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Florence P. Dwyer

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REPORT TO THE PEOPLE
FROM YOUR CONGRESSWOMAN

FLORENCE P. DWYER - 6th District, New Jersey



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The struggle for economic growth and for greater opportunity for people, in an often bitterly competitive world, must be waged on many fronts and in a wide diversity of ways.

While Congress is only one of many such battlefields, it is an important one. And here, in the House and Senate, several major skirmishes last week advanced the interests of Union County and the whole New Jersey-New York metropolitan area.

Of particular importance to Union County were the hearings held before the Senate Surface Transportation Subcommittee, of which Senator Case of Rahway is a member, on two different bills designed to require greater consideration of the public interest by the Interstate Commerce Commission before that agency permits passenger trains and ferries to be discontinued.

As sponsor of a House bill identical to the Case bill in the Senate, I testified at the Senate hearing strongly supporting this particular measure as the better of the two. But more about this hearing in a moment.

On another important commuter issue, the House got the jump on the Senate when a House Judiciary subcommittee last week approved a bill giving the consent of Congress to the interstate compact between New Jersey and New York creating a two-man bi-State transportation agency. This is the agency on which will rest the responsibility for developing a long-range solution to the commuter problem in the metropolitan region. The chances are good that the full committee will approve this bill this week, and the House will pass it shortly afterward. As a co-sponsor, I shall give this a nudge wherever possible.

Commuter Service Vital

It hasn't often been mentioned, but dependable commuter service is more than just good and convenient transportation. It is one of the most vital elements affecting the rate of economic growth of a region and determining its general suitability as a place to live and work.

On another front, the House has passed the Public Works Appropriations bill for the next fiscal year. It contains a healthy amount of assistance for several important

New Jersey projects -- including, I am pleased to report, the funds I requested in testimony before the Appropriations Committee last month.

This bill, which the Senate is expected to okay soon, will permit completion of the huge Arthur Kill-Kill van Kull project during the next year, thus opening the entire system of channels between New Jersey and New York to the largest of ocean-going shipping.

Another big port area project will be completed with money provided by the bill: the 558-foot vertical-lift railroad bridge between Union County and Staten Island -- the largest of its type in the world.

Funds in the bill will permit preliminary surveys of these other important New Jersey projects: deepening of the Newark Bay-Passaic River channel (where industrial growth has been especially encouraging), continuation of the Passaic Valley flood control survey, and study of New York harbor siltation and deepwater anchorage projects.

So much of our metropolitan area progress depends on keeping our unparalleled waterways up to date. This bill makes an important contribution toward that end. And it does so without adding a penny to the President's budget.

A Clear Look Ahead

An entirely different kind of contribution toward metropolitan area progress -- and one of immense importance, I believe -- came last week in the form of the Metropolitan Region Study made by Harvard University for the Regional Plan Association. Union County, as you know, is an integral part of the region.

Financed by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation, this study is probably the most comprehensive and authoritative ever made of our area. It will be referred to for years in the future as a guide for further thought and action in solving the multiple problems associated with the growth of the world's greatest urban area.

Several of its conclusions bear directly on the current commuter crisis, and I found that they bolstered effectively the arguments I presented in my testimony on the commuter bills before the Senate subcommittee. For instance, the study forecast a population growth from the present 16 million to 20.5 million in 1975 and 23.5 million in 1985-- an increase of almost 50 percent in the next 25 years.

The study also concluded that almost all the population increase will be concentrated in the suburban areas surrounding the Big City, rather than in New York City itself. And it warned that this suburban growth will make strenuous demands on suburban commuting facilities.

Help Save the Trains

That is why, as I pointed out in my testimony, the present and precipitous dismantling of our railroad commuter service is such a dangerous thing. Not only does it threaten present needs, but it could also gravely jeopardize a future that is otherwise promising.

The Case and Dwyer bills won't, by themselves, solve the commuter problem, but they could help to slow down this rush to abolish the essential facilities of a mass transportation system-- and thus provide the time needed to develop a long-range transportation program.

It would do so by restoring the former balance in the manner in which the ICC judges passenger service discontinuance cases. The need of the general public for commuter service would receive equal consideration to the railroad's desire to curtail this service.

For this reason, as I concluded my testimony, the legislation "is a key element in the overall effort of various levels of government and of private citizens and organizations to establish an effective and adequate commuter system, on a basis that is fair and just to the railroads and to the public which needs their services."