

Legislative Budget Hearings Testimony

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- Good morning Chairwoman Pintor Marin, Vice-Chair Burr-Zi-Chell-E (Burzichelli), ranking member DiMaio, and members of the Committee.
- It is my privilege to appear before you today as NJ TRANSIT's executive director – and it is my honor to serve Governor Phil Murphy -- a Governor who on Day One publically recognized the challenges confronting our agency and who is providing the support and resources we need to rebuild.
- Governor Murphy is providing NJ TRANSIT a 172 percent increase in state appropriation – And **without** a fare hike in FY19.
- Now, it is our job to put that money to work and deliver safe, reliable and convenient rail, bus, light rail and Access Link paratransit trips for our customers, your constituents.
- In a moment, I will discuss how the Governor's proposed budget will benefit our customers, from the additional staff we will bring on for bus, rail and other departments, to enhance scheduling, provide more timely media updates and communication with the public, and improve service reliability.
- I will also tell you about our accelerating installation of Positive Train Control, PTC, the federally-mandated safety system that is a top priority for NJ TRANSIT.
- But first, as well as thanking the Governor, and the Acting Commissioner, I want to thank you, our Legislators, for your support and your interest as we work to restore transit.
- And most of all, I want to thank our customers.
- I feel their pain. I've lived it as a 25-year daily rider of the Northeast Corridor and Morris & Essex Lines – including during last year's "Summer of Hell."
- I've been on the late trains, and the cancelled trains, and on the trains without announcements explaining why we weren't moving.

- And I want you and NJ TRANSIT's customers to know that we are laser focused on turning this agency around.
- I wish I could say that the fixes will be quick and easy, but they won't. With the support of the Governor, and of you and your colleagues in the Legislature, and of our customers, we will succeed.
- In fact, we've already begun.
- One of the legacies of the chronic neglect and underfunding of NJ TRANSIT over the previous eight years is a shortage of staff in critical positions, in jobs that directly affect the customer experience.
- In rail, experienced engineers have been lost to retirement or to other railroads.
- Being a locomotive engineer is a great job, but it's also a challenging one. It takes two years of rigorous training before a candidate is ready.
- So it's vital that we hire and train – and graduate – more engineers. We are on a path to doing that.
- We have increased the number of engineer training classes we are offering per year from two to three or more. And we have consulted with other railroads and experts to make sure our recruiting and training are bringing in the best and the brightest, maximizing the chances for success.
- Thanks to Governor Murphy's proposed budget, we also are able to restore staffing levels for a range of other positions that are critical to the proper operation of the nation's third largest transit system.
- For example, adding positions in Human Resources and Training will give us the ability to accelerate the hiring process and expand training classes for not only engineers, but also conductors and bus operators and other employees.
- Rail has gotten a lot of attention, and rightly so. But more than half of the 900,000-plus trips made every work day on NJ TRANSIT are on bus – both intrastate and interstate to New York and Philadelphia.
- Being a bus operator is also a great job – and as the Governor emphasized recently when he visited our bus maintenance facility in Newark – NJ TRANSIT is hiring.

- To turbocharge the process of bringing in new employees, we are doing the equivalent of speed dating -- speed hiring.
- Applicants are invited to come, in large numbers, and in one session are interviewed, given initial employment tests, and -- if they already have a commercial driver's license -- can even be given a conditional job offer on the spot.
- We held a bus operator speed hiring event last Wednesday at our General Office Building in Maplewood. We also regularly participate in job fairs and other outreach at Fort Dix and other locations, most recently on April 11th in Camden, so we can draw upon the talents of our veterans.
- We have two more speed hiring events coming up at Bergen Community College: on May 1st and May 24th -- both scheduled to begin at 5:30 p.m. We are currently in the planning process for future events across the state, and we will keep you apprised.
- Overall, in FY19 we will be adding 40 additional operator positions in bus. And we're actively hiring for mechanics and maintenance and service personnel, too.
- There are other improvements we're going to make that will enhance the customer experience for bus travelers.
- For the first time in a decade, money will be available for targeted relief of overcrowding on bus routes with the fastest growing ridership. This includes routes on the River Road corridor in Bergen County, serving Fort Lee, Cliffside Park and other communities, as well as some routes in Union and Hudson counties.
- The funding will also be used to improve on-time performance (OTP) of key routes in North and South Jersey, including routes serving Paterson, Bridgeton, Hamilton and Princeton. We'll do that by analyzing and adjusting running times, along with adding some additional buses where needed.
- The additional resources also allow us to mitigate effects of road construction and detours, for example, for the upcoming major Route 495 construction project near the Lincoln Tunnel.
- The Governor's budget and renewed fiscal stability is putting NJ TRANSIT back on track in a very real way. It's helping NJ TRANSIT deliver the service our customers deserve.

- Now let's turn to the 900-pound technical gorilla in the room: positive train control – PTC.
- Years of neglect and status quo have let NJ TRANSIT get behind in its federal mandate to install PTC. This, unfortunately, is a sad reality that has not only affected NJ TRANSIT, but many other railroads.
- The Federal Railroad Administration last week sent letters of concern to railroads around the country and in our region.
- The FRA is concerned that we, Metro North, the Long Island Rail Road, and many others, may not be able to make the end of year deadline.
- Two months ago, we immediately conducted a comprehensive review of our program. It was disturbing.
- What we found caused us to immediately pick up the phone to the FRA in Washington, and we began a series of productive meetings and conversations on how NJ TRANSIT can meet the Federal CFR requirements for this vital safety program.
- Since then, we've met a number of times, and our partnership has become more collaborative.
- We both have the same overriding goal: the safety of **all** rail passengers.
- With the help of our Board Chairwoman, the Acting Commissioner, we have sternly warned our contractor that they **must** deliver a system that meets federal safety requirements.
- Since then, the contractor has expanded to operate two equipment installation facilities, with multiple work shifts, in their efforts to meet the required Federal deadline.
- Also, recently we successfully began the initial field testing of PTC functionality on a six-mile stretch of the Morris & Essex Line between Morristown and Denville.
- NJ TRANSIT continues to meet regularly and to work closely with the FRA on every aspect of this project. The FRA monitors our progress, advises on our plans, and supervises major test operations.

- Our partnership with the FRA has been invaluable as we both work toward our common goal of ensuring proper installation of this important technology.
- We also are coordinating with Amtrak, Conrail, Norfolk Southern and short line freight railroads. All of us use some of the same sections of track – and all of our PTC systems must integrate seamlessly with each other.
- We are committed to continuing our partnership with the FRA to ensure that we are operating within the FRA's requirements.
- Now let me turn to some of our other major capital initiatives.
- As you know, NJ TRANSIT currently has three major light rail expansion projects on our to-do list.
- The Northern Branch extension of the Hudson Bergen Light Rail will bring the HBLR approximately 10 miles from its current terminus in North Bergen to Englewood, in Bergen County.
- We are working with the Federal Transit Administration to finalize the environmental impact statement for that project, and the goal is to have that issued later this year. Preliminary engineering on the Northern Branch will then follow.
- In Hudson County, the Route 440 extension of the HBLR from the West Side station in Jersey City to a new redevelopment site on the Hackensack River waterfront already has its environmental approval. We have begun preliminary engineering, which will take until about the end of 2019.
- And in South Jersey, we continue to fund the work of the Delaware River Port Authority to progress the environmental review for a new light rail line from Camden to Glassboro. That environmental work is expected to be finished in early 2019.
- Identifying the proper mix of funding, federal and state, will be the key to moving all these projects forward into construction in the next few years.
- We also continue to advance our extensive agenda of resiliency projects.
- These projects will protect our transit system in the face of extreme weather, power blackouts or other emergencies, and include the \$500 million replacement of the Raritan River Bridge on the North Jersey Coast Line, as well as a number of essential electrical substations.

- NJ TRANSIT is spending nearly \$150 million on essential state of good repair work in the coming fiscal year, including replacing track, rehabilitating bridges and stations, and purchasing 182 new cruiser buses.
- I want to conclude with these thoughts. While we have many initiatives underway to address our issues, we need to do more ---- and we will.
- But, perhaps the most important message for you today is that our Governor has made a commitment to the improvement of NJ TRANSIT and to restoring the luster it once had as a national leader.
- And, I know I speak for everyone at NJ TRANSIT, from the rail engineers and bus operators to the front line employees in customer service and at stations, to the architects, civil engineers, planners, CPAs, administrative assistants and clerks; we all share the same goal – making good on our commitment to provide the best service we can for the customers and communities we serve.
- We know that our problems took years to make and few will be solved overnight. But, with the support of Governor Murphy, the help of this Legislature and the patience of our customers, we will get this job done.
- Chairwoman Pintor Marin, Committee members, thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.
- Thank you.