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June 20, 2011

Dr. Vukan R. Vuchic
Emeritus Professor of Transportation
University of Pennsylvania
vuchic@seas.upenn.edu

Dear Dr. Vuchic:

I am in receipt of your most recent correspondence concerning the Regional Rail rebranding program implemented in July 2010. Unfortunately, the claims you put forth in rehashing these old issues simply do not correspond with our findings.

There is nothing in our data or statistics to suggest that the Regional Rail naming convention change has deleteriously impacted service for our riders. To the contrary, according to the results of the December 2010 Customer Satisfaction Survey, overall customer satisfaction for SEPTA increased from 7.2 to 7.9 (based on a scale of 10) compared to 2008. This is the highest score we've received since the survey process began. Every mode and every category from cleanliness, security, to the conditions of our stations and vehicles improved as did "**communication.**" Regional Rail was no exception with customer approval increasing from 7.6 in 2008 to 7.9 in 2010.

Moreover, Regional Rail ridership is up by **340,000** from last year, so there is no indication that the rebranding program cost the Authority any customers. We believe that the introduction of our new Silverliner V cars, improved communications tools, regional rail naming simplification, enhanced information access through TrainView, Next to Arrive, and the launch of a mobile version of the SEPTA website are succeeding in breaking down some of the barriers that discourage people from using public transit. As the ridership numbers suggest, all of these initiatives make SEPTA Regional Rail a more appealing travel option for regular and occasional riders.

I strongly disagree with your assertion that SEPTA staff ignored your advice. Every courtesy was extended to you by senior staff on many occasions discussing the renaming topic, or more specifically the history and background of the Center City Commuter Tunnel. It is unfortunate that you choose not to accept the validation presented in these discussions about the experiences of new or infrequent riders as they tried to navigate a confusing line identification system, and the frustration and concerns expressed by our front line personnel when they encountered a customer on the wrong train.

Dr. Vukan R. Vuchic

June 20, 2011

Change is often difficult to accomplish, but if the Authority is not willing to advance new initiatives, then we will become irrelevant to our customers and the region. It appears that you have an ardent interest in defending the legacy of the naming design, train pairings, and through-traffic demand model, which you worked on with SEPTA, with the opening of the Center City Commuter Tunnel more than 25 years ago. However, one must accept that the traffic demand envisioned with the opening of the Tunnel never materialized because the pairings never met the needs of our riders. The suggestion that a customer wishing to travel between Paoli and Doylestown would select Regional Rail as the fastest, most convenient way to travel is just incomprehensible. Couple that with having two separate and distinct lines with the same R/number designation and color, and we ended up with an illogical and confusing system, especially for occasional riders.

As you know, the decision to rebrand our Regional Rail system came after much study and analysis and extensive discussions within SEPTA, with our peers, and with transit professionals such as yourself. In fact, we looked to our colleagues in Boston, who use a single color designation for their commuter rail lines as the inspiration for the changes to Regional Rail.

No process or program is ever perfect from inception, and we realized that modifications and adjustments would be necessary. This is why we will continue to listen to our customers and work to respond to their comments. The added color stripe at the top of the schedule was introduced based on expressed concerns about ease of locating individual schedules from the large racks in our Center City Stations. The stripe was never intended or advertised as anything more than a quick visual cue for customers traveling through a busy station. Introducing new colors was quite intentional in an effort to be eye catching and avoid replicating the confusion created under the old system where one color represented two different lines. Since the introduction of the stripe this past March, we have seen a marked **decrease** in the number of customer comments concerning ease of finding schedules at Center City stations.

We agree that signage must remain a top priority, and we recognized that with 153 stations this would be a challenge. Engineering Maintenance & Construction staff has successfully leveraged stimulus funding to advance several key station resigning projects including 17 stations on the Paoli/Thorndale Regional Rail Line, in addition to the work already completed at the Center City stations.

Station signage is only one feature of enhanced customer communications and information dissemination. The electronic messaging and audio announcement systems on the new Silverliner V cars provide greater flexibility and opportunity for more detailed line and direction of travel information.

Dr. Vukan R. Vuchic

June 20, 2011

In addition to listening to our customers, we also rely on the insight and experiences of our front line personnel – Conductors, Passenger Service Staff, and Transportation Managers – who deal with our customers on a daily basis. I am attaching a letter from Mr. Williams, General Chairman of United Transportation Union, Local 61, which confirms that the Regional Rail rebranding program has benefitted SEPTA, especially the infrequent riders of our service. You and I can endlessly discuss the merits of the name changes, but our train crews are the ones who interact with riders day in and day out, and know, first hand, what works and what doesn't work. This is why I value and listen to their input and take great stock in their assessment that this program change was the right decision.

Public transportation in the Philadelphia region has a rich history, and we have great respect for our roots; but SEPTA is firmly committed to the future and advancing change to help build ridership and meet the needs of our customers.

There are many issues on which we see eye to eye; unfortunately, this is not one of them. Your input on other subject matters will continue to be welcomed, but I suggest that we agree to disagree on the Regional Rail rebranding program and instead work to find other topics of mutual interest to explore.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph M. Casey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph M. Casey
General Manager

Attachments: Letter from Dr. Vukan R. Vuchic – June 9, 2011
Letter from UTU General Chairman Fred Williams

**OPEN LETTER #1 TO MR. JOSEPH CASEY
REGARDING SEPTA'S DEGRADATION OF THE PASSENGER
INFORMATION SYSTEM ON THE REGIONAL RAIL DIVISION**

June 9, 2011

Dear Mr. Casey,

I appreciate very much the contacts we have had during the last couple of years to discuss many current issues in SEPTA's operations and planning. However, I am quite upset by the fact that you ignored numerous pieces of advice I gave to you and members of your staff with respect to the Regional Rail Division (RRD) information system. I clearly explained at many meetings and in writing that the changes Mr. Hanratty was planning to make, supported by an unsigned write-up produced in the RRD, would be destructive to the quality of RRD services and detrimental to the riding public. Yet, SEPTA proceeded to make those changes and the results have been truly disastrous, as I had predicted.

I have received calls and e-mails from numerous colleagues, mostly transportation experts or other persons familiar with SEPTA and its operations expressing concerns about the changes SEPTA introduced, as well as some that are still planned. Knowing my extensive work for SEPTA over the last 44 years, they wanted to hear my opinion about these changes. I have therefore decided to write to you this open letter, because the issues I am discussing affect both the general public and the quality of transit services in the Philadelphia region.

Under the pretext that the information system on RRD was confusing, SEPTA introduced changes which actually eliminated most information, degraded the system's image and introduced illogical and often directly incorrect information. Bearing in mind the facts that the changes that cost tens of thousands of dollars resulted in the virtual elimination of the concept of diametrical lines in our regional network, produced confusing schedules, reduced the legibility and contents of signs, these "innovations" have been a real fiasco.

Here is a brief review of the main changes in the information system.

1. Elimination of the "R" symbol has decreased the image of the Regional Rail system. Elimination of the line numbers makes it extremely difficult for passengers to find which train from any inbound line goes to which outbound line. This defeats one of the main goals in building the \$350 million (1983 dollars) Center City Connecting Tunnel which upgraded a set of independent commuter lines from individual suburbs to single terminals in center city into an interconnected regional network, by far the best regional rail network in North America.
2. Stations that are served by several lines formerly had signs like "University City R1 R2 R3" now have a sign "University City." Do Mr. Hanratty and Ms. Mintz still claim that elimination of signs improves passenger orientation and prevents passengers from taking a wrong train?!?

3. Colors of lines were eliminated. Since Boston introduced color schemes for its rapid transit lines in the 1960s, the colors have become a popular and extremely effective feature of rail lines in virtually all cities, from San Francisco and Los Angeles to Washington, Hamburg and Oslo. Nearly every transit system now has distinct light rail, metro and regional rail lines designated by colors. SEPTA has now become the first system in the world which has abandoned colors.
4. The regional rail lines on the Philadelphia rail transit map are now designated by a single gray color which has the lowest visibility. As a conductor said on an RRD train, "It is not even a color, it is drab gray."
5. You told me a few months ago that due to the complaints about elimination of colors for lines they would be returned. However, the only change has been that a color bar has been added on each printed schedule, but there is no corresponding color on any maps, signs at stations nor on trains. Moreover, the newly introduced colors are different from the colors to which passengers had become accustomed over 25 years (R5 was blue, R3 orange, etc.)
6. The signs designating trains are not legible from a distance greater than 20 feet, so that one can read designations only in a few seconds as the train is coming into a station. Signs on the sides of trains are even worse than before: there is one or two signs along a 5-car train. Not infrequently, signs are missing or wrong ones are posted (showing Paoli on a Trenton line, and similar).
7. The sign content is incorrect: trains from, for example, Chestnut Hill East to Elwyn say "Elwyn via Center City," so that they are correct only on the inbound section. From University City outbound the train is not going "via Center City!"
8. The basic concept of transit lines has been diminished by elimination of diagrams of lines and stations from printed schedules. The diagram of the entire network, basic for any potential riders of Regional Rail system, is not given on any line schedules.

Negative reactions to the new information system are unanimous. Passengers are confused, unable to find where the train proceeds from center city, nor which stations it serves. Conductors admit that the signing is much more limited than it was. And nobody knows how many passengers have been lost due to the confusion.

I suggest that you undertake a review of this set of uncoordinated designations/signs/schedules/maps and develop a plan for their fundamental revision. If you are interested, there are a number of transit experts in Philadelphia who could be called on to develop a logical, contemporary system of passenger information. The basic decision should be revisited: should SEPTA facilitate and encourage all trip categories, commuting to/from center city, as well as regional trips through center city, such as Jenkintown or Lansdale to the Airport or Temple to Ardmore; or, should SEPTA concentrate on commuters and ignore potential regional riders among non-center-city points. It is obvious that the former policy is more desirable. SEPTA has a major role as a system serving the growing multifocal region, rather than only independent commuter lines as served by Penn-Central and Reading Railroads prior to 1983.

I could provide several alternative methods considered in the past by various persons for a passenger-friendly system of revised and updated system of line designations, signs on trains and more complete printed schedules. As changing the pairs of lines on opposite sides of center city are sometimes necessary, the information system should be capable of providing clear information about that, rather than keeping that information well hidden.

The logic should be applied that if some information is not sufficiently clear, improvements should be made by enhancing rather than eliminating information, as has been done now. While many of the changes I propose are conventional information sources, the potential exists to develop improved materials that use contemporary information sources, such as the internet and/or smart phones.

Because of my involvement with SEPTA and, specifically, its Regional Rail Division, I intend to write to you another open letter to point out several other major issues, such as the new fare collection system, to warn you against some possible decisions that are being discussed, but that would be highly detrimental to the RRD system. The present study fails to consider practices used on peer regional rail systems in dozens of cities; it proposes one-way free travel which is not used on any regional rail system serving transit-type ridership.

As you know, I will be more than glad to continue our contacts, but I hope that in our further discussions my proposals may be considered more carefully than before for the good of the RRD, SEPTA and, most importantly, both current and future riders.

Sincerely yours,

Vukan R. Vuchic
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Local-61/General Committee of Adjustments, GO-SIA
Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

Fred M. Williams
General Chairman



Francis X. McDermott
Vice General Chairman

Martin A. Strom
Vice General Chairman

Michelle L. Duncan
Vice General Chairman

Nelson Pagan
General Secretary

June 15, 2011

Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority
1234 Market Street 14th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Attn: Richard Hanratty

Re: "R" Destinations

Good Morning Rich,

Prior to eliminating "R" destinations many crew members complained about passengers being carried the wrong direction due to incomplete information (i.e. passengers were being told to "catch the R5" when traveling to Lansdale instead of "catch the R5 Lansdale train" and they ended up on the Paoli side of the railroad). The same passenger inconveniences were being reported on the other lines due to the "R" destination.

Subsequent to the elimination of the "R" destination we have noticed a significant drop in the number of passengers on trains traveling in the wrong direction.

Cordially,

Freddie M. Williams

Freddie M. Williams
General Chairman
UTU Local 61

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