



August 24, 2018

To: Honorable Phil Murphy, Governor
Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, Transportation Commissioner
Kevin S. Corbett, NJ Transit Executive Director
NJ Transit Board of Directors

On behalf of mayors representing communities and train stations served by the Morris and Essex Line, we urge immediate action to improve the experience of tens of thousands of NJ Transit customers, and our constituents. Our neighbors are subject to intolerable conditions this summer which have, for many, surpassed what they dealt with during the “2017 Summer of Hell”.

We are grateful for the administration and agency’s commitment to restoring the nation's second-largest commuter railroad to its prominence as a reliable, safe, and cost-effective transit operation. We all benefit from those investments and the resulting rise in property values as our towns are positioned as unique destinations for those reliant on mass transit instead of individual cars. We know you share our deep concern both for short-term disruptions – implementation of Positive Train Control (“PTC”) and engineer shortages; and long-term challenges – ensuring the necessary capital funding is in place, with support from the federal government, to expand operations through The Gateway Program.

We also applaud the decision to explore waiving residency requirements to expedite hiring more engineers immediately. Like you, we regret the situation has escalated to a point where a shortage of skilled employees has grave impacts on commuters and their families.

However, we are in a state of emergency which requires swift and fundamental, not incremental, change at NJ Transit. Understanding the complexity of these challenges, we offer measures for consideration that can, and should, be taken immediately to make the commute for 150,000 riders more tolerable during this time of transition and improvement. Our recommendations are built from the shared learnings earned during the 2017 upheaval and based on an expected commitment to customer service and satisfaction that provide a level of predictability and relief.

- **Forward-Thinking Communications:** Both Governor Murphy and Mr. Corbett committed to a “war-room” mentality where train movements are actively monitored and social media updates provided in an emergency operations center. In the two weeks since this announcement, passengers are receiving more frequent updates and are told why their trains are being cancelled; such transparency is an important step in building greater trust with the public. However, transparency in the moment means passengers receive delay or cancellation notices while they’re at the station leaving them little to no room to make alternative plans. This starts a cascade with vast negative impacts on business dealings

and family responsibilities – most notably, childcare. The problems are compounded then as the feverish rush to find an alternative route creates a public safety risk for riders as they desperately move to board the next train, which is often overcrowded. Additionally, riders indicate the NJ Transit “Alerts and Advisories” are highly unreliable as not all cancellations are captured and there are considerable delays updating the “Departure Vision” page rendering it a tool with questionable usability and counters any assist in trip planning. All communication tools including web, applications, push notifications, social media, and station announcements must have a consistent and concurrent message. As one commuter said, “my train is listed as CANCELLED on Departure Vision but then a different train is redirected to stop at my station [...] this isn’t communicated well and we’re either guessing or asking the crew and sometimes they know and sometimes they don’t.”

- **Additional Buses and Hudson River Ferries:** Allocate necessary resources towards alternative means of transportation unrelated to rail operations. The addition of bus and ferry options would not be impacted by the same forces causing repeated train delays and cancellations. The deployment of these services in 2017, while not perfect, provided a valuable and relationship-building respite for commuters.
- **Cross-Honoring:** In lieu of discounts or refunds, implement a cross-honoring agreement with the PATH, ferries, and bus service. This agreement was successfully put into place during last year’s Amtrak repairs. The added financial cost of ongoing service disruptions for the foreseeable future should not be borne by riders.
- **Partnerships with Local Officials:** As elected officials, we are uniquely positioned as community conduits to disseminate accurate information and assist our communities when there are disruptions in service; but we need to know what’s going on. The PTC project, coupled with the uncertainty caused by insufficient staffing at NJ Transit, puts us all in a precarious position without a clear timeline. Re-establishing routine conference calls with elected officials, to provide relevant and timely information going forward, makes us your partners on the ground and goes a long way to alleviating negativity and pent-up frustration. At this critical juncture, it would be wise for NJ Transit employees, who serve as government relations liaisons to our communities, to begin coordinating public meetings so that our commuters can hear directly from the source and be able to ask questions – ones’ local officials are not equipped to answer at this time.
- **Accountability and Performance Monitoring:** NJ Transit, its management and board, must be held accountable and performance metrics made publicly available. The agency has very ambitious goals and, collectively, we need metrics (such as on-time performance) to know if various actions and work-plans are having the intended positive impacts on riders. The status of ongoing capital construction projects and major repairs should also be readily available to the public. The time for discussing prior failures and prior administrations has passed, we need benchmarks to hold new leadership accountable.

Beyond the short-term requests listed in the points above, we offer the following on long-term measures for the administration and NJ Transit to consider.

- **The Gateway Program:** Please continue your efforts to fight for and sufficiently fund every aspect of The Gateway Program. We applaud the Gateway Program Development Corporation - the strong partnerships they have built and the transparency in which they operate. It should come as no surprise that as communities that serve as hosts for extensive rail operations and have absorbed the majority of economic growth for the state, we are 100% supportive of all phases of this project but are concerned about the priority rating from the Federal Transit Administration and lack of funding. We remain committed as partners and advocates in advancing this project and supporting policy makers, both

statewide and nationally, who share our support for the most important and urgent infrastructure program throughout the country.

- **Regionalization of Ferry System:** Ferry service is a critical, yet underutilized mass transit option that is powered to insulate the transportation system in the event of a catastrophic incident such as a shut-down of one of the current tunnels operating under the Hudson River. Currently, ferry operations, including maintenance and repair, are concentrated in the northern portion of Hudson County. Prudence suggests relocating ferry maintenance and operations to areas (a) where such uses are already permitted and/or may be more appropriate and useful from a mass transit standpoint and (b) in closer proximity to those areas that are actively developing ferry operations as part of their mass transit infrastructure. Specifically, ferry operations, as part of mass transit infrastructure, are being built out in South Amboy, Carteret and Bayonne, creating valuable connection points for motor vehicle and bus commuters from Central Jersey to take advantage of this mass transportation option. This regional trend will only continue to grow and long-range decisions should include such previously untapped resources.

In closing, we all received the August 23rd communication announcing NJ Transit’s accommodations for customers serviced by the Atlantic City Rail Line (ACRL) due to customer feedback received as a part of the “We Are Listening” forums held by the agency. We hope that you will “listen” to us as well - the elected representatives who are advocating on behalf of customers on the M&E line.

We remain committed to working with the administration and NJ Transit on how we can collectively restore our transit operations to national prominence and eagerly look forward to your timely response.

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