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AirTrain a boon, not a boondoggle

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AirTrain ridership jumped again in 2006 to an all-time high, according to statistics released by the Port Authority yesterday.

Ridership on AirTrain JFK jumped 15 percent last year to

nearly 4 million riders while AirTrain Newark saw an 8-percent increase to 1.5 million riders.

"Thirteen percent of JFK's passengers now use AirTrain's free or paid service to access passenger terminals, while AirTrain Newark is the primary ground transportation for 10

percent of Newark passengers," said Port Authority Chairman Anthony Coscia.

AirTrain JFK, which opened in 2003, is a \$1.9-billion elevated rail that ferries travelers between Jamaica, Howard Beach and the airport for \$5 each way.

The positive numbers are a stark rebuke to early critics

who feared the AirTrain would be an expensive boondoggle. AirTrain JFK loses about \$30 million each year, but the Port Authority said it was never built to be a moneymaker.

AirTrain Newark opened in 2001 and connects Newark Liberty International Airport to Amtrak and NJ Transit.