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Coalition Calls on Governor, Senate President, Assembly Speaker to Fully Fund NJ Transit in State Budget

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New Jersey For Transit, the 18-member coalition calling for more equitable transportation funding, gathered today at the State House in Trenton to urge state leaders and NJ Transit to make a last-ditch effort to find a budgetary solution to prevent the proposed 9-percent fare hike and cuts to service.

The budget bill (S2016/A4600) that continues to move through the Legislature has no increased funding for NJ Transit. Without further legislative action, fare hikes and service cuts likely will be approved in July. The public comment period closed on May 21 and the NJ Transit Board is expected to vote on the proposal at the July 15 board meeting, absent increased funding from the state.



“The time is now. Less than a week remains for leaders in Trenton to come together find a solution to avoid the need for NJ Transit’s proposed fare hikes and service cuts,” said Janna Chernetz, New Jersey Policy Analyst for Tri-State Transportation Campaign. “Governor Christie has failed to acknowledge the breadth of the transportation funding crisis in New Jersey. The entire transportation funding structure, both capital and operating, in New Jersey is broken and it is irresponsible, unjust and unconscionable for the Governor and the Legislature to require transit riders to pick up the pieces.”

The proposed state contribution to NJ Transit in the coming budget is only \$33 million. In 2009, it was \$348 million. To fill that gap, the Christie Administration continues to raid the Clean Energy Fund of \$62 million and is redirecting \$295 million from the Turnpike Authority that was supposed to be dedicated to the cancelled ARC tunnel.

“It is high noon for NJ Transit riders in Trenton – there won’t be a second chance to save riders from another fare hike and service cuts,” said Doug O’Malley, director of Environment New Jersey. “Gov. Christie has signed off on stiffing NJ Transit and their riders. Senate President Sweeney and Speaker Prieto shouldn’t support a budget that gives the shaft to riders.”

The fare hike and service cuts will only fund basics and the funding does not address the need for expanded service as transit ridership continues to set records.

“Every budget is about choices. Saddling New Jersey’s commuters with another fare hike and continuing to neglect one of the state’s greatest assets would be a very bad choice,” said Jon Whiten, Deputy Director of New Jersey Policy Perspective. “Adequately investing in public transit must be a priority for New Jersey’s leaders. The state’s economic future depends on it.”

New Jersey For Transit has come together to fight the agency’s plan, call for the state to adequately invest in public transit and bring attention to the benefits that affordable and efficient trains and buses could bring to New Jersey’s economy, its environment and its everyday working people.

“The Legislature and Christie Administration has failed to come up with other funding sources to prevent this fare hike and service decrease. We need to fight for a long-term solution to provide a stable source of funding to meet NJ Transit’s capital and operating needs and increasing the gas tax is a good and obvious start,” said Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. “Instead of expanding service and increasing ridership, they are raising fares and cutting services. This will put more people back in cars adding more traffic and more air pollution.”

The coalition members say the fare hikes will hurt commuters, the economy, and the environment, and the state Legislature will be responsible if the hikes are allowed to happen.

“New Jersey Transit’s recent proposal for service reductions and 9 percent fare increases would cause undue financial harm to hundreds of thousands in our state who are still struggling to recover from the side effects of the Great Recession, all while providing less service at a time when our region is demanding more,” said Michael Phelan, co-founder of the New Jersey Commuter Action Network.

“Having an affordable public transit system in New Jersey is vitally important,” said Serena Rice, Executive Director of the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey. “As car ownership is so expensive, many New Jerseyans must depend on public transit. Any increase in fares would jeopardize their budgets that are already stretched to the max, and to have their routes to and from work be cut would be devastating. New Jersey public transit needs to be an affordable transportation option – not a transportation luxury.”

Rob Duffey, Policy and Communications Director of New Jersey Working Families, said legislators should pass a budget that invests in transit instead of passing the cost of corporate tax breaks on to transit riders.

“It’s simply outrageous New Jersey’s bus and train riders face their second fare hike in five years, while some of the world’s biggest and most profitable corporations are getting billions in tax breaks,” Duffy said.

Raising mass transit fares and cutting service is the start of a downward spiral that will affect all economic levels of the workforce, said Cyndi Steiner, Executive Director of New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition.

“Biking and walking are transportation options that support mass transit, and together these options enable access to jobs for the 11 percent of New Jersey residents who do not have access to a car whether for economic reasons or by choice,” Steiner said.

People who oppose the fare hikes argue that the state’s plan to increase transit fares poses a threat to the safety of those who use NJ’s roadways.

“Motorists depend upon a safe roadway, part of ensuring that safe infrastructure is having an affordable public transportation system,” said Cathleen Lewis, Director of Public Relations and Governmental Affairs for AAA of New Jersey. “By increasing fares commuters may decide to take the roadways instead, putting additional pressure on already deteriorating roadways.”

The New Jersey For Transit coalition is calling for the state to fix its transportation funding crisis, borne in large part from a political reluctance to increase gasoline taxes, and dedicate an adequate amount of money to NJ Transit. The 18 groups signed on include transportation, environmental, consumer, anti-poverty, grassroots and labor

organizations. The coalition is being led by Environment New Jersey, New Jersey Policy Perspective and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign.

New Jersey For Transit is a broad-based coalition focused on the need for investment in affordable, efficient high-quality public transit in New Jersey. Coalition members are: AAA New Jersey, The Amalgamated Transit Union, The Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey, Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, Clean Water Action New Jersey, Delaware Valley Association of Rail Passengers, Environment New Jersey, Fair Share Housing Center, Ironbound Community Corporation, **New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition**, New Jersey Citizen Action, The New Jersey Commuters Action Network, New Jersey Policy Perspective, New Jersey Public Interest Research Group, New Jersey Sierra Club, New Jersey Working Families, South Jersey Urbanists and Tri-State Transportation Campaign.