

4-30-03

## McGreevey sets first spike in \$70M ship-to-rail project

BY RON MARSICO  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

It wasn't quite as historic as the driving of a gold spike to mark the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

But Gov. James E. McGreevey tapped the first silver spike yesterday for a \$70 million upgrade of the ship-to-rail facility at the marine terminal in Elizabeth.

Joking that he was no longshoreman after missing the spike a couple of times, McGreevey touted a project that within four years will handle up to 1 million cargo containers a year, up from 228,000 last year.

"Our administration is committed to ensuring the vitality of this port," McGreevey said against a backdrop of containers and unloading equipment.

State Department of Transportation Commissioner Jack Lettiere, meanwhile, said another \$80 million will be used to make various off-site rail freight improvements.

Currently, 87 percent of containers leave Port Elizabeth on trucks, with just 13 percent on rail cars. With the upgrades, the rail figure

will grow to 25 percent.

Officials said that shipping by rail will remove thousands of trucks from area roads. "It makes sense for the environment," Lettiere said. "It makes sense for New Jersey drivers because it will mean less trucks on our highways."

The project includes creating expanded rail terminals at the Maher and APM facilities and one mile of track to connect with freight rail lines to points along the East Coast and in the Midwest. The first phase of the project is expected to open in early 2004, with the second phase due to be completed in late 2005.

"This will be the most efficient

transportation system of its kind in the nation," said Brian Maher, president of Maher Terminals Inc.

The project is being funded by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates the marine terminals in Elizabeth and Newark.

McGreevey said investment in the region's ports will continue in the coming years — amounting to \$4.4 billion in total outlays — despite the state's dire fiscal condition.

"The port is creating jobs, stim-

ulating the regional economy," said McGreevey, noting container cargo at the Port of New York and New Jersey jumped 13 percent last year.

The growth of rail freight at the facility has grown exponentially, from just 20 containers a month back in 1989, said Vincent Aullis, an official with the International Longshoreman's Association Local 1235.

Anthony Coscia, chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, added, "It's just smart government, working in a very efficient way."