

PATCO transit preparing for DNC, Gaga

Carol Comegno, @CarolComegno 4:52 p.m. EDT July 20, 2016



CAMDEN - The PATCO Hi-Speedline will operate extra train service next week for the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia and for a DNC-sponsored concert in Camden featuring Lady Gaga and Lenny Kravitz, transit officials announced Wednesday.

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and former president Bill Clinton are expected to attend the concert along with Vice President Joe Biden and other national political figures.

The Delaware River Port Authority, which owns and operates the PATCO rapid transit line, also announced heightened security for PATCO service between Lindenwold in South Jersey and Philadelphia as well as for its four bistate DRPA bridges into the convention city.

Unlike the visit by Pope Francis last year, no New Jersey roads will be closed and all bridges in Philadelphia will be open. However, on Interstate 95 through Philadelphia, trucks will be banned from Saturday through Thursday night when the convention ends.

PATCO General Manager John Rink told DRPA commissioners Wednesday that the number of cars per train during non-rush hour service next week will be increased from two to six. Longer trains also will be in service before and after the 1 p.m. concert Thursday at the BB&T Center on the Camden Waterfront. He also said there is a possibility that more frequent service will operate as well and that the ferry also will be running for the concert.

"I don't think we will see a huge uptick in traffic as we did for the pope. Most conventioners will fly to Philadelphia and all of them are staying on the Pennsylvania side of the river, but there likely will be some spectators and protesters crossing the river," DRPA CEO John Hanson said.

Rink also reported PATCO and the DRPA participated in a major security exercise June 23 sponsored by the federal Transportation Security Administration of the Department of Homeland Security as a practice scenario in advance of the DNC.

He said the exercise involved many transportation and enforcement partners, including local and state police, SEPTA transit service in Philadelphia, New Jersey Transit, Amtrak, Conrail, the Coast Guard and Delaware Area Rapid Transit. He said the exercise culminated in an active shooter and improvised explosive device on multiple transit systems in the region.

"The initial results were extremely positive as this region works well together on a routine basis," Rink said.

The BB&T Center will host the Camden Rising concert, an invitation-only event, Thursday afternoon for dignitaries and invited guests before Clinton formally accepts the Democratic nomination to run for president that night.

In other business Wednesday, the DRPA and PATCO accepted a top award from the TSA.

TSA mass transit and passenger rail manager Christopher McKay presented PATCO with what he called the gold standard award for security — the Baseline Assessment Award.

"This is the highest award we give for transportation security enhancements in awareness and security response. It demonstrates your commitment and you should be extremely proud of your organization ... and your police chief," he said.

He said PATCO scored 96 percent in the review and that it was one of only 13 transit organizations nationally to receive the award.

"This award is evidence of our stewardship of the PATCO line with which we are entrusted," Hanson said. "We are paying careful attention to security for the DNC event as we did during the pope's visit and as we do every day,"

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