

New Jersey Railroad Bergen Cut

Historic District

The New Jersey Railroad Bergen Cut Historic District stretches along the former New Jersey Railroad right-of-way, beginning at the Hackensack River, passing through Bergen Hill, and ending just west of the Hudson River waterfront, in Jersey City. This historic district includes the Bergen Cut and a number of bridges and railroad embankments along its almost 2.7-mile length.

At the center of the historic district is the Bergen Cut, marked by a deep crevasse “cut” through Bergen Hill. Built between 1832 and 1838, the Bergen Cut was part of the New Jersey Railroad’s initiative to gain the most direct route possible for the delivery of products to and from New York City. At the time, multiple companies were jockeying for control of rail transportation and freight traffic in New Jersey. For the New Jersey Railroad, Bergen Hill stood as a formidable barrier between the interior rail networks of northern New Jersey and the prime real estate of the Jersey City Waterfront, directly across the Hudson River from Manhattan.

Excavations for the Bergen Cut followed a former streambed, resulting in a winding path for the rail line. The resulting cut was between 20 and 40 feet deep. When completed, it was the first rail route opened through Bergen Hill and was considered an engineering marvel. The Bergen Cut provided the only passage through Bergen Hill for more than 20 years until the completion of the Erie Tunnel in 1861.

The Bergen Cut was widened and straightened beginning in the late 1870s. Today it remains in use by the Port Authority Trans-Hudson Corporation (PATH).



Top left: In 1856 a blizzard marooned a train in the Bergen Cut. An account of the snowstorm described: “It was in vain that the engineer, mounted on his iron horse, attempted to make headway.” The passengers “ingloriously wended their way on foot to the terminus of the road — Jersey City” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, January 26, 1856. **Top right:** 1863 Stereograph view of the Bergen Cut. Photographer: William Mead; *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Background image: The Bergen Cut, near present-day Journal Square Station in the early twentieth century, when it was controlled by the Pennsylvania Railroad. *Courtesy of the New Jersey State Library.*

Wittpenn Bridge Replacement Project

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) is in the process of replacing the historic 1930 Wittpenn Bridge with a new vertical lift structure. In 2019, the NJDOT executed an Amended Memorandum of Agreement to mitigate the effects of replacing the Wittpenn Bridge, which included multiple forms of public outreach. This document was produced as part of these public outreach efforts. More information on the Wittpenn Bridge replacement project can be found at <https://www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/roads/rt7wittpenn/>.