



thebellcurve

CP's Quality-o-Life-o-Meter

Garrett Reid back in court after trace amounts of morphine show up in drug test. "Oh, now morphine's illegal, too?" says Garrett. "Fuck me. Next you'll tell me it's illegal to crush up oxy's, mix 'em with suppositories and horse tranquilizers, melt it all in a spoon and shoot it up my dick hole. Gawd." **Even**

Taxi Workers Alliance strikes in protest of flawed GPS system. "Plus we could use the day off," says one driver. "I'd forgotten what it was like to eat at a table or pee in a toilet." **Even**

UPenn Dean of Admissions Lee Stetson, a 30-year veteran, resigns abruptly without explaining why. Maybe he just got tired of some legacy in a gray sweatshirt calling him "guy." **Even**

UPenn and Brandywine Realty Trust announce plans for Cira Centre South, a multi-skyscraper residential, commercial and hotel complex on 30th Street. West Philly's more fun when you sleep 40 stories above it. **Plus 1**

Successful Youth Violence Reduction Partnership loses vital state funding. Remember those pictures from the Saigon airlift? Get those Cira Centre South towers up fast! **Minus 5**

Former Independence Seaport Museum head John Carter, who defrauded the institution out of more than \$1 million, will be sentenced Oct. 22. To a Viking funeral. **Plus 1**

Former Jersey Gov. Jim McGreevey asks critics of embattled Idaho Sen. Larry Craig to "fill their hearts with compassion and equanimity." And fill their cabinets with Israeli boy toys. **Plus 1**

Local indie film *explicit ills.* will star Rosario Dawson, Paul Dano and The Roots' Black Thought in a drama about "the effects of drugs and poverty." So, who's playing Malik B? **Plus 1**

M. Night Shyamalan stages bloody death scene for new film on 69th Street in Overbrook Farms. Or *did* he? Yes. But *did* he really? Pretty sure. Are you? Yep. **Plus 1**

Total Pluses: 5

Total Minuses: -5

This Week's Total: 0

Last Week's Total: -12

news

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HOW THEY'LL WIN, P. 18

TRANSPORTATION

Train Wreck

Rising costs, contractor disputes and minority-inclusion questions hound EI project.

By Phillip Tanfield

SEPTA calls its ongoing Market Street Elevated Reconstruction Project "the most important transit project in the U.S." But lately, it could also be deemed an ever-deepening money pit as the transit agency has pushed back completion dates and continued working with companies it has publicly blamed for some of the delays.

The project was originally estimated to cost \$420 million. Now, as a two-week shutdown recently ended, that figure has nearly doubled, to \$710 million. And originally scheduled for a November 2007 end date, they now expect the project will reach "substantial completion" in December 2008.

"Overall, the project has just been a really big mess," says Michael Nutter, the Democratic candidate for mayor who served as that district's councilman. "There are always things that can be done better. However, with this project, I don't know much of anything that can be done worse."

SEPTA blames an evolving vision of what the line should ultimately look like, and the unpredictable nature of such projects.

"If you look historically at projects that involve rebuilding something that already exists, when you're doing the cost estimates, you can pretty well figure what it's going to cost to build from scratch," says spokesman Richard Maloney. "But when you're tearing down an old structure, you can't always predict what problems you're going to encounter."

That might come as news to West Philly residents who've seen businesses shuttered, streets sullied and their commutes turned nightmarish. "SEPTA did not fully explain the reasons for the delays or cost overruns," Nutter says. "I know that one of the contracts was suspended, and that caused some pretty significant delays. It is always difficult to get

complete explanations from SEPTA."

The contract that Nutter referenced involves contractor PKF Mark III, which had a \$74 million contract to work on the Cobbs Creek section of the line. SEPTA was not satisfied with their work, and after SEPTA ordered them to stop the work, the companies engaged in lengthy litigation, which recently ended in settlement.

(PKF Mark president Pete Getchell has stated before that, "SEPTA has managed this project so badly that we had no other choice" than to sue to get out of the contract. The company's 2004 suit stated "that SEPTA breached its contract on the Cobbs Creek portion of the project, causing significant delays and overruns.")

"They've got an affirmative action program, but apparently it's all white."

big engineering firm, and one that's doing some very good work," he says, noting that there have been no problems with them other than "that one section not getting done right."

For his part, Getchell says, "all our issues with SEPTA have been resolved and we're working on our current contract."

Apart from the widening of the project's scope, the rising prices of fuel, concrete and steel are also regularly cited as problems. Making matters worse is a growing

concern about minority contracting.

On its project Web site, SEPTA says it aims to provide business and work to local and minority contractors and workers. "SEPTA set the work-hour goal for minorities to 26.4

percent and established a 10 percent voluntary work-hour goal for residents in the construction area," as well as a goal for 6.9 percent of work hours to be completed by females. SEPTA recently cited 25.9 percent minority work-hour fulfillment, 7.3 percent local participation, and 1.3 percent female participation.

"I always thought their goal numbers were a little low anyway," Nutter says. "I have always been concerned with SEPTA's minority, female and disadvantaged business participation rates."

Pat Gillespie, president of the Philadelphia Building Trades Council, AFL-CIO, was also skeptical of the inclusion numbers, singling out contractors like PKF Mark III.

"They've got an affirmative action program, but apparently it's all white," says Gillespie. When PKF Mark III rehabilitated the Route 15 trolley, "You'd go down Girard Avenue and you'd see five or six white guys on jackhammers. Now maybe their African-American employees were working somewhere else that day, but when you go to SEPTA and complain

about a lack of inclusion, they give you a blank stare: 'What do you want me to do about it?'"

Getchell declined to respond to the inclusion comments, saying only, "You'll have to ask Pat what he really means by that."

Meanwhile, weekend EI shutdowns will continue every weekend through November.

(editorial@citypaper.net)



THE BIG PIG: Originally estimated at \$420 million, SEPTA's EI project has nearly doubled in cost.

Yet today, PKF Mark III continues to work on the EI under a second contract: an \$89 million arrangement to rebuild the elevated structure along Market Street. Though many have questioned the wisdom of continuing such a relationship, Maloney defends it, saying that it's a reputable company that hasn't botched anything beyond Cobbs Creek.

"They've been on the project all along; it's a