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Proposed light rail extension to King of Prussia meets some resistance

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A group in Upper Merion is drumming up dissent for a proposed extension of the Norristown High Speed Line to King of Prussia.

Calling themselves No KOP Rail, the neighbors have launched a [Change.org petition](#) and are asking local state representatives and state senators, as well as Gov. Tom Wolf, to kill the project.

The proposed extension is in the planning stages, several years out from breaking ground if it can secure enough federal, state and local funding to buck up to the \$1 billion price tag for construction.

Member Dan Cowhey described the group "not very cohesive or organized" and as "people who didn't like the rail line but didn't know how to speak up about it."

Many live in an area adjacent to three of the proposed five routes, according to Cowhey, in wedge of residential development between Route 202, I-76 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

Their complaints range from the process of planning the extension to fears about the outcome.

"I get the impression that there are people sitting around a table with a map of KOP and they're drawing lines where obviously a train can go" as opposed to going out and examining the routes themselves, he said. "That's what concerns me."

Other concerns, as shared on the petition's website, include "additional crime," "cluttering an already very busy highway (202)," and the possibility it will "dramatically decrease home values." Cowhey said the group, which draws on a neighborhood of about 60 residents, will focus on unifying its message and may reach out to visible light rail critics such as Randal O'Toole, a fellow at the libertarian think tank Cato Institute, to help them make a compelling argument.

Eric Goldstein, executive director of the King of Prussia District, a member of pro-rail group the King of Prussia Rail Coalition, said SEPTA *has* been recording and in some cases changing its proposal in response to public comment taken at hearings over the last three years.

"What I am hoping for is that their just be a constructive dialogue," said Goldstein.

Opposition to light rail is common during the planning process, but studies tend to support the assumption that proximity raises property values, rather than lower them.

State Sen. Daylin Leach (D-Montgomery County), one of the politicians the petition is addressed to, said he believed some of the concerns were unfounded. "I don't think having people come to shop is going to result in more crime or more graffiti or anything like that."

Liz Smith, SEPTA's director of long range planning, was out of the office Friday when a call was placed for comment. According to SEPTA's planning documents, a public hearing on the proposed routes should be coming up in early 2016.

The King of Prussia Rail Coalition has launched its own endorsement-gathering campaign to try to demonstrate community support for a project dependent on political funding process.