east side.

What’s in it for Connecticut commuters? Actually, a faster ride to the West Side.

By moving some LIRR trains out of Penn Station and sending them to GCT, some Metro-North trains will be able to travel from Connecticut directly to Penn Station by way of the Bronx, the Hells Gate Bridge and the East River tunnels, a route now exclusively used by Amtrak.

That new routing will actually be a faster route to midtown Manhattan than the current Grand Central routing. It will also mean Penn Station connections to Amtrak to the north and west and NJ Transit deep into the Garden State.

As Manhattan’s West Side expands with more offices, many of them built over the LIRR yards, Connecticut commuters will see this new Penn Station service as an attraction.

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More spending on rail nationwide and a new train station at GCT and service to the West Side — as I say, it was a good week for transportation.

Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the [Commuter Action Group](#), sits on the [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com.