

YEAR-END TRANSIT TRIP - 12/30/2024

After we came back from Bali, I thought my traveling was done for the year. However, a 12/23/24 email from the West Jersey Chapter of the NRHS announced their XXIV annual mid-winter trip on SEPTA. I was on one of these back in 2022 and had found it interesting. This year's trip was scheduled to start at 9AM on Monday 12/30 at SEPTA's **Market East** station. I wonder about that as the name of the station was changed to Jefferson several years ago. However, transit names can have long lives. Some native New Yorkers still talk about the IRT subway!



The Philadelphia area has perhaps the most diverse transit in the US, but new or casual riders can find it difficult to navigate thru the network [more on this later]. Philly has two conventional heavy subway lines – one standard gauge and the other with the PA trolley gauge of 5'2¼", the largest trolley service in the U.S. totaling 40 miles and consisting of six lines, one of which uses historic, rebuilt PCC III cars, three suburban light rail lines that are reminiscence of interurbans, "trackless trolley" busses, regular busses and 13 regional rail lines. Add to that, NJT's rail line from 30th Street Station to Atlantic City, NJT busses from Center City to South Jersey [SJ], the PATCO High Speed rail line from Center City to Lindenwold NJ and AMTRAK service on the Northeast Corridor plus to Harrisburg. The goal of the today's trip was to ride as many SEPTA lines in one day as possible. With the West Jersey Chapter based in SJ, most of the riders would begin their adventure on PATCO that began operating in 1969.

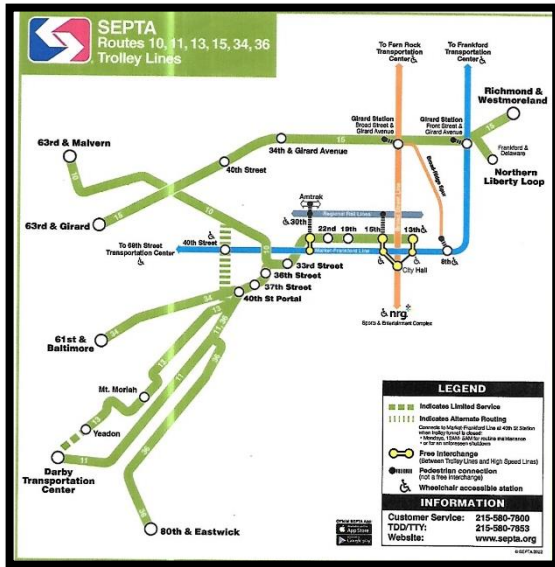


I dressed for the occasion by wearing this new train shirt that I bought on sale at the SEPTA store in Center City on Christmas Eve. I drove to SEPTA's Jenkintown Station and for the first time in years paid to park. The parking fee

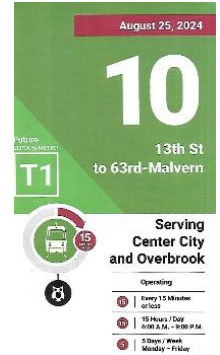
was waived during Covid and came back starting last Summer at a new \$2 price. Three regional rail lines pass thru Jenkintown station, giving it frequent service. That is why two large commuter parking lots are located there and why there is this combined train schedule. I caught an 824AM train that should have arrived at Jefferson at 848AM, but it was late and then sat for a few minutes by Wayne Junction. Seeing I would now be late, I sent an email to the WJ Chapter guy who announced the trip saying I would be a few minutes late. I arrived at 902AM and rushed upstairs to meet the group but no one was there. I had the trip's itinerary so I literally ran to the first location – the trolley station at 13th & Juniper. I was there at 915AM and again saw no one. I doubled back thinking I might see them - nope. I emailed the WJ guy again asking for the phone # of the trip's leader. He didn't have it so emailed that guy. There was NO reply then or during the rest of the day.



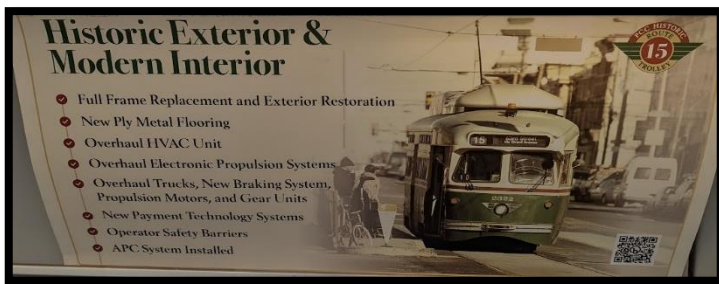
I stood there dejected and started to head home. But wait a minute, I have the itinerary so why not just do this by myself and I might catch up with the group.



Just then a Route 10 trolley [the 1st ride] entered the station. There are five trolley lines that serve west and southwest Philly. These lines run in the streets till 40th & Woodland Avenue and 36th Street near Chestnut Street where they enter a tunnel and then run alongside the Market Frankford Line [MFL] subway eventually reaching an underground loop around City Hall square. I boarded the trolley, which was a Kawasaki LRV made back in 1981 – 1982. After exiting the tunnel and a few quick turns, it ended up running on Lancaster Ave. I exited at Girard Ave. to switch to Route 15 that uses historic, rebuilt PCC trolleys. These trolleys



were built in 1947/48 and used for many years in Toronto. SEPTA bought a group of them and had 18 rebuilt by PA-based Brookville Mine Equipment Co. into PCC IIs. These operated from 2005 to 2020 when service was suspended due to the reconstruction of I-95 and other issues. Meanwhile, the PCC IIs were rebuilt in-house by SEPTA into PCC IIIs that since



June 2024 have provided service on Route 15.

Riding the historic Route 15 trolleys was no doubt the highlight of this trip. From Girard, the trip was supposed to go its western terminus at 63rd Street and



from there ride to the eastern terminus at Richmond & Westmoreland before reversing back to the MFL stop on Girard. As I exited the Route 10 trolley, a Route 15 trolley was approaching from the west. Figuring that the group might have already been to 63rd, I boarded the east-bound trolley but they weren't on it. My ride went past the



Philadelphia Zoo and crossed the Schuylkill River. It then past Girard College, an independent private school for grades 1-12. It was founded by a donation from Stephen Girard's estate, whom at the time of his death in 1831 was the richest man in America. Three times the trolley had to stop because of cars parked on the tracks[2x] and from a man going down the Avenue

between the tracks in a wheelchair. At Girard Station, riders can change to the Broad Street Line [BSL] subway. About 15 blocks later, there is another Girard Station as Route 15 passes under the MFL's El. About 25% of the riders who boarded paid NO fare and the operator did not say anything . Using recent reconstruction, the Route 15 passes under I-95 and runs parallel to it for some distance. Eventually, the line crosses under I-95 and ends at the Westmoreland loop in the Port Richmond section of Philly. I had to exit there as the operator said he was out of service and a Route 15 bus would be the next out. It left a few minutes later at 1039AM and I rode back to the Girard Station for the MFL.

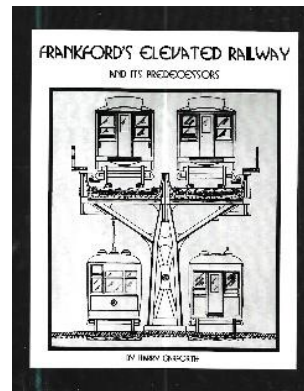


As I exited the bus, I was shocked to see several drug addicts standing there dazed or bent over in a drug-induced stupor. I waited for about 10 minutes thinking the WJ group might show up - nope. Up on the platform, I rode the MFL north to the **Frankford Transportation Center** that is the end of the line rather than getting off at **Arrott Transit Center** [the next to the last stop] per the itinerary. The aging M4 cars used on this line were built by Adtranz, an Italian company, between 1996 and 1999. Enroute, I saw street after street of the quintessential Philly row houses. I rode to the FTC for two



reasons. First to kill some time as I thought I was ahead of the group. Second, I wanted to see the FTC that was extensively mentioned in this book that was published in 2022 on the 100th anniversary of the elevated line. I helped edit the book. I

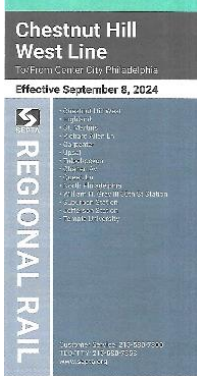
stopped to buy a pretzel for a snack. By a SEPTA service counter, there was a well-stocked, wall rack with schedules. I picked up ones for all the lines I expected to ride that day. I wonder how much longer will the paper schedules be available as many other transit systems have discontinued issuing them. Outside to the west of FTC was a massive depot that houses New Era diesel busses and the 37 trackless trolley still used on three routes.



trolley loop that was at the end of Route 23, which at 10.7 miles was believed to be the longest trolley line in the world within one city. Regrettably, that service ended in 1992, but the rails and wire are still in place!



It was time for lunch so I walked into Cosmo Pizza. I had a slice of Sicilian cheesesteak pizza. Unfortunately, like an increasing number of restaurants, it charges 3% more for cards so I paid cash making my lunch was pointless. At this point, I



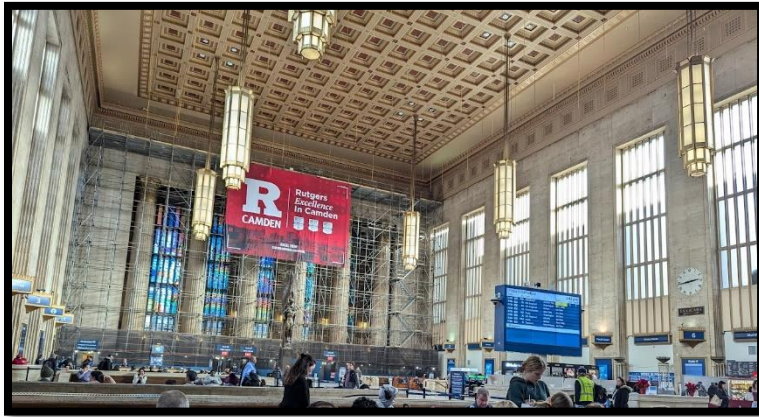
abandoned the itinerary and headed to the near by CHW station that is below the street level.

The former PRR station there now houses a bank branch and a very small ticket window/waiting

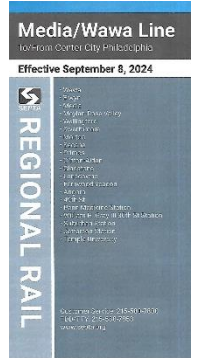


room on the trackside that was closed. I waited for 25 minutes for the next train that was late. The line runs east in a grade-separated right-of-way [ROW]. Within a very short distance, the line has eight former stations that are closed up. Just before Christmas, SEPTA announced that it was leasing five vacant stations on the CHE/CHW lines to a developer for \$1 a year per station. The developer will assume maintenance of the buildings and ultimately renovate the former stations into mixed retail and residential use.

I exited the train at **30th Street Station** for three reasons. First, I needed to go to the bathroom and there are NO bathrooms on SEPTA trains. Second, I needed to charge my phone. [I should have brought a backup battery with me.] Third, for my next ride, I decide to take the



Media/Wawa Line that until Aug. 2022 ended in Elwyn. SEPTA extended the line from there to Middletown Twp. and the



new station was going to have that name until the Wawa convenience chain bought naming rights just before it opened. [Together with some friends, I hoped that Sheetz or Royal Farms would buy the naming rights for that station.] The company's HDHQ is located in [and took its name from] Wawa, an unincorporated community in Delaware County. I was on the very first train that arrived at **Wawa Station** on 8/21/22 and got a nice free t-shirt. However, today I would not be riding to Wawa but instead exited at Clifton-Aldan. The SEPTA route map showed a connection there with the RT 102 light rail line. When I was on the platform, I asked a woman where was the light rail station. She didn't know. The conductor, who was clueless, overheard this and said I need to take the train back to the Penn Medicine station. A local guy said come with me and pointed out the small shelter that was only a block away.

A few minutes later, a Route 102 LRV heading to 69th Street stopped. This line along with Routes 100 and 101 were former Red Arrow lines. Routes 101 & 102 use Kawasaki Type K LRVs that are very similar to the trolleys on the Route 10/11/13/34/36 lines, except they are double ended. After a short bit of street running, Route 102 operates in a private ROW till Drexel Hill Junction where it connects with Route 101. From there to 69th Street, both lines run in a private ROW with nine stops. However, the ROW crosses several streets at



grade that are controlled by signals like this. About eight minutes later, the LRV was at 69th street but had to wait a bit till the traffic light changed allowing it to cross Market Street and enter the terminal. There are walls of historical displays inside the terminal but I did not have time to stop. I have been here before but it was some time ago. By mistake, I went thru the turnstiles and

down to the MFL platform. I watched a train arrive on one track, and then use a ballon track to reverse, and come back on another track heading to Center City.



I went back up and walked over to the turnstiles for the Norristown High Speed Line, formerly Route 100.

However, I went to the wrong platform. I immediately exited and walked to the correct platform and tapped my SEPTA Senior Fare Card that I had been using all day and it would not let me back in. I had to get an ambassador to open a gate for

me. This delay caused me to miss the 355PM train by seconds. So, I had to wait till the next one at 410PM.



This line has an interesting history. It was built in the early 20th century as the Philadelphia & Western [P&W] and intended to be the eastern end of a proposed transcontinental RR. When that didn't come to be, the 13.4 mile line to Norristown was electrified and built for high speed operation. Until 1951, it connected with Lehigh Valley Transit in Norristown. LVT ran from Allentown and used the P&W tracks to reach 69th Street. The Brill Bullet trains ran there from 1931 to 1990. These were streamlined and ran very fast [up to 89MPH]. I rode one once in 1986. The former Electroliners from Chicago's North Shore Interurban line ran here as Liberty Liners until 1977.



Today, the line operates with a fleet of 26 N-5 cars built by ABB Traction in 1992–1993. It is *high speed* in name only as the operating speed was reduced to 55MPH from 70MPH after several accidents. Until 2019, there were express and limited stop trains to reduce travel times between the line's 22 stops,. My train had a trainee operator and an instructor in the cab. Riders must press a button to request a stop. If there was no request to stop and no rider was visible on the small platforms, then my train just blew past the stop. The two-track ROW is grade separated. Leaving 69th Street, the area around the ROW is single family homes. It passes next to Villanova University. Between Radnor and County Line, the line passes under SEPTA's ex-PRR/PC mainline, but there is no way to switch lines. Soon after that, the line passes thru a hilly area. For more than a decade, SEPTA studied and planned to build a spur line from near Hughes Park to King of Prussia. However because of a lack of federal funding of the billion dollar+ cost, SEPTA stopped working on the expansion in 2023 .





Just before arriving at 441PM in the elevated Norristown Transit Center, the line crossed the Schuylkill River on a bridge from 1911 that was rebuilt in 2013. This was my third crossing of the Schuylkill that day. There were three transit cops just standing around the Center. I was thirsty and came to the realization that there is NO vending at any SEPTA station, nor were there

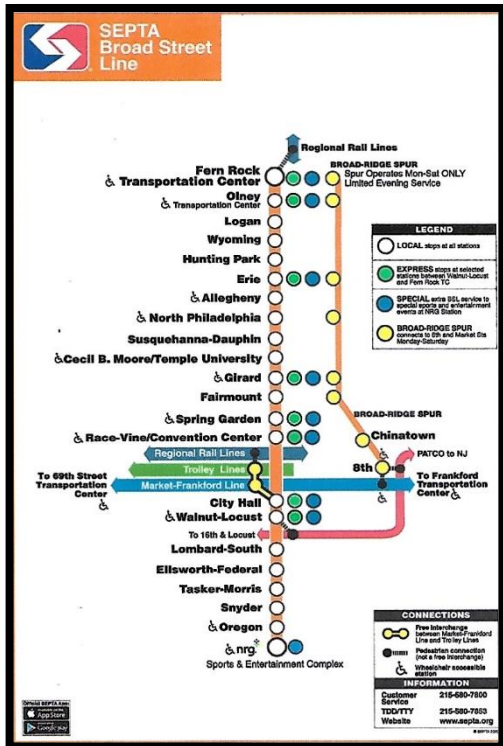


any stores near by. What was there is a large parking garage for the adjacent major stop on the Manayunk / Norristown regional rail line. I walked down to the former RDG station and found the waiting room was locked. However, the weather had been very nice all day and the temperature was still in the 50s. The 514PM train, that started in Elm Street a short distance to the west, came about 15 minutes late. There were only two other passengers on the platform and very few others boarded at the nine stops before Center City. Between 2004 and 2010 when we owned a hi-rise condo in Center City, I often rode this line to Conshohocken so I could work remotely from the Gartner office there. While I was on the train it was dark and I could not see anything out the window so I read one of the RR magazines I had with me.



It was about 615PM when I arrived in Jefferson where the day's adventure had started about nine hours earlier. It was time for another potty stop and I needed to charge my phone again. The charging device there was really slow and I only got an increase from 9% to 17% after a half hour. I also needed some food and walked to **Reading Terminal Market**. I knew it closed at 6PM but thought the Down Home Diner was open in the evening. Nope. However, a Panera across 12th Street was open and doing a brisk business at 7PM.





At that point, I could have walked back to Jefferson and rode a train to Jenkintown, but I still had one more line to ride - the BSL. This subway line runs N-S from the sport stadiums in South Philly to the **Olney and Fern Rock Transportation Centers**. So, I walked to 13th & Market and went down to board the BSL at the City Hall Station. I sat by the express track and ended up helping some new arrivals from SC with directions. Then a local train came so I rode that. The line has four-tracks [2 local / 2 express] and is underground to Olney after which it comes to the surface and runs around the shop area on a balloon track to the Fern Rock TC that was added back in 1993 - 1994. This line is standard gauge and uses B-IV cars that were made by Kawaski, beginning in late 1982. While SEPTA has announced plans to replace the 25 year old cars on the



MFL, there are no announced plans to replace those on the BSL even though they are about 15 years older. Perhaps since the BSL cars run mostly underground, their service life is longer. This picture is at Fern Rock.



At this time of night, only a few passengers exited there. This station is extensively used when the Eagles, Phillies, Flyers or 76ers are playing at home as many fans ride to/from the stadiums via the Fern Rock connection with the regional rail. I exited thru a subway turnstile and entered one for regional rail. I rode an elevator down to the north-bound platform for Track 1. On Track 0, a conventional locomotive-pulled train set was laying over till the next day's AM rush.

At 825PM, a north-bound train stopped. All of the trains that stop here also stop at Jenkintown so I had no concerns. There were lots of luggage in the seats so I immediately knew that this train had come from the PHL airport. In fact, it had left there at 737PM and made the five stops in Center City before I boarded. At 834PM, after two quick stops, I exited at Jenkintown and my 12 hour+ SEPTA adventure was over.



Recapping the Trip

I rode on:

- Six regional rail lines,
- Two subway lines,
- Two light rail lines,

- Two trolley lines,
- One trackless trolley,
- One regular bus.

Some of this was old hat but other parts I hadn't ridden in quite a while. This was my first ride ever on a trackless trolley. I tried to add up the total mileage but the mileage of each route is not readily available. I would guess that I rode at least 125 miles. Large parts of SEPTA are NOT ADA accessible and I probably went up and down over 200 steps that seeming impacted my bad right knee. All of my travel was FREE with my SEPTA Senior Fare Card.



I always find things when traveling and this trip was no exception. The coins went into a jar. I will see if the Wawa gift card has any value. I checked the SEPTA keycard and the TVM said it was expired. I am saving corks to make a piece of art. The locket will go to Emmet, my granddaughter. Train tickets are become rare as folks mainly use cards or their phone to pay for their ride. These will go into a box of used tickets that I have. When I accumulated 50, I will list them on eBay.

I learned a lot about SEPTA's operations and this helped me understand the reasons behind why parts of it are being rebranded. Earlier in 2024, SEPTA began transitioning to the use of single letters to refer to its subway, elevated, and trolley lines. Together, these lines are now known as "SEPTA METRO". You saw the new branding on the left edge of the schedules for the included lines above. It is hoped that the simplified branding and the new *wayfinding* signage will make it easier for SEPTA riders to navigate the system no matter their language, ability, or level of familiarity. Drexel Station at 30th Street on the MFL was the first station on the METRO system to debut the new signage.

As part of the METRO rebranding, this new unified system map was created. The previous system map excluded most of the trolley operations and all bus routes. You will note that the METRO lines are color coded and include a identifying single letter. I think that someone at SEPTA gave some thought to the order of the METRO lines, otherwise it could have been LGBTDM.

The other transit news worth noting is that back in Feb. 2023, SEPTA approved a \$714 million contract with Alstom Transportation Inc. for the purchase of 130 modern, fully ADA-compliant [i.e. low floor] trolley vehicles. Delivery of the new trolleys is scheduled to begin in 2027 with the full fleet expected to be delivered by the end of 2030. These vehicles will eventually replace SEPTA's entire aging fleet of trolleys used on the 10/11/13/15/34/36/101/102 lines..

