

Rail work to require Ben Franklin Bridge restrictions

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CAMDEN, N.J. — People who commute between southern New Jersey and Philadelphia are in for a rough summer.

Work on the tracks and electrical systems on the PATCO Speedline will mean a less frequent schedule for the train line used by 40,000 per day and closed car lanes on the Ben Franklin Bridge, which carries trains — and 100,000 cars daily — over the Delaware River.

“I have no choice but to catch the train because the parking is horrible and expensive over there,” Juanita King, who works as a scheduler at Philadelphia’s Pennsylvania Hospital, said before she hopped on her train recently at Camden’s Ferry Avenue Station, a popular place for park-and-ride customers from Camden and Gloucester counties.

A round-trip ride from there is \$4.50 a day and most of the parking is free.

If King drives to work from southern New Jersey, she’d pay a \$5 bridge toll and parking expenses starting at \$9 — if she could arrive in time for the early-bird rate.

The Delaware River Port Authority, which operates PATCO and four bridges, is replacing the tracks and ties on the train line for the first time since the 1980s and electrical systems that in some spots date to 1935.

Authority CEO John Hanson, who has attended forums for commuters and greeted them at train stations, was out the other morning handing



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When one of the two sets of PATCO train tracks over the Ben Franklin Bridge between Philadelphia and Camden, N.J., are closed for two months to be replaced, riders and drivers can expect problems.

information cards to drivers at the toll lanes of the bridge.

He is encouraging commuters to telecommute, carpool or use other bridges while construction lasts. And if none of those solutions work for them, they’ll need to leave early or prepare for delays.

He said the \$103 million PATCO overhaul is due and there is no way to do it without inconvenience.

Starting June 3, the train

tracks on the south side of the bridge will be closed. During that time, they will be taken out and then rebuilt. When that project is over, the same will be done on the north tracks. Altogether, the track replacement will take about four months.

While the track work is going on, one of the seven traffic lanes over the bridge will be closed at rush hours; two lanes will be closed at

other times.

After the tracks are rebuilt, the electrical systems will be replaced. That will take almost two more years and will sometimes cause delays.

Work on the line began in March, starting Friday afternoons and lasting through the weekend.

Ed Bogaard, another University of Pennsylvania Hospitals scheduler, said he’s on probation at work for show-

ing up late because of train delays.

But Judi Burrell, a legal secretary, said her bosses know about the delays and are being flexible. Still, she’s trying to figure out if there’s a bus that would be a better option for her for the next few months.

But the news isn’t all bad: About the same time the tracks are rebuilt, all PATCO train cars will be refurbished.