Legislative Budget Hearings Testimony
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• Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

• It is my honor to appear before you today as NJ TRANSIT's interim executive director, on behalf of an agency that provides nearly 950,000 rail, bus, light rail and Access Link trips every work day -- safely, efficiently and with a strong commitment to improving the travel experience for our customers, your constituents.

• Although I've been at NJ TRANSIT for nearly 32 years, I've been serving as interim executive director for only a little more than three months. It has been a personally and professionally fulfilling time to lead the agency I love. And we have made significant progress over the past year.

• In the last few months, NJ TRANSIT has reached fair and reasonable labor agreements with our bus and rail employees, ensuring continued safe and convenient service for our customers and the state.

• We have taken important steps to advance the project to build new rail tunnels under the Hudson River. These new tunnels will be critical for the quality of life of our customers, and for the economy of New Jersey, New York and the region.

• We continue listening to our customers and focusing on providing them with the services they tell us are important to their lives. That includes added value amenities, from the expansion of our very popular MyTix feature within the NJ TRANSIT app, which allows customers to purchase their tickets using their cell
phones, to the installation of cell phone charging stations at key rail and other facilities.

- With the support of Governor Christie and Commissioner Hammer, we will fulfill another top priority of our customers -- keeping fares stable. There will be NO NJ TRANSIT fare increase in the upcoming fiscal year.

- Now let me touch upon a topic that concerns every one of us today -- safety and security.

- As the terrible events in Brussels last month reminded us, transit systems worldwide are potential targets of terrorism and therefore our vigilance must be constant and unwavering. At NJ TRANSIT, the safety of our customers and employees is our absolute top priority.

- To that end, NJ TRANSIT is fortunate to have a highly-professional and skilled police force, led by Chief Christopher Trucillo. The chief and his officers have the challenge of safeguarding our customers, our employees and our rail, bus, light rail and Access Link paratransit services and equipment, across the entire state of New Jersey.

- The New Jersey Transit Police Department's number one mission is counter-terrorism, followed by crime prevention and deterrence. They accomplish this mission through intelligence-led policing and counter-terrorism tactics in all of their strategies.

- And Under the direction of the Chief, the Office of Emergency Management, (OEM), is responsible for coordinating emergency management activities with all of the departments and business lines within NJ TRANSIT. OEM is also responsible for the Homeland Security Training and Exercise program within NJ TRANSIT. To date more than 518 NJ Transit employees, in addition to 504 partner first responders from communities across the State, have received advanced Incident Command Training.
• I must add that ALL of NJ TRANSIT’s more than 11,000 employees are on the alert -- on duty and off. From conductors to bus operators to office staff, our employees are “force multipliers” -- extra eyes and ears for our police.

• In that same vein, we urge all our customers to maintain their vigilance, too. “See something -- Say something” is not just a slogan. It is a necessity for all of us.

• Safety, of course, means more than being alert for terrorism. Every day, NJ TRANSIT works to ensure that our operations are safe for our customers, employees and all those around us.

• Immediately following the unfortunate derailment in Philadelphia two weeks ago, our Vice President/General Manager of Rail, Bob Lavell, ordered a “Safety Stand Down” where every single rail employee – more than 4,000 -- is personally spoken to about the constant need to be fully aware of safety rules when working around the railroad – to help avoid this kind of tragedy.

• We will follow the investigation in Philadelphia closely and make any adjustments recommended by our federal regulators.

• Meanwhile, our Office of System Safety and our rail, bus, light rail and support departments will boost our outreach and education efforts to reinforce another fundamental message: When you see tracks, always think train.

• Far too often, people are in such a hurry that they drive, or walk, around the crossing gates, and ignore the flashing lights. This is extraordinarily dangerous, and we cannot emphasize that message enough.

• Another fundamental for us at NJ TRANSIT is to make the most efficient use of our resources as we work to keep our services aligned with customer demand.

• All of us in this room understand that public dollars are precious, and that demand for bus, rail and light rail and paratransit transportation continues to grow.
NJ TRANSIT’s $2.1 billion Fiscal Year 17 operating budget fully funds our bus, rail and other services, including Federally-mandated Access Link paratransit transportation. As I mentioned, it does this while maintaining stable fares. We are constantly focused on making the most of our resources, so we aim to work smarter and do more with the resources we have.

For example, we’ve made tremendous progress at the aging, congestion-choked Port Authority Bus Terminal. As someone who ran NJ TRANSIT’s operations at the PABT some years ago, I know, on a very personal level, how important the Bus Terminal is to our customers and to the trans-Hudson transportation system.

By rearranging our bus staging procedures, we have noticeably reduced the frustrations of our customers and improved the commuting experience.

And we continue to work with our partners at the Port Authority as they move to replace the bus terminal.

So I want to particularly express NJ TRANSIT’s thanks to Governors Christie and Cuomo, to Port Authority Chairman John Degnan, and to the authority’s Commissioners and its Executive Director, for their commitment last month to build the new Bus Terminal on Manhattan’s West Side. That is where our 87,000 New York market bus customers want to go each work day, as directly and smoothly as possible.

Of course, NJ TRANSIT is also partnering with the Port, and with Amtrak and the United States Department of Transportation, on another critical project for the region – the construction of new rail tunnels under the Hudson River.

As you know, Amtrak’s existing Hudson tunnels are more than 100 years old, and have suffered the effects not just of the passage of time but by the hard hand of Superstorm Sandy. In the coming years Amtrak plans to perform extensive and necessary renovations on the two existing tunnels that will require taking them out of service one at a time for an extended period. The new tunnels will
keep trains moving during the rehabilitations, and after that, will help meet customer travel demands into the future.

- With Governor Christie’s leadership and that of Senators Booker and Menendez, NJ TRANSIT is leading the Federally-required environmental review for the new tunnels, a critical step that will allow the project to proceed to construction.

- We have a number of other projects that will help customers reach their destinations safely and efficiently, by keeping our extensive infrastructure in a state of good repair.

- We continue to advance our $1.2 billion comprehensive resilience program to make our system stronger and more reliable for the people we serve every day – a system that will better withstand the effects of extreme weather.

- The $595 million replacement of the Raritan River Bridge is starting preliminary engineering and undergoing a review under the National Environmental Policy Act.

- We are also making steady progress on NJ TRANSITGRID, a $577 million first-of-its kind project to create a new, independent power generating system – a microgrid – in the Meadowlands to keep both NJ TRANSIT and Amtrak moving, even if the state’s power grid is compromised.

- We are in the final engineering phase to replace and harden signal, communications and other systems on our rail lines, and to construct a new, permanent emergency storage, maintenance and inspection facility in New Brunswick for up to 400 rail vehicles.

- The capital program for the coming year has a number of important, strategic projects. This includes the soon-to-be finished Westmont Rail Station in Wood-Ridge, a partnership project with the redeveloper of a nearby brownfields industrial property.
• This year we will continue to advance our $500 million state-of-good-repair program with projects designed to keep our assets in working order and maintain their useful life. For example, we expect to advertise construction and design contracts for improvement projects -- ranging in value from $2 million to $60 million -- at rail stations in Elizabeth, North Elizabeth, Cranford, New Brunswick, Mahwah, Lyndhurst and Perth Amboy.

• Our commitment to state-of-good-repair targets assets and facilities the public rarely sees. Millions will be invested in upgrading rail yards, and repairing switches, boilers and train washers, for example.

• And our planners are studying ways to improve passenger circulation at Penn Stations in Newark and New York.

• Rail rolling stock will benefit this year as we advance the process of replacing aging Arrow III rail cars with more than 100 new, multilevel vehicles. Multilevels offer increased seating and have been well received by our customers.

• For our bus customers, we have just completed the largest phase of a $15.5 million project at the Secaucus Station to improve the transfer between buses and trains.

• And, continuing with buses, we expect that as many as 235 new cruiser buses will be delivered this fiscal year. Those new buses benefit our commuters by placing state-of-the-art equipment into service and lowering the average age of our fleet, reducing maintenance costs. And, these new buses have more capacity, helping us to meet ridership customer demand.

• Additionally, we have allocated significant resources to help Amtrak upgrade its Northeast Corridor, which is used by more than 80 percent of our passengers each week day.

• Mr. Chairman, I have been with NJ TRANSIT since its earliest days. I have seen how Transit's dedicated employees, with the help and support of Governors and
Legislators, have transformed the bankrupt railroads and bus companies we inherited into one of America’s largest and finest mass transit systems.

- During my tenure as interim executive director I have had the opportunity to work with every department, every facet of NJ TRANSIT. Every department in this agency has hard-working men and women and I am proud of what they accomplish every day – providing safe, convenient, comfortable, and affordable transportation services to our customers and the taxpayers of New Jersey.

- Public transit is an essential component in New Jersey’s transportation network, and we at NJ TRANSIT are committed to providing safe, convenient, affordable, and reliable rail, bus, light rail and Access Link options to keep New Jersey moving and its economy growing.

- Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.