

Westchester County Railroads and Suburban Transformation

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Introduction

Daily commutes of hours stuck in rush hour traffic on the highway is probably what comes to mind when thinking of suburban commuting. When one thinks of suburbs, one most likely also thinks of 1950s post World War II America and the planned communities made up of miles of concrete, automobiles and roadways. The truth, however, is that suburbs as a place people live and commute to and form a city, are in fact much older than the automobile. What we would call commuter suburbs today have existed in the United States since the decades preceding the Civil War. These communities came about due to new innovations in transportation, mainly in the form of the railroad. The railroads were private corporate ventures that would end up impacting the development of areas through which they ran. Over time this influential form of transportation would itself become an institution that was influenced, as groups and powerful individuals became involved with the railroad.

In the early United States, the cities of Boston, New York and Philadelphia all had nearby communities that served as places of residence for those working or doing business in the respective city. Early on these communities were located very close by. Boston had Cambridge across the harbor and Philadelphia had the neighboring town of Spring Garden. New York, which then consisted of just lower Manhattan, had what we now know as Greenwich Village and the town of Brooklyn across the East River.¹ Many of these communities were first tied to their parent cities by steamship or other forms of water-based transport. New York City, as a major port on a river also had many connections with other communities in its surrounding

¹ Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford University Press, 1985. p. 21, 24-25.

area. Among these communities were the Rivertowns and Soundshore areas of Westchester County.

Westchester lies just north of New York City and originally included all of what is now the Bronx. Westchester County is one of the original counties of New York created following the English acquisition of the former New Netherlands colony. Early in its colonial history the County was made up of various huge manors and small agriculturally based villages. However, by the mid-19th century the County's population began to grow rapidly. Between 1850 and 1860, the County population grew by seventy-five percent and those communities close to New York City had doubled in population.² These rapid growth rates were a result of communities that developed as commuter suburbs. For the time period of antebellum America, the municipalities of Westchester were quite the distance from New York City. New innovations in transportation that came about in the early 19th century is what allowed these suburbs to spring up in Westchester.

Transportation is a key component and probably the most important factor in the development of suburban Westchester County. Steamboat ferries served the communities of Westchester along the Hudson River and Long Island Sound for the initial decades of early American history and continued to serve after the arrival of the railroad. While the steamboats are what came first, the County really began to grow into suburbs with the construction of railroads north out of Manhattan. These lines allowed for faster travel times into New York City and facilitated the growth of new communities along their routes. The railroad were an

² Jackson p. 36

influential force on Westchester, having created many opportunities for development and in some cases can be solely credited for the rise of many Westchester Communities. Railroads provided access and communication to what was previously rural countryside, turning farmland into vibrant communities and attracting those captivated by the land to become Westchester based commuters.

In the early 20th century another growth of suburbia in Westchester occurred with the rise of the automobile. The rail network in Westchester continued to serve as an important impetus for the development of the County and an important resource for commuters in Westchester. However, the early 20th century would see how powerful players, the public and the government influence how those railroads would operate and possibly impact their communities as a flip to how it was in the 19th century. This time period saw the brief rise of a Westchester Railroad under the wings of a powerful man, but as the rise of the automobile and changing attitudes occurred in the 20th century a decline of some of the railroads in Westchester would occur under the influence from a different man of power. Westchester was home to the creation of America's first limited access roadway system and many powerful players in the transportation industry had begun to turn away from the railroad. Nevertheless, all of the railroads were key to the story of Westchester, shaping the population, perception, development and history of the County. To this day, despite the effects the automobile and changing attitudes would have on the rail system, the New York City area, Westchester included has some of the highest mass transit and passenger railroad usage in the United States. Altogether the railroads represent a change over time; at first they influenced Westchester and as they did so individuals and communities began to influence the railroads.

These individuals and communities used the railroad as a tool to influence the development of the County.

The first railroads in Westchester were private ventures. As these private ventures served the County, they would create a transportation system that encouraged development of communities in Westchester at certain locations and thus were a tremendous influence. While these first railroads were successful they were not alone, other ventures were attempted but failed as new forms and ideas of transportation took hold in Westchester. Alongside these railroads a trolley network sprung up in the County which also played a part in the story of the influence of Westchester's railroads before they also declined. As the railroad network influenced the County, people began to take notice of the railroads effects. The railroads consolidated as the era of the railroad tycoons came and went. New technologies were adapted and powerful individuals took control of the transportation networks. Men such as Cornelius Vanderbilt, J. P. Morgan and Robert Moses exercised influence on the railroads. As the age of powerful railroad tycoons and captains of industry ended it would be the general public and the government that would use the railroad as a tool of influence in Westchester. Today the railroads of Westchester remain an influence and a tool utilized by communities because of that influence.

Review Essay

An important book for conducting this senior project was *The New York, Westchester and Boston Railway: J. P. Morgan's Magnificent Mistake* by Herbert H Harwood Jr. and edited by George M. Smerk. This book details the history of the Westchester Railroad. This includes

the original failed plans and attempts to revive them. Harwood focuses especially on the role of J. P. Morgan and the New Haven Railroad in the fate of the Westchester Railroad. Harwood also focuses on how the actions of J. P. Morgan and the New Haven Railroad in combination with the costs of the construction and original investors, leads to the railroad's eventual downfall.

This book was extremely helpful for the conduct of my senior project. Harwood's work provided the necessary facts needed for much of the research into the New York, Westchester and Boston railways. While there were other sources on the railroad, Harwood's work is of a scholarly nature which was very helpful and creditable for this project. In addition Harwood revealed the importance of J. P. Morgan in the history of the railroad. Harwood also explained the court proceeding, background information and the connection between the New Haven Railroad's acquisition and the railroads bankruptcy.

The information given from Harwood was also extremely helpful in determining the direction of the project. Harwood's detailing of the decline and the events leading up to it were key in determining that there would be a focus both on the growth and the decline of the railroad. The book also helped me to create the notion of an overall switch in the influence of the railroads. When I had narrowed down this project to being about the Westchester County railroads, this book helped guide me to what my overall idea to hone in on would be.

Another important book was *Westchester: the American Suburb* edited by Roger G Panetta with contributions from various other authors. The book contained several essays important to conducting this project. They were "Westchester, the American Suburb", "The

Lure of the County”, and “Suburban Transportation Redefined.” Each of these essays gave important information on the impact and role and impact of the railroads and the Bronx River Parkway on Westchester County, throughout its history.

“Westchester, the American Suburb” was authored by Panetta and presented a great amount of information on how the County had changed over time as a suburban region of New York City, including how the railroads were part of this change. “The Lure of the County” was written by Kenneth W. Maddox. Both of these essays were crucial for finding out ways and specific examples of how the railroads in Westchester influenced the County’s development. This includes how they made the country side attractive and how they lead to development of communities along their routes. Another essay was “Suburban Transportation Redefined” written by Barbara Troetel. This essay provided some important details on the origins and construction of the Bronx River Parkway. It indicated to me the importance and impact of the Bronx River Parkway. This included how it was different from past transportation and how government involvement was important.

I initially got this book to look for details on what exactly was unique and first to occur in Westchester. As my project changed to transportation and railroads, I used the book to find out details that were not in other books and to reinforce ideas already in the paper. While not about the railroads specifically, this book provided key information on the development and attraction of Westchester that resulted from the railroads.

Crabgrass Frontier by Kenneth T. Jackson was important for understanding suburbs. This book is about the suburbanization of America. For this project I used this book as

background research to understand what suburbs actually were, including the reasons for and of their existence. As such this book was key for understanding the suburban development background that the railroads caused.

When this project started I wanted to do something about Westchester as one of America's first suburbs. I was directed to this book as a first read to understand what exactly suburbs were and to gain an overall understanding of the topic of suburban development. While my topic changed to being about railroads suburbs were an important consequence of the railroads in Westchester County. The background knowledge provided by the book was key for me to understand an overall picture of the impact of the railroad on Westchester throughout its history.

Several chapters in this book were helpful to this paper. This includes two on what is called "The Transportation Revolution." These chapters were about new transportation methods in the 19th century that changed population movement in America's cities. I used this when I had decided to narrow down to transportation in my topic scope. The chapters provided important information on the methods of transportation and their impact that I would help in my understanding for conducting this project.

Westchester County: The Past Hundred Years 1683-1983 is a series of essays on Westchester County that I used for this project. The book was edited by Marilyn E. Weigold, and was created as part of the tricentennial celebration of Westchester's founding. This book contains several essays, each about a specific era and area of Westchester County's history.

Like *Crabgrass Frontier* and *Westchester: the American Suburb* this book provided information on Westchester as a suburban area. When I switched to talking about railroads a lot of information on the railroads and transportation in Westchester was still useful for my project. This included a chapter called “Industrialization, Immigration and Transportation to 1900” by Stephen Friedman and “Westchester as an Evolving Suburb” by Neil Martin. These chapters provided information on the history of Westchester’s railroads and the impact on development created by them.

This book provided me with an idea that is a large piece of this project. The trolley system is mentioned in this book in the chapter entitled “Industrialization, Immigration and Transportation to 1900.” This led to a realization that the trolley system was an important and impactful part of Westchester’s rail network that needed to be included alongside the major rail lines.

Researching and learning about Robert Moses, who is a key figure in part of this paper, came from *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* by Robert A. Caro. The book provided details about how Robert Moses transformed transportation in the New York City region.

This book was extremely important for this project. The information about Moses and his projects was key to helping me establish the idea of a change in attitude toward the railroad. The book provided evidence for a decline in the rail network and a prime example of a specific individual in the transportation world who was part of it. The reasons for the decline of the Westchester railroad was also gleaned from this book given how it shows the growth of the

road network and the automobile. The book also established that the changeover from rail to automobile traffic was not just an isolated phenomena in Westchester but one that was repeated elsewhere though the actions of Robert Moses.

The First Railroads

Today nearly 85 million rides are taken a year on the three commuter railroad lines that pass-through Westchester.³ These three lines were the first railroads in Westchester County. They were all the result of private ventures and today are under management of a government owned authority. They survived the times of railroad monopolies and the rise of the automobile to influence the history and development of Westchester and be used as tools to influence Westchester, which they still do to this day.

The history of these railroad lines in Westchester goes back to 1842 when the New York and Harlem Railroad reached Williamsbridge, now in the Bronx. The Harlem Railroad is one of the first railroads in the United States, having been chartered in 1831. The initial Manhattan route was the first streetcar rail in the country, and used horse pulled streetcars in its first years.⁴ The railroad continued to expand, entering Westchester in 1842 and reaching White Plains by 1844. It provided steam locomotive powered passenger services directly to the city from stations in Westchester along the route. Despite its fast-initial expansion and commuter services, the line suffered financial troubles and was eventually incorporated into the New York

³ "2018 MNR Ridership Report Appendix" *Metropolitan Transit Authority*, 15 April 2019, <http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/docs/MNR-2018-Annual-Ridership-Report.pdf>. Accessed 10 September 2019.

⁴ "The First Streetcar" *TODAYINSCI*, <https://todayinsci.com/Events/Transport/StreetCarJohnMason.htm>. Accessed 29 October 2019. & "Early NYC Transit: Early Transportation Methods" *Metropolitan Transit Authority*, <http://web.mta.info/nyct/facts/ffhph1.htm>. Accessed 29 October 2019.

Central System in 1872.⁵ Today the former Harlem Railroad is now the Harlem Line of the Metro-North railroad which runs all the way to Columbia County, further upstate. The line follows the Bronx River Valley for its initial Westchester route, it shares this water following trait in its route with the other railroads that were built in Westchester. The railroads central location meant it influenced the development of the central part of the county.

The second line in Westchester was the Hudson River Railroad, later known as the New York and Albany division of the New York Central System. This railroad, as its name implies, follows along the Hudson River and is now part of the Hudson Line of the Metro-North Railroad. This gave the railroad a prime route to influence the development of Westchester's Rivertowns on the river's edge. The Hudson River Railroad had been planned and chartered in 1832. While this was prior to the construction of the Harlem Railroad, it was delayed by opposition and lobbying from the steamboat companies on the Hudson River.⁶ A problem the Harlem Railroad didn't face due to the inland nature of its route. The Hudson River Railroad was finally built in 1849 and had services running by that September.⁷ The line was profitable for its initial years of service and saw an average number of daily riders of 870 and a total of 21,593 riders for the month of October.⁸

The Hudson River Railroad is an example of how a private venture railroad became and influential component to Westchester County. The Hudson River Railroad was built under Chief

⁵ Friedman, Stephen J. "Industrialization, immigration and the Transportation Revolution." *Westchester County: The Past Hundred Years, 1883 – 1983*, edited by Marilyn E. Weigold PhD, Westchester County Historical Society, 1984, p. 54

⁶ *Next Stop Westchester!: People and the Railroad*. Hudson River Museum, 1996. p.12

⁷ Crandell, Richard F. *This is Westchester: A Study of Suburban Living*. Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1954. p. 37

⁸ Friedman p. 54-55.

Engineer John B. Jervis. Jervis was the Chief Engineer of the Croton Aqueduct and the Mohawk & Hudson Railroad. Jervis wanted to build the Hudson River Railroad as proof that railroads could successfully compete with steamboats, especially when it comes to costs and efficient long-distance shipping of goods.⁹

The New Haven Line is the third Westchester railroad. The New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad or New Haven Railroad for short, had built tracks along the shore of Long Island Sound into New England. The line opened in 1849 and provided passenger service to Westchester Sound Shore Communities like New Rochelle, Mamaroneck and Pelham.¹⁰ The New Haven line was extremely successful, with accounts of 900-1000 passengers per day in the first month of operations alone. The railroad is credited with being the cause of rapid industrialization in the Sound Shore Communities and the rapid increase in population that took place by the 1900s.¹¹ This railroad was highly influential, having become one of the major railroads of the United States. The New Haven railroad was such an influential and useful tool that it influenced other railroads in Westchester. Today this railroad is known as the New-Haven Line of the Metro-North Railroad, which carries commuter traffic from Connecticut and the Sound Shore Communities and serves as a section of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor line.

These three railroads were all important to the development of Westchester County. The Harlem, Hudson and New Haven Railroads created the conditions and services that turned Westchester County into the quintessential example of the American suburb that we see it as

⁹ *Next Stop Westchester!: People and the Railroad.* p.12

¹⁰ Crandell p. 37

¹¹ Friedman p. 55

today. The railroads created the perfect conditions for these communities to grow and develop. At the same time they showed a landscape and provided an ease of travel that would attract those who would become what we now call the commuter. These commuters were dependent on the railroad for their livelihood, knew the influence of the railroad and were part of the general public's use of railroads as a tool of influence.

Influence of the First Railroads

The first railroads in Westchester County influenced it in many ways. The primary impact was that they contributed to the creation of Westchester as communities of commuter suburbs. Commuters are one of the first groups to have realized the potential of the railroad as a tool. The railroad companies built stations at various communities and other locations across the County. In turn people would move in or set up shop by these stations expanding Westchester's agrarian villages into commuter towns and cities. In some cases entire municipalities owe their existence to the railroad as they were established by those who settled near the railroad station. The railroads also influenced the growth of the County by attracting visitors to its countryside by the scenic rides that showed the landscape. These are some of the ways the railroads influenced the County and attracted attention as a tool of influence.

The existence of the Westchester railroad lines allowed many middle and upper-class families to move out of Manhattan, yet still be able to reach New York City. These first commuters could live anywhere along one of the railroads and have easy access to work and activities in New York City. The development of Northern Westchester in particular was opened up with The Harlem Railroad. The railroad opened up the rural and more isolated parts of the

County to more easily communicate and interact with the outside world. The railroad also influenced which areas in the north of the County would grow. Purdys, a hamlet in the town of North Salem, attracted people and businesses due to the railroad as opposed to the nearby town of Somers. When the Harlem Railroad was built the plan called for the route to travel through Somers, however the wealthy members of the community rejected the route.¹² Instead, the railroad acquired permission to route through land owned by the Purdy family in exchange for a regularly served depot on that land.¹³ The railroad then allowed for a community to be founded surrounding the depot which exists to this day. The Harlem Railroad is also credited with creating Mount Kisco, which grew around its depot despite being between two other already existing communities in Northern Westchester.¹⁴ The villages of Purdys and Mount Kisco are just two examples of how the railroad influenced the development of Westchester County as a home to the suburban commuter. While the railroads influenced this growth in Northern Westchester, the main impacts of the railroad were felt in Southern Westchester.

Southern Westchester is a key area that shows the importance and influence of Westchester railroads. Southern Westchester developed as the most populous and most densely developed part of the County as a result of the railroads. In what is now the Bronx, the Harlem Railroad provided direct access into Manhattan via a bridge over the Harlem River. This access into Manhattan made the Harlem Railroad an important influencer in Westchester's

¹² *Next Stop Westchester!: People and the Railroad*. p.13

¹³ White, Dana. "The First Families of Westchester" *Westchester Magazine*. January 2015.

<http://www.westchestermagazine.com/Westchester-Magazine/January-2015/The-First-Families-Of-Westchester/>. Accessed Oct. 16, 2019.

¹⁴ *Next Stop Westchester!: People and the Railroad*. p.13

development. It was a focal point for access to New York City and many depended upon it for that access. When the Hudson Railroad was built it saw the importance and influence of this entrance way. The Hudson Railroad decided to pay the Harlem Railroad for the trackage rights to use. People settled along the rail lines leading to this bridge for fast and easy access to New York City. This in turn created a commuting population that shifted the County population south as more people moved up and out of the city.¹⁵ This commuting population defined what type of place Westchester was and what it continues to be; a place of suburban commuters. This growth in the southernmost part of Westchester County shows a tremendous influence of the railroad on its development. The area near this bridge and the stations closest to it would become the densest and most urban part of Westchester County. This development and large rate of urbanization from the railroad lines would culminate in the City of New York gradually annexing parts of Westchester into the City itself. The lands west of the Bronx River and south of Yonkers were given to the City in 1873, only a few decades after the railroads were built through the area. The rest of what is now the Bronx was ceded from Westchester in the 1890s with the consolidation of New York City into its five boroughs. Outside of what became the Bronx many other communities were established and grew in the southern part of the County and developers took advantage of the rail lines to establish them.

Bronxville is one community in Southern Westchester that owes its development to the railroad. In the late 19th century a man named William Van Duzer Lawrence purchased around 400 acres of land surrounding the little used Bronxville depot.¹⁶ Lawrence had realized that

¹⁵ *Next Stop Westchester!: People and the Railroad*. p.20

¹⁶ Martin, Neil S. "Westchester as an Evolving Suburb" *Westchester County: The Past Hundred Years, 1883 – 1983*, edited by Marilyn E. Weigold PhD, Westchester County Historical Society, 1984. p. 95

Bronxville was in a good location in regards to future growth of New York City and began construction of an entire community. This venture was extremely successful with Bronxville being incorporated by 1898 and the community being called the prototype high-status and high-prestige community.¹⁷

The railroad is also responsible for the creation of what would become the City of Mount Vernon. The land was part of the town of Eastchester, which in the mid-19th century was primarily rural and sparsely populated. In 1850 a group led by a man named John Stevens planned a city and purchased 367 acres of land in Eastchester.¹⁸ This community would eventually become the City of Mount Vernon, sitting right on the border with what became the Bronx. The creation of Mount Vernon can be attributed to the New Haven Railroad and became proof that it was possible to set up a large community in a rural area and commute to the city for work.¹⁹

Today Mount Vernon is a city level municipality and Bronxville is a noteworthy village in Southern Westchester. This shows just how influential the railroads were in that they are responsible for the development of an entire Westchester city. In turn such important communities would definitely see the importance of the railroad as a tool of influence. In addition many individuals, especially those in the real estate and land development industries such as Lawrence, saw how influential the railroad was to Westchester, saw that the railroad created opportunities and used these opportunities to be influential themselves.

¹⁷ Jackson p. 94-97

¹⁸ Crandell p.37-38

¹⁹ Friedman p. 55

Lawrence's successful Bronxville community and the creation of the City of Mount Vernon by Steven's group paved the way for the growth of other communities linked to the railroad. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, developers began to create communities in places such as Scarsdale and North Tarrytown (now known as Sleepy Hollow).²⁰ Many other municipalities grew because of the railroad, such as New Rochelle and White Plains and in turn they became part of Westchester's reputation as suburbia. Many of these communities would grow thanks to cooperation between the developers and the railroad companies.²¹ The railroads provided advertisements that gave Westchester the appearance as an attractive place to live.

The three railroads can also be credited with giving Westchester its first appearances as an attractive suburbia that the one would desire to live in and commute from in the 19th century. Those who travelled the County, such as one unnamed English traveler, observed that wherever the railroad went, what was once the forest would turn into suburban villas. The railroad lines not only grew a commuting population, but also facilitated the county's agriculture which allowed for fast delivery and access to food markets for those living near the lines. This in turn increased the attraction of living in Westchester. The railroad lines are also credited with allowing artists from New York City to visit Westchester and capture its beauty, with thousands of paintings made in the 19th century which further attracted the wealthy to live in Westchester.²² These new wealthy and artistic residents of Westchester are another

²⁰ Martin p. 95-96

²¹ Panetta, Roger. "Westchester, the American Suburb" *Westchester: The American Suburb*, edited by Roger Panetta, Fordham University Press, 2006, p. 22

²² Maddox, Kenneth W. "The Lure of the Country" *Westchester: The American Suburb*, edited by Roger Panetta, Fordham University Press, 2006, p. 118-121

example of the railroads influence. The railroads attracted people to live in Westchester and the power and wealth of these individuals would allow them to use the railroad as a tool of influence.

The first three railroads are now the New Haven, Hudson and Harlem Lines of the Metro-North Railroad which continues to service Westchester today. Together these three railroads shaped how Westchester would grow and develop, just like how the railroads shaped the development in the rest of America as they were built across the nation. The three Westchester railroad lines proved key to the County as they provided access to New York City for small communities on their lines, creating entire communities and cities. They provided Westchester businesses with direct access to markets to ship their goods. They shaped how visitors viewed the County and its countryside and created an idealized picture of life in Westchester. This led to the rise of some of America's first true commuter suburbs as the railroad was used to travel back and forth to New York City. The development of Westchester caused by these lines would even lead to part of the County joining New York City itself. Altogether these lines though their influence made Westchester what it is today and without them Westchester would have been very different.

Failed Lines & Consolidation

The three railroad lines that exist today were not the only ones that existed in Westchester. There is one other railroad that existed in Westchester in the 19th century. The New York and Northern, more commonly known as the Putnam Division or "The Old Put." The Old Put is the most recent of the initial Westchester railroads, having begun service in 1880.

The railroad line followed the Saw Mill River. Unlike the other three railroads in 19th century Westchester, the Putnam Division was mainly purposed and operation oriented towards carrying freight from the farms and mills along the river to the markets of New York City.²³ Despite the separate purpose of this railroad it still operated some passenger service and was influential in Westchester's development and history. The railroad was also used as a tool of influence by those who would end up in control of it.

The story of the Putnam Division can be traced back to plans that show how Westchester railroads were not just important to Westchester itself. During the late 19th century there were numerous ambitious plans to connect New York City with railroads in New England as competition to the New Haven Railroad which had already come to dominate Southern New England in the late 19th century. These plans called for a railroad to travel north through Westchester and connect New York City to railroads in New England up north, with Westchester County as the gateway between the two. In 1872 a railroad called the New York, Westchester and Boston was chartered and was one of these plans. The full name of the railroad, the New York, Boston & Montreal Railroad, implied an eventual expansion to New England. In addition the chartered route of the line paralleled the New Haven line. This indicated a direct threat and competitor with the New Haven Railroad. The Panic of 1873 just a year later prevented the rail line from getting off the ground and the railroad laid dormant for several decades.²⁴ The Putnam Division originated from another such plan. A railroad company called The Eire Railroad wanted to construct a northbound line east of the Hudson to serve as

²³ Friedman p. 57

²⁴ Harwood, Herbert H, Jr. *The New York, Westchester & Boston Railway: J.P. Morgan's Magnificent Mistake*. Indiana University Press, 2008. p. 8-9

the company's gateway to New England. The Erie Railroad would have used the railroad for its plans to expand influence in that region via a connection to the New York and New England Railroad.²⁵ This plan by the Erie Railroad while different also shows the influence of the railroad on Westchester County and its use as a tool of influence. The Erie Railroad wanted influence on the line to control access to New England and such a railroad would most definitely have impacted Westchester by turning it into a major hub for access to New England had it come to fruition.

Like the New York, Westchester and Boston the Putnam Division's plans were dashed by the Panic of 1873. However due to the Erie Railroads previous backing, investors were able to salvage their investments for a more modest plan to connect the Bronx and Brewster, New York. This soon was developed and turned into the New York and Northern in 1878.²⁶ This railroad would be another influence on Westchester, by connecting many industries in the County that were along the Saw Mill River with markets elsewhere. This in turn would contribute to the development of Westchester as these industries profited.²⁷

While the Putnam Division was able to be built and operated it soon fell to a trend in Westchester's railroads at the time: that of consolidation. Consolidation was the merger of Westchester's railroads into the control of larger railroads. This was an important step for how the railroads impacted Westchester and were used as a tool of influence. The New York Central System took control of the Putnam Division in 1894 by manipulation of stocks and land deeds,

²⁵ Gallo, Daniel R. and Kramer, Fredrick A. *The Putnam Division: New York Central's Bygone Route through Westchester County*. Quadrant Press, 1981. p. 8

²⁶ Gallo p. 6-11

²⁷ Friedman p. 57

forcing the railroad to default. This resulted in the New York Central gaining control of most of the rail traffic in Westchester as it had already acquired the Hudson and Harlem Railroads.²⁸ The New York Central was run by a man named Cornelius Vanderbilt, nicknamed the “Commodore,” who was a key player in the impact the railroads would play on the development of Westchester County. The Commodore was a highly successful owner of steamboat and shipping lines in the New York area providing Westchester with access to New York City by sea.²⁹ After making a fortune in the steamboat business, Vanderbilt abandoned his shipping industry as he no doubt saw the railroads as a potential tool of influence to be utilized. In 1864 he acquired a controlling interest of the Hudson River Railroad.³⁰ A few years later Vanderbilt acquired a controlling interest in the Harlem Railroad. With both railroads under his control Vanderbilt consolidated both lines, connected them together and created the New York Central System in 1869, one of America’s most famous railroads.³¹ Cornelius Vanderbilt is the first of a few examples where an individual who used the influence of Westchester’s railroads as a tool for influence of their own. Whereas there were people who took advantage of the railroads influence on Westchester prior to him, Vanderbilt had direct influence on the railroads themselves and had the ability to use that influence as a tool.

By the late 19th century most of Westchester’s rail traffic was under the control of Vanderbilt’s New York Central System with the Harlem, Hudson and Putnam all becoming “Divisions” of the New York Central System.³² The sole exception being the New Haven

²⁸ Gallo p. 22

²⁹ Friedman p. 56

³⁰ Crandell p. 37

³¹ Friedman p. 56-57

³² Friedman p. 57

Railroad, which was its own large railroad in New England. In Westchester the consolidation by Vanderbilt affected how the railroads impacted the County and its commuter population. Consolidation meant increased costs for commuters due to the lack of competition. This had huge consequence for Westchester as now one man essentially had control over the development of Westchester County, given how important the lines were to the County's development. Some of the effects of this control were that Westchester farms that depended on the lines to ship their goods suffered from the higher costs. On the other hand, communities grew in population from those taking advantage of proximity to all the lines that had easy transfer access between them.³³ These effects show how one individual or group was able to use their influence over the railroad to be influential themselves. By being in influential control of the railroads, Vanderbilt and the New York Central had tremendous influence on Westchester County. The purpose of pursuing this influential control varied from person to person. For men like Cornelius Vanderbilt and groups like the Erie railroad the utilization of the railroads influence was likely as a tool for gaining more power and money in pursuit of wealth.

The Trolley Network

The mainline railroads were not the only way Westchester was served by railroad. In the late 19th century, the communities of Westchester, in addition to being served by the four railroads, had been served by a series of interconnected trolley networks. These trolley lines would also contribute to the development of Westchester County and its growth as a place of suburbs. This service included many of the communities in Westchester that are now cities in

³³ Friedman p. 57

their own right such as Mount Vernon, Yonkers and White Plains. The story of the trolley networks also reveal how the public began to use the railroad network as a tool of influence. Transportation was becoming a necessary service for members of the general public, a trend that would continue into and throughout the 20th century.

The trolley networks were initially horse powered, but by the 20th century they switched to electric trolleys that provided fast travel across many Westchester communities.³⁴ These electric trolleys were interconnected and in addition to the main railroads, allowed a commuter to travel via transfers all the way into New York City from almost anywhere in the populated parts of the County with fast speed and low cost.³⁵ This increased the influence of the entire rail network as this speed became a normal and important part of daily movement around Westchester.

Yonkers, is a perfect example of this interconnected network. In the early 20th century Yonkers had twenty railroad stations within its boundaries. On top of this there was the Yonkers Railroad Company system that connected the city and its neighboring communities with five trolley lines. The trolley network was very successful, making money with low fares. The trolleys were reportedly always packed and the services ran twenty-four hours a day. An example of this is in 1893, where the annual ridership on the trolley lines in the southern parts of the County alone reached 5,867,848.³⁶ Today, Yonkers is the largest city in Westchester

³⁴ Friedman p. 57

³⁵ Crandell p. 43

³⁶ Friedman p. 57-59

County. This shows that the trolley network was an influence on the development of Westchester.

The trolley network was an important influence on the County as it most likely solved a “last mile” problem in the County’s rail network. The “last mile” problem is an issue in transportation networks where the first and last legs of a traveler’s journey are handled when they are not in direct proximity to the main network. The County’s trolley lines provided communities and commuters with access to the main railroad stations if they lived in areas outside the immediate vicinity of the station. This likely solved a “last mile” problem in the County network and expanded the access to the railroads for many Westchester residents. This allowed the various suburban communities across Westchester to connect and develop into each other, turning sections of the County into continuous suburban area.³⁷ The trolleys also likely increased the influence of the railroads as the areas and numbers they reached increased with better access. This also would make the trolley system a tool to be influenced as people would utilize it for easy access to the rail network and for commuting to New York City.

Like the railroads, the trolley network in Westchester consolidated and this allowed for service across the County in the early 20th century. Due to consolidation in the early 20th century it was possible for a person to travel from one end of the County to the other completely by trolley with what was possibly only a handful of coins.³⁸ This is in contrast to the railroad network, as sheer ridership numbers allowed the Third Avenue Railway Company (also

³⁷ Panetta, p. 39

³⁸ Crandell p. 43

referred to as the Westchester Electric Railway Company³⁹), which began to acquire the various trolley companies in Westchester, to keep fare prices low and still turn a profit.⁴⁰ At one point, the streetcar lowered transportation costs so much, that it allowed the working class of New York City to realistically imagine moving out of the City and become commuters. In fact, trolleys were so successful that communities began to grow around the stops and stations along streetcar and railroad lines. This was especially evident in the Rivertowns where the hillsides away from the Hudson Division of the New York Central became home to suburban development.⁴¹ With the successes that the trolley made, the companies in control were able to expand their lines across the County and provide mass transit to the people of Westchester. Just like the four mainline railroads the trolleys had become a key component of how railroads influenced and were a tool of influence in the development of Westchester and the creation of the suburban County it is today.

The large ridership numbers the trolley systems got came with a cost however: larger accountability to the public. This public accountability is an example of how the public and though them the government would begin to use Westchester's railroads as a tool of influence. Trolley companies were chartered and registered with various municipal clerks as well as the County clerk. The companies needed to file with these clerks whenever they planned and underwent expansions or changes to their lines and services. As part of this, the companies would make promises, such as to provide services by a certain time or to keep the fare at a

³⁹ *New York Times (1857-1922)*; Sep 13, 1899; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times p. 11. Accessed Sept. 11 2019.

⁴⁰ Friedman p. 58-59

⁴¹ Panetta, p. 38-39

certain price.⁴² Whereas the main railroads in Westchester were owned by powerful railroad barons such as Cornelius Vanderbilt and J. P. Morgan, who could use their power to get around government and public accountability, the trolley network had no such luck. If a Westchester trolley company failed to meet its promises or was unable to accomplish them in a timely manner, backlash would occur that could affect the lines. In March of 1882, the Harlem River and Port Chester Rapid Transit Company is an example of a trolley railroad having faced this backlash and the public exercising influence on the network.

The Harlem River and Port Chester Rapid Transit Company, in its charter had promised to construct a rail bridge over the Harlem River by May 1st of 1882. This bridge would allow easier access to the Second Avenue elevated line in Manhattan for commuters along the line. By the time of March there was no visible signs of bridge construction and people began to raise complaints. The trolley railroad was partially owned by the New Haven Railroad so people accused the New Haven Railroad of acquiring the charter of the Harlem River and Port Chester Rapid Transit Company just to prevent anyone else from building the desired bridge as competition to the New Haven Railroad.⁴³ This incident shows both the influence of the railroad network and people's utilization of the network as a tool of influence. This incident also shows how important the railroads and transportation had become to the general public. This would pave the way for even more utilization of the railroad as a tool as the general public understood how important and influential the transportation network was to them. Although

⁴² *New York Times (1857-1922)*; Sep 13, 1899; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times p. 11. Accessed Sept. 1, 2019. & *New York Times (1857-1922)*; Dec 4, 1895; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times p. 15. Accessed Sept. 11, 2019.

⁴³ *New York Times (1857-1922)*; Mar 30, 1882; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times p. 3. Accessed Sept. 11, 2019.

the bridge was never built, it was important to the commuters that wanted it and they used the trolley line to bring accountability to the powerful railroad company that blocked it.

New Railroad Technologies

The time period stretching from the 1890s into the first decades of the 20th century would begin a new era wherein the railroads while still an influence, would no longer be as powerful and influential as they had been. Instead a new era where the government and the public would be the ones to utilize the railroad system as a tool and understand how it would impact Westchester County. At the same time new technologies and innovations would shape how the Westchester railroads served the County and its people. Part of the reasoning for the inclusion of these new technologies is an example of how the railroad was used as a tool of influence by the general public and the government.

By the 1890s all of the Westchester trolley lines were electric as opposed to horse-drawn. These types of upgrades took place across the Westchester railroads throughout the early decades of the 20th century. This time period saw the construction of the current Grand Central Terminal and the electrification of the Westchester railroads. The major catalyst for these changes was a deadly tunnel fire in January 1902. The smoke caused by steam locomotives operating in the tunnels in New York City made communications between workers difficult. This led to a collision between locomotives that caused the death of 15 Westchester commuters. This incident would lead to an example of how the public and government used the railroad's influence as a tool of influence. The public outcry from this accident caused the mayors of Westchester towns to successfully lobby for a ban of steam locomotives in the

tunnels and the lower parts of the rail lines, which was successful by 1908.⁴⁴ Due to the increasing safety risk of the steam locomotives among other reasons, the railroads leading into Manhattan from Westchester began to electrify their lines in 1903. On the Hudson Line, electrification was built up to Croton-Harmon. This required a new terminal, roundhouse and other railroad maintenance services to be built in Croton, which combined with the speed of new electric locomotives, helped grow that community.⁴⁵ On the Harlem Line, electrification was constructed up to a new railyard and station at North White Plains. Due to the low clearance level of the Park Ave tunnels to Grand Central, the Hudson and Harlem lines were electrified with what is known as third-rail as opposed to overhead wires. The New Haven Railroad also electrified its tracks during this time. Unlike the other lines, however, the New Haven upgraded to overhead electric lines as it had its own route to New York City via Penn Station.

To run on these electrified lines, new electric locomotives called multiple-unit motor cars or “MUs” for short were built. These locomotives had faster acceleration than steam locomotives and could more easily switch moving backwards and forwards.⁴⁶ This in turn speed up travel times between stations on electrified portions of the Westchester railroads. This increased ridership and likely in turn increased the railroads potential influence and ability to be used as a tool. By 1913 the rail lines in Lower Westchester had completed electrification and began to provide speedy access to New York City. A new era of electric railroads had arrived in the New York City region. The public and the government had begun to exert their influence on

⁴⁴ *Next Stop Westchester!: People and the Railroad*. p. 19

⁴⁵ Panetta, p.42

⁴⁶ *Next Stop Westchester!: People and the Railroad*. p.19

Westchester's railroads. In turn these railroads influenced the County's development. This ushered in a new era where the railroad was used as an influencer instead of just being an influencer in its own right.

While these technologies came about and were likely implemented for numerous reasons, the usage of the railroad as a tool of influence by the general public and the government likely played a key role as to when the technologies were implemented. The technology and plans for electric railroads were likely in the plans for the railroads for years prior to the 1902 accident. The backlash from the 1902 accident by the public and government officials most definitely played a role in the decision to electrify the Westchester railroads by the companies that controlled them. The railroads began to electrify their lines just a year after the accident, showing that there was probably a connection between the accident and electrification. This shows that the railroad network was successfully being used as a tool of influence and was not just an influencer in of itself.

The Westchester Railroad

In the 1910s the fully electric railroad had come to Westchester. A fifth railroad known as the Westchester Railroad had begun construction in Westchester County, under the name New York and Port Chester. This railroad which has been called "Westchester's Forgotten Railroad" was first proposed and chartered in the 1870s as the Southern Westchester Railroad and later as the New York, Westchester and Boston. These initial ventures collapsed by 1881.⁴⁷ This new railroad and its story is an example of how people had hoped to use the railroad as a

⁴⁷ Acara, Roger. *Westchester's Forgotten Railway*. New York, 1962. p. 7

tool of influence. The railroad's decline is also an important example of government and public attempts to utilize the railroad as a tool of influence though attempts to save it.

The Westchester Railroad was unlike its predecessor railroads. The other railroads which were at first private ventures just so happened to create influence in Westchester. The previous Westchester railroads were built as part of the rise of the railroad and just so happened to impact the development of Westchester as communities grew in response. The Westchester Railroad was proposed for the purpose of serving the commuters of Westchester County and was built by predicting where future natural development would best occur thus where a railroad to serve this new development was to be built. The railroads proponents, looking at how the other Westchester railroads had communities grew around them, believed that the line would help the communities it served grow to become the commuter suburbs. This is a prime example of how the railroads were influential and were utilized as a tool of influence. The railroads proponents wanted to utilize the railroad as a tool to develop a section of Westchester County. The investors and proponents likely wished to develop communities and make money out of selling properties and developments along the railroads route. The attractiveness of this idea meant proposals for the railroad came up repeatedly. Plans began gaining ground in 1901. Construction began in 1909 and the railroad opened in 1912 under the name of the New York, Westchester and Boston.⁴⁸

The New York, Westchester and Boston, also referred to as the Westchester Railroad, followed a route similar to the New Haven line from the Harlem River to the north, but went

⁴⁸ Arcara p. 9-13

farther inland. The route had a branch, called the 'White Plains Division' separating in Mount Vernon and ending in White Plains along a route close to the Hutchinson River. At the time this branch travelled through open fields, but investors hoped the route would soon be paid for by new communities that were to spring up and utilize the line. Like the Putnam Division, this branch had plans and intentions to eventually expand farther north. The plan was to build the White Plains division up to Danbury, Connecticut where, in connection with other lines, the trains could run all the way to Boston, Massachusetts.⁴⁹ Such plans indicate that investors and owners of the railroad saw the potential influence and possible utilization as a tool of this railroad line. Like the Erie Railroad's plans for the Putnam Division, a railroad stretching from Westchester up to New England would be a major thoroughfare. This would be a highly influential railroad producing a lot of development and revenue that using the railroad as a tool would grant control over. Despite these ambitious plans, the railroad met a similar fate as the New York & Northern Railroad and never was able to meet these expectations. The railroad peaked at 14 million passengers in 1928 but ridership in individual trains was very few and the railroad never once turned a profit. The line was eventually torn up and sold starting in 1939.⁵⁰

Although the Westchester Railroad was like the Putnam Division in being a failure of a larger idea, the story of the Westchester Railroad demonstrates the influence of the railroad on the development of Westchester and contains a story of how individuals and groups utilized the railroad as a tool of influence. The story of the Westchester Railroad shows how big players such as J. P. Morgan and Robert Moses influenced the railroad and influenced Westchester at a

⁴⁹ Arcara p. 7

⁵⁰ Arcara p. 17-19 & 34

time when the County began to away from the railroad. The County had been transitioning toward a more automobile based system. The story of the Westchester Railroad, however, also shows how people and the government had begun to influence the railroad in turn hoping to have influenced the development of Westchester despite the change toward the automobile.

Construction on the Westchester Railroad began in 1909 and finish by 1912.⁵¹ The construction of the railroad followed a “newest and best” philosophy of design.⁵² The construction used all the latest techniques, rolling stock and technology, including overhead-rail electrification and cutting through landscape with little bending to the terrain. Two branches were constructed that split in Mount Vernon. One went east to New Rochelle, paralleling the New Haven route and the other went north to White Plains. The White Plains route originally was planned to move through Elmsford into White Plains, but the New Haven Railroad moved the line further east through Scarsdale in order to cut costs and have access to a better potential market. In addition the new route would travel through undeveloped land not directly connected to a competing Harlem Division of the New York Central Railroad.⁵³ The building of the railroad through undeveloped land is an example of both the influence of the railroad and the attempts by people to use the railroad as a tool of influence. Investors and backers hoped to have influence on the railroad that was to serve entire new communities that were to be built up on the undeveloped land the railroad passed through.

⁵¹ Acara p. 12-13

⁵² Harwood p. 41

⁵³ “ASKS \$20,000,000 INCREASE: Westchester Railroad Petitions Service Board to Act on Merger” *New York Times* (1877-1922); Aug 17, 1909; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. p. 5. Accessed Oct. 31, 2019 & Harwood p. 34

As part of its philosophy of design, the railroad stations were not just depots, but had grand designs with multiple levels and many grand architecture styles; “Spanish Mission” and “Italian Renaissance” among them.⁵⁴ The railroad was also unique in that it used a European style ticketing system. There were no conductors collecting tickets on the train, but instead a ticket would be punched on the platform and put into a box at the station of destination where guard would watch to see if the correct type of ticket was being used. This allowed for cheaper ticket costs for passengers in comparison to the other Westchester railroads.⁵⁵ These aspects also show how the railroad’s designers hoped the line would be an important key to the development of the area. It was hoped that a fancy and cheap-to-use railroad would be able to fit well into the predicted communities it would serve.⁵⁶ These grandiose aspects of the line are a primary example of the usage of the Westchester Railroad as a tool of influence. The investors and owners of the line hoped to create a railroad that would influence what type of community and residents the railroad would serve. Despite the railroads failure the investors of the Westchester Railroad were successful in their attraction and creation of grandiose commuter communities. The railroads path today is surrounded by some of the highest income communities in America such as Scarsdale and Rye.

Despite all these grandiose aspects of the railroad, the Westchester Railroad was troubled. All these grand stations and newest technology cost large amounts of money. All the construction costs of the railroad meant the line cost nearly two million dollars per each mile of

⁵⁴ Acara p. 12 & Harwood p. 43

⁵⁵ Acara p. 15-16 & Harwood p. 44-45

⁵⁶ Acara p. 12

track built.⁵⁷ In addition not once would the railroad turn a profit in any year of its existence.⁵⁸ It was only one year into the railroads operations in 1913 when the railroad began to cause trouble for its owner, the New Haven Railroad. In 1913 the New Haven Railroad was struggling to make money, the Federal government had opened an investigation into the railroad's financial affairs and on top of all this J.P. Morgan, who was the owner of the railroad, died that March. The Federal investigation would center on the Westchester Railroad and the question of why the New Haven Railroad decided to acquire and actually build the railroad was asked. This was a focal point as Charles Mellen, who was President of the New Haven Railroad, was against the idea of acquiring the line from the start. The initial investigation concluded that the acquisition was just a buyout of competition. At the urging of some politicians, which is yet another example of public and government utilization of the railroad as tool of influence, further probing was done in 1914. This additional probing did not reveal any answer to the question of why the railroad was acquired and built. The investigation concluded the acquisition was just a waste of corporate funds and any potential answer to why it was done is conjecture at most.⁵⁹ Fortunately, for the New Haven Railroad and the Westchester Railroad this had no further consequence. This investigation shows how the government and public understood the railroad was an influencer and tool to be influenced. The initiation of an investigation by the government shows that the railroads were indeed powerful and influential enough to warrant such government intervention within them. In addition by undergoing the

⁵⁷ Harwood Front Cover

⁵⁸ Acara p. 19

⁵⁹ Harwood p. 72-74

investigation, the government was utilizing the railroad as a tool of influence against those who may have improperly profited from their influence over the railroad.

The Westchester Railroad continued to operate for the next twenty years, however, the railroads decline was becoming apparent. Between 1930 and 1931 the Westchester Railroad lost one million riders and by 1933 income was thirty-three percent lower than its 1929 number. Inability to keep up with debts meant regular daytime services were cut in half.⁶⁰ By the mid-1930s the New Haven Railroad was also facing financial troubles and in the late 1930s the Westchester Railroad's death was all but assured due to its own financial troubles with a debt of \$50.6 million. \$11 million of which was traced back to the initial price of the New Haven's acquisition of the Westchester and Port Chester.⁶¹ The story of the Westchester Railroad's decline involves several attempts to save it which is an important example of how the railroad was utilized as a tool of influence by the public and the government in attempts to influence their communities.

Despite the decline and the debt the Westchester Railroad faced there were attempts to save the railroad by the commuting general public and their municipal government representatives. In December of 1937 the municipalities of Westchester offered to cut tax assessments in half to save the railroad as well as supported a Citizens Committee Plan to create a Transportation Authority to run the railroad. The plan to create a Transit Authority to run the railroad gained traction and its creation was passed in the state legislature, however Governor Herbert Lehman vetoed it citing that such action is only reserved for "special

⁶⁰ Harwood p. 106

⁶¹ Harwood p. 117

purposes.” At one point in 1938 the railroad’s former employees offered to work without pay until the railroad would be able to reimburse them for the time they would work without pay.⁶² By the time these any other plans gained traction it was too late to save the railroad. Many had hoped the even with the end of the railroads usage, the line could be preserved as a potential influencer and tool of influence in their communities. World War II however, created a demand for the railroad’s abandoned assets and most of the line was torn down in the early 1940s for the war effort.

These attempts to save the railroad were very important. While the decline of the railroad shows that railroads were no longer as important and influential to the development of Westchester communities as they were in the past, they were still a tool of influence. The attempts to save the railroad show that a new era of public and government influence on railroad transportation and in turn, community development had begun. This also marked a point where transportation was changed from being viewed as a private industry that influenced communities to a public service through government regulation or takeover that the general public wanted to influence for the benefit of their communities. People attempted to save the Westchester Railroad because the railroad, despite its failed state, could still have had future use in influencing and creating development in the communities along its route.

A Legal Battle and J. P. Morgan

The story of the Westchester Railroad contains two additional important indicators of the influence of the County railroad network and its use as a tool. These are the legal battle

⁶² Harwood p. 119-123

over who would build the railroad and the intervention of the powerful J. P. Morgan. The legal battle demonstrates the desire of multiple parties to use the Westchester Railroad as a tool of influence on the communities it would serve. The intervention of J. P. Morgan also shows how among powerful individuals views began to change regarding the railroad. Some individuals in the transportation business no longer saw the railroad as having as much potential as influencers and as a tool of influence.

The revival of the Westchester Railroad from its original failed idea is traced back to the New York and Port Chester Railroad. This Railroad was incorporated in April 1901 by William C. Gotshall after he received the support of some backers. Gotshall is an example of an individual who believed in the influence of the railroad and its potential as a tool of influence. He was an electrical engineer from St. Louis who was involved in building electric railroads across the Midwest. Gotshall planned on building a new railroad using the Westchester Railroad's proposed line paralleling the New Haven Railroad. This new railroad would terminate directly at a subway line that provided direct access to Manhattan.⁶³ Construction began, but all that was built was one bridge during the lines entire existence.⁶⁴ A rival group of promoters under the name New York City and Westchester Railroad had appeared around the same time period. The existence of these rival groups shows how different people saw the influence of a new Westchester Railroad and its potential as a tool.

The New York City and Westchester Railroad's sponsors had managed to dig up the corporate shell of the 1872 New York, Westchester & Boston Railroad in 1903. Unlike the Port

⁶³ Harwood p. 19

⁶⁴ Acara p. 9

Chester Railroad, the New York City and Westchester Railroad retained the original 1872 plan for a branch line to White Plains. This group had connections with New York City, including Tammany Hall, with the subway companies and influential figures such as William B. Parsons, a chief engineer of the subways and Andrew Freedman, an executive committee member of the Interborough Rapid Transit.⁶⁵ Such key groups and figures joining in was an example of how people viewed the railroad as a tool of influence as they could possibly gain from its construction. When William Gotshall learned of the New York City and Westchester Railroad accusations began to fly and a legal battle ensued between both companies.

Gotshall began the legal battle by suing the New York City and Westchester Railroad, in turn they countersued Gotshall. The case revolved around the argument that since the New York, Westchester and Boston Railroad laid dormant for 30 years, the charter was invalid. During proceedings in 1904, according to one New York Times article, the counsel for the Port Chester Railroad at one point outright stated “You have stolen or plans...You have stolen our route after Thirty years in which your company was never heard of.”⁶⁶ This was only one part of a case that would escalate to a statewide level as the City’s board of alderman, the state legislature and even both political parties got involved (Democrats for the Westchester Railroad and Republicans for the Port Chester Railroad) as accusations of bribery and corruption were thrown about.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Harwood p. 20

⁶⁶ “FIGHT ON WESTCHESTER CO.” *New York Times (1877-1922)*; Oct 13, 1904; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. p. 6. Accessed Oct. 31, 2019.

⁶⁷ Harwood p. 23

This court case, with the numerous parties involved shows how important the railroad was. The intervention and involvement of all these parties shows that there were numerous individuals and groups that all wanted to have a say in this new line that would impact the development of part of Westchester County. In addition the involvement of all these parties shows that many people at least thought the Westchester Railroad would be of large importance and a useful enough tool in some way to warrant their attention and jockey for influence. Each group backed a side hoping that their support would grant them influence in the future of development in the service area. Whether it was political parties, investors, bakers or developers, all of them wanted to be a part of this potential influencer and use it as a tool of influence.

While the railroads underwent the legal battle, both issued stocks and bonds, bought properties and started construction. In the case of the Westchester Railroad, construction started in the Bronx in 1905.⁶⁸ The railroad had to meet a construction cost minimum requirement of one million dollars in two years placed on it by New York City. This was a cost that combined with those of the legal proceedings would lead to consequences down the line. By the end of legal proceedings both the Westchester Railroad and Port Chester Railroad had spent vast amounts of money to the point of near death of both projects.⁶⁹ However the conflict had gotten the attention of some important people and in 1906. The New Haven Railroad under the railroad tycoon J. P. Morgan would intervene and save the line.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "WESTCHESTER RAILROAD STARTS CONSTRUCTION" *New York Times (1857-1922)*; Jun 4, 1905; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times p. 7. Accessed Oct. 31, 2019.

⁶⁹ Harwood p. 24

⁷⁰ Acara p. 11

J. P. Morgan is one of the prime examples of an individual who saw and utilized the railroad as a tool of influence. He was a 19th century banker from Hartford, Connecticut who had over time become very powerful within that industry, being the man behind J.P. Morgan and Company and was powerful enough to bailout the US Government in the Panic of 1893. In the 1880s he got involved with the railroads, conducted deals between them and reorganizing/rehabilitating numerous lines throughout the late 19th century.⁷¹ Due to his hometown connection to the New Haven Railroad, when he joined the board of the company in 1892 the company essentially became “his.” Whilst in charge of this railroad Morgan took control of all railroads in Southern New England and had his protégé, Charles Mellen buy up all transportation lines, including trolley and steamship ones that could be competition to the New Haven Railroad.⁷² The Westchester and Port Chester Railroads were part of this completion, being on a route parallel to the New Haven Railroad’s tracks into New York City. The completion of the buyout of these railroads is another example of how the railroad was an influencer and tool of influence. The owners of the New Haven Railroad understood how powerful and influential their railroad was. By effectively eliminating competition they ensured the continued influence and tool utilization potential of their own railroad. In some cases the acquisitions would have increased the New Haven Railroad’s influence.

With the spending of both the Westchester and Port Chester Railroads causing both to head towards bankruptcy, some of the sponsors went to Charles Mellen who had become President of the New Haven Railroad, knowing that he was buying up all the competition to the

⁷¹Wallenfeldt, Jeff. “J.P. Morgan: American Financier” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Sept. 5 2019. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/J-P-Morgan> Accessed Nov. 4 2019.

⁷² Harwood p. 14

New Haven line. Two of these backers, bankers named Oakleigh Thorne and Marsden J. Perry, had connections to J. P. Morgan and offered control of both railroads to Mellen. For Mellen and the New Haven Railroad it was obvious at this point that both the Westchester and Port Chester Railroads were failing ventures and posed no threat or interest to their operations. However, the Westchester Railroad's sponsors were able to persuade Mellen to bring up a proposal at a New Haven Railroad's board meeting. This was despite Mellen's belief that this would go nowhere. At the board meeting, it would be the word of J. P. Morgan that saved the railroad line when he motions for a committee to investigate and by stocks. J. P. Morgan likely saw a potential influence and possible tool utilization of the Westchester Railroad even though it was wildly regarded the ventures were doomed to failure. Due to his control of the railroad and power as a 19th century tycoon the rest of the board went along with Morgan's plan and the New Haven would intervene in the squabble of the Westchester Railroad.⁷³

In the fall of 1906, the New Haven Railroad would spend \$8.2 million buying all the stock and associated expenses and debts of both railroads. In 1907 another \$2.9 million was spent on acquisitions, among them property owned by the Astor family which was noticed by the press.⁷⁴ In total, including money spent during the Panic of 1907, the New Haven Railroad spent about \$11.2 million acquiring both the Westchester and Port Chester Railroads. Allowing the company to spend large amounts of money on what looked like two unimportant doomed projects shows that J. P. Morgan saw the potential influence of the railroad and its use as a tool of influence. The board of the New Haven Railroad acquiesced to J. P. Morgan when they

⁷³ Harwood p. 25-27

⁷⁴ "RAILROADS BUYING NEAR WEST FARMS" *New York Times (1877-1922)*; Jun 2, 1907; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. p. S5. Accessed Oct. 31, 2019. & Harwood p. 26

received and approved the report on these expenses. Charles Mellen however, sensed trouble and expressed doubt on his own copy of the report, foreshadowing the financial issues that would lead to the Westchester Railroad's downfall. Despite expectations that the acquisition meant the death of both railroad projects, the New Haven decided to go through with the construction of a line for reasons unknown.⁷⁵

Charles Mellen's reaction to the whole Westchester Railroad affair and its contrast to J. P. Morgan's blatant approval of the acquisition is one way to show how the story of the Westchester Railroad shows a change in attitude toward the railroad and its views as a tool of influence. J. P. Morgan was from a time when the railroad was dominant and key to the development of the entire country. He, as a railroad mogul was one of the men who influenced where and when entire communities developed as they responded to the building of lines. Mellen on the other hand viewed the acquisition as potential trouble and represented a change in how the railroad was seen as a way to influence the development of communities and as a tool to be utilized for its influence.

While powerful individuals like J. P. Morgan still utilized the railroad as a tool of influence, those in power in the transportation and planning industries would turn to look towards a different form of transportation: the automobile. The automobile was invented in the 19th century and it continued to gain popularity as a method of individual private transportation throughout the 20th century. The automobile would spur a building of road networks across the United States and some transportation planners looked toward the

⁷⁵ Harwood p. 27-29

automobile as the future. The New York City region was a key location for those planners as they built new infrastructure around this idea. The parkways and limited access roadways built across Westchester and other parts of New York would prove detrimental to the railroads within them.

Road Networks and Robert Moses

In the early 20th century the limited access road came to Westchester County. The popularization of the automobile led to the construction of new roads across Westchester. This new form of transportation would impact the influence of the railroad and the views of its potential utilization as a tool. The construction of limited access roads into New York City added competition to the railroads for commuters traveling there. This reduced ridership and dependence on the railroads, negatively impacting their potential as an influencer. In addition a powerful urban planner by the name of Robert Moses utilized the influence of the railroads in a way that negatively impacted them.

A major factor in the eventual death of the Westchester Railroad was the construction of the Hutchinson River Parkway (HRP). In 1928 the Hutchinson River Parkway was opened along the Hutchinson River, on a route that paralleled the White Plains branch of the Westchester Railroad.⁷⁶ This would take away traffic from the Westchester Railroad as people opted to use personal vehicles to travel as opposed to the railroad. This would lessen the potential of the railroad as an influencer and a tool of influencer. If people used personal

⁷⁶ Harwood p. 105

vehicles, they were not using the railroad. If the railroad was not being used as much, then it's potential as an influencer and tool to be influenced decreased.

The origins of this change date back to the early 1900s with the Bronx River Parkway. The parkway started out as a project to clean up the polluted Bronx River in 1907. This plan created a 25 mile long park on the Bronx River and the Bronx River Parkway was built as a limited access road along the route into New York City that opened in 1925.⁷⁷ Westchester would pioneer the limited access road in the form of the parkway. The railroad that had its influence negatively impacted by this new development was the Harlem Division. The Bronx River Parkway parallels the line south from White Plains. This definitely took away traffic and in turn influence and tool usage potential from the Harlem Division. A road network consisting of parkways including the Saw Mill River Parkway and the Hutchinson River Parkway was built in Westchester throughout the 1920s forward.⁷⁸ The Hutchinson, as previously mentioned was detrimental to the Westchester Railroad. The Saw Mill River Parkway was detrimental to the Putnam Division. The Saw Mill follows the Putnam Division for part of its path and this likely took away some of the passenger traffic that used the line. The parkways also represent a contrast to the railroad systems that served the County before. The parkway system was planned, built and operated by the County government through a parkways commission. Moreover this was a successful endeavor conducted by the County government.⁷⁹ This represents a shift in attitudes toward transportation as a public endeavor as opposed to a

⁷⁷ Troetel, Barbara. "Suburban Transportation Redefined" *Westchester: The American Suburb*, edited by Roger Panetta, Fordham University Press, 2006. p. 247-250

⁷⁸ Martin p.102-103 & 211.

⁷⁹ Michaelian, Edwin G. "Governing Westchester County" *Westchester County: The Past Hundred Years, 1883 – 1983*, edited by Marilyn E. Weigold PhD, Westchester County Historical Society, 1984. p. 159 & 162

private corporate like the railroads were. This would impact the utilization of railroads as a tool. It became a possible idea to have railroads be operated by the government and the public. This would allow for more direct influence on the railroad by the public and its ability to impact their own communities.

One man who was a key player in New York's transportation industry can be attributed to the changes in transportation within the New York City area, Westchester included: Robert Moses. Moses was an Urban Planner and is responsible for the shaping of much of the transportation network in the New York region in the 20th century.⁸⁰ Robert Moses was very powerful, having served in high positions within New York City and New York State governments from 1924 all the way up to the 1974.⁸¹ He was an avid proponent of limited access parkways and constructed many in New York City and Long Island. In Westchester County Moses built the Sprain Brook Parkway and the Cross County Parkway. Moses was also behind the plans for the expansion and widening of the Hutchinson River, the Taconic State, the Bronx River and Saw Mill River Parkways in Westchester County in the 1920s and 1930s. Together with these plans that also included plans for Long Island and New York City, Moses created a huge public roadway network that served the entire New York region.⁸² Robert Moses used his influence and urban planning experience to negatively impact the influence of the railroads in favor of his automobile centered transportation network. He also utilize the

⁸⁰ Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974. p. 5

⁸¹ Caro p. 9

⁸² Caro p. 896

railroads as a tool of influence in a way that negatively impacted them and to advance his own interests.

Moses' public roadway network allowed someone to travel anywhere down across Westchester and into Long Island with just a personal automobile. This took away from ridership on New York railroads, as the number of people commuting by rail to New York City every day fell from 263,000 to 239,000 between 1930 and 1950. At the same time the number of automobile commuters jumped from 38,050 to 118,400 an increase of 321 percent.⁸³ This is just one negative impact of Robert Moses that lessened the influence and potential as a tool of the Westchester railroads.

Several of Moses' projects had already been showing negative effects on the railroads of the region in the 1930s. The Susquehanna Railroad lost two-thirds of its passengers after the George Washington Bridge opened in the 1930s and the Triborough Bridge took passenger traffic away from both the New York Central and Long Island Railroad. In New York City Moses exacerbated the problems for rail networks as he ripped up trolley tracks and tore down the Third Avenue Railway to encourage usage of his roadways. This was despite several planner's opinions that the region's transportation network needed an equal balance of mass transit construction alongside all the roadways Moses had built.⁸⁴ Moses also refused to expand the rail network when his projects had the opportunity to do so. When Moses laid out the plans for the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge community groups refused to approve of the bridge unless it included a provision to allow for a railroad connection from Westchester down into Long Island

⁸³ Caro p. 917

⁸⁴ Caro p. 897–898.

to be able to be built on the bridge in the future. Failure to do this meant the only way to cross from Westchester and Connecticut into Long Island by land would be via automobile as no rail connection would exist without a new entirely separate bridge. Despite this requirement Moses, given his powerful control over New York City's planning, ignored the rail provision without any objection from the City itself.⁸⁵ This shows that Moses used his influence and utilization of the railroads, but did so in a way that was negatively impactful on the railroads. He gutted the influence of existing railroads with his road network and ignored the railroads potential influence when he could have used it to gain influence by using it as a tool. In addition the attempt by the community groups to get a railroad connection shows that despite what impact Moses was having on the railroad, the general public still saw the influence of the railroad and its potential as a useful tool of influence that could be utilized.

Robert Moses shows how attitudes had begun to change about the railroad and just how much they had lost in terms of influence in favor of the parkway and automobile. Moses had completely gutted existing rail networks in some cases and ignored or destroyed attempts to keep them running when it was possible. Even when communities tried to influence the railroad for the benefit of developing the future of their communities, Moses would prevent the impact of the railroad. On top of this, Robert Moses in fact used his position in the transportation world to cause the decline in influence of the railroad in order to advance his own version of the future of influential transportation.

⁸⁵ Caro p. 519

Robert Moses abused the situation of the railroads to advance his roadway projects. In the construction of the West Side Highway and Henry Hudson Parkway Moses used the New York Central System to get the money he needed to build the project. A 1927 agreement between the City and railroad for the construction of a railyard was used to get \$84 million worth of money and work done for the parkway by the railroad while the City only spent \$25 million. In addition Moses used the 1927 agreement to get the railroad to pay for part of the Henry Hudson Bridge. Moses also obtained several millions for his parkway project by granting loans to the struggling railroad that it would then have to pay back with interest.⁸⁶ Moses would also try to use the death of the Westchester Railroad to his advantage. When the railroad was shut down Moses proposed that a parkway be built on top of the railroad's right-of-way. This however was strongly opposed and rejected by the Westchester municipalities that held on to the hope the railroad could be revived in the future.⁸⁷ The railroad was used as a tool by Moses to try and advance his own road network and the Westchester municipalities still saw the potential influence of a continued Westchester Railroad. This shows that even with a decline in the importance and influence of the railroad in the eyes of powerful individuals like Robert Moses the general public and the government still saw it as a potential influencer and tool of influence in their communities.

Moses' attitudes and usage of the railroad represents an overarching change in the way railroads were viewed and utilized by influential individuals despite their importance and impact on development as seen by the general public. John D. Rockefeller Jr. represents this

⁸⁶ Caro p. 525-530

⁸⁷ Harwood p. 120

with his influence on the Putnam Division. In 1930 he wanted to expand the Rockefeller Estate in Pocantico Hills, onto land that the railroad ran through. Rockefeller did not like the smoke and ash from the trains and believed the line attracted undesirable people to his land. He used his influence and wealth to convince and pay the New York Central system to uproot and shift the entire railroad around Rockefeller's new land. In the process the entire village of East View, New York was bought by Rockefeller and given as the new route for the rail line. This new route reduced passenger and freight traffic along the entire line and thus was overall a detriment to the railroad.⁸⁸ Rockefeller's relocation of the railroad both shows a changed the view of the railroads influence and how influential the railroad still was. While Rockefeller had reduced the impact of the railroad, the relocation still required the destruction of an entire community along its route. This shows that the railroads still had influence and were a tool of influence despite increasing views to the contrary among some people.

Both Robert Moses and John D. Rockefeller Jr. show how there was a view that the railroads had declined in influence. For them the railroad was merely an obstacle to their own desires for which the decline could be used to advance their own interests. This is in contrast with the general public and the government which increasingly saw and utilized the railroad as a tool of influence to benefit their own communities. Together the railroad moved away from being private ventures under control of powerful individuals taking advantage of their influence. The railroad had instead become a tool utilized by the general public and government with a desire to benefit their own communities. The Westchester railroads while

⁸⁸ Gallo p. 28

negatively impacted by men like Robert Moses and Rockefeller Jr and hurt by the rise of the automobile but still had influence of their own and could still be utilized as a tool of influence. Their paths were still desirable for possible future development and they were still utilized as a method for commuters to utilize to travel.

Conclusion

The railroads of Westchester had started from private ventures in the 19th century. As they were built new communities developed along the rail lines where the trains stopped. People travel on the railroads and settled at these new communities after seeing the landscapes and development. These new communities were influenced by the railroads and would lead to founding and development of in turn became the suburbs of New York City. This shows the tremendous influence of the railroad in Westchester County by having turned it into the suburban community we know it as today. At the same time the railroads began to be utilized as a tool of influence by many individuals and groups. Real estate developers, politicians, railroad tycoons and commuters all saw the influence of the railroad and sought to utilize the railroad as a tool of influence on Westchester and its communities. Powerful individuals such as Cornelius Vanderbilt and J. P. Morgan exercised their influence on the railroads. They saw the railroad as a way to have influence and utilize that influence. As the age of powerful railroad tycoons and captains of industry ended it would be the general public and the government that would use the railroad as a tool of influence in Westchester as the railroads entered a decline. The railroad was used as commuter transportation and as a way to attempt to challenge the powerful individuals that previously utilized them as a tool.

While the railroads were successful they were accompanied by other failed ventures attempted by those who saw the railroad as an influencer and a tool to utilize for influence. They failed due to varying factors such as financial failure or competition in face of new transport methods. The creation of the automobile and Westchester's parkway system as well as the influence of Robert Moses would hurt the railroads and their overall influence. However, the railroads decline in influence did not mean they were no longer important. Commuters and communities still utilized the railroad as a tool of influence in Westchester even as the automobile became more prominent.

Across America, what is known as "car culture" developed in the ensuing decades, but Westchester commuters still utilized the rail network to commute and move around the County. The County lost the Westchester Railroad in 1939 and would lose the Putnam Railroad in the 50s and 60s. Three of its lines, the Hudson, Harlem and New Haven survived and continue to serve millions of commuters every year. They would survive a national decline of passenger transport as well as when forced railroad consolidations caused the big railroads to file for bankruptcy in the coming decades. They survived because the communities that grew as a result of those lines were influenced by them and commuters that relied on them saw their usefulness as a tool of influence. The people rallied and lobbied their influence on the lines for their continued existence while passenger rails declined nationwide and companies declared bankruptcy. Because the commuting public and their communities still saw the potential influence of the railroad and utilized it they maintained control of an influencer on their community had kept it alive. The railroads survive as the Metro-North Railroad under a government supervised transit agency.

Today the railroads still influence the communities they travel through and the railroads are utilized by those communities. This has taken the form of Municipalities planning developments of their transit districts, which is the area in the immediate vicinity of the train station of that community. The communities do this because they know how important the railroad is as an influence to their development. By understanding this and developing the transit districts they are also utilizing the influence of the railroad to benefit their community. This influence is also continuing to impact the development and history of Westchester. The railroads are now bringing in a new kind of commuter who lives in New York City and travels to work in the community hubs and transit districts that had originally developed near the railroad stations in Westchester County back in the 19th century. These “reverse commuters” as they are called show how the railroads still influence Westchester and how the Westchester communities continue to utilize the influence of the railroad for their own benefit.

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