



Everything Jersey

Shame to those who watched ARC crumble

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**Star-Ledger Guest Columnist**

The Access to the Region's Core trans-Hudson tunnel stands unfinished.

By Thomas C. Jardim

There's a special place in political hell reserved for politicians without backbones, and it's becoming an awfully crowded place.

Its latest additions include Republicans like state Sen. Tom Kean Jr., U.S. Reps. Leonard Lance, Frank LoBiondo and Rodney Frelinghuysen, and state Assemblyman Alex DeCroce, all of whom steadfastly and publicly supported the Hudson rail tunnel project to Manhattan's Penn Station, but sat silently as New Jersey's governor killed the project. It also includes members of Gov. Christie's own administration, including Chief of Staff Rich Bagger, NJ Transit head James Weinstein and state DOT Commissioner Jim Simpson (who said in 2008 the tunnel "has to happen"), who for years spoke out in favor of the Access to the Region's Core tunnel project and then watched it get buried.

And finally, we shouldn't forget piling well-deserved enmity on the countless local and county Republican-elected officials along the train lines who would have benefited most from the new ARC tunnel for their incomprehensible failure to stand up to a governor and for a project estimated to boost home values along those lines by \$18 billion, while generating \$375 million a year in new property tax revenue for those municipalities.

Of course, the largest seat in political hell should be reserved for Gov. Chris Christie himself, and for good reason. We're now told that his maddeningly stupid decision to kill this once-in-a-generation public works project will enhance his national image as a cost cutter. So is that what this is about, and is this where we are in our public policy decision-making? More than 20 years' worth of bi-state, bipartisan support for a project whose benefits are clear,

unassailable and well-documented have to yield to one person's bid to earn some tea party credibility and leap onto the national Republican stage.

And please, governor, spare us the fictions about fretting over cost-overruns and your red meat, "I'm a fiscal watchdog" slogans, when everyone — from politicians to commuters to political beat reporters — knows your own stubbornness about the gas tax has left you no other options for transportation spending. He is employing the same one-shot fiscal gimmicks for which previous governors have rightly been criticized. And of course, there's nothing fiscally sensible about killing the ARC project, and in the process losing \$6 billion in federal and Port Authority funding, and still being on the hook to pay back the \$300 million already paid to the state by the federal government to make the project happen.

The tea partiers like to claim they are standing up for the values of our Founding Fathers, giants of their generation who would, undoubtedly, be horrified by the anti-intellectual lines coming from the tea party. Christie's tough-guy persona and policy decisions are probably a perfect fit for the tea party.

But my guess is that if Christie were to stand anywhere with our Founding Fathers, the only place one could imagine that happening is on a rowboat to Manhattan. If Christie had any say about it, that might be the only way we'd be able to cross the Hudson River today.

This week, I heard a guy from the Cato Institute on radio railing against the interstate highway system, the centerpiece of the administration of that great moderate Republican president Dwight D. Eisenhower. Quick, somebody get that guy a job in the Christie administration. Apparently there's plenty of jobs available for such fools to fill.

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