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Broad Coalition & Legislators Protest NJ Transit's Fare Hikes & Service Cuts in State Capital

Trenton Hearing Highlights Need for State Leadership on Transit

Trenton – New Jersey For Transit, a new diverse 19-member coalition will be at tonight's public hearing in Trenton to denounce NJ Transit's proposal to raise fares by 9 percent and cut bus and rail service in the state. The Trenton hearing has a special significance for the coalition, seeing as the fare hikes and service cuts are a direct result of the state's failure to address its broken transportation funding structure.

"Transit riders can no longer afford to pay the price for New Jersey's inaction. We did not create this mess, and we cannot be the only ones left to clean it up," said **Jon Whiten, Deputy Director of New Jersey Policy Perspective**. "If the Governor and the Legislature won't step up to fix a crisis that's been coming for decades, the least they can do is find a short-term solution in the 2016 budget to fill NJ Transit's operating hole. Passing the buck to transit riders just won't cut it."

Led by Environment New Jersey, New Jersey Policy Perspective and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, New Jersey For Transit is calling for more equitable, sustainable and responsible transportation funding, while bringing attention to the benefits that affordable and efficient trains and buses bring to New Jersey's economy, environment and everyday working people.

"When done right, public transit can move people forward in big and small ways. It is essential to the financial success of working people, especially lower income workers striving towards upward mobility," said **Dena Mottola Jaborska, Deputy Director of New Jersey Citizen Action**. "If we care about supporting working people and giving families economic opportunities, we cannot continue to shortchange public transit of public investment."

Sen. Shirley Turner and Assemblyman Reed Gusciora, state lawmakers representing the Trenton area, said the fare hikes would create additional economic hardship for their constituents.

"A 9 percent fare hike places a strain on commuter budgets, but also places a greater strain on low-income households that must rely on public transportation to commute to work," said **Sen. Shirley Turner**. "This is simply another example of the burden of balancing the budget being placed on the backs of low- and middle-income households."

In addition to the fare hikes, NJ Transit is proposing a number of service cuts. These include the outright elimination of three bus lines – one of which (the 655 bus from Princeton to Plainsboro) serves Trenton-area residents.

“The 655 is more than just a bus route; it's a vital link between residents in Princeton and their closest hospital,” said **Aaron Hyndman, Communications Coordinator at the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition**. “And for those who depend on biking and walking, it's their only option.”

By not investing in public transit, the state is making it much harder for residents to make environmentally conscious choices – with devastating long-term impacts on air quality across the state.

“These fare hikes and service cuts are another blow by the Christie Administration against mass transit in the state – commuters will pay more for less service,” said **Doug O'Malley, Director of Environment New Jersey**. “Riding the train or catching the bus is the best way to reduce our carbon footprint – but not when you can't afford it.”

The state has dramatically raided NJ Transit this decade. The state contribution to NJ Transit in 2009 was \$348 million; the proposed 2016 budget has only \$33 million coming from state funding. The budget includes funds raided from the Clean Energy Fund and \$295 million from the Turnpike Authority that was supposed to be dedicated to the cancelled ARC tunnel. Instead of nearing completion of a new tunnel, commuters are stuck with old infrastructure and a broken system for funding transportation.

“Central Jersey ultimately needs to see mass transit expanded – from an extension of the River Line through Downtown Trenton to speedier rapid transit buses. But the continued raiding of NJ Transit funding makes those expansions a pipe dream – and hands a fare hike bill to commuters,” said **O'Malley**. “Gov. Christie is not a friend to mass transit – his legacy will be one of drastically higher prices for cut-back service. We urge NJ Transit to reject these fare hikes and service cuts.”

New Jersey's per-gallon gasoline tax – last increased in 1988 - has fallen so far behind that now every single state but Alaska has a higher tax. The result is that the real value of New Jersey's gas tax has fallen dramatically over the past few decades, strangling the state's ability to invest in the essential public assets those taxes pay for, including public transit. Our leaders have dug a hole that is hundreds of millions of dollars large and constantly growing the longer they fail to act.

“Without adequate resources raised in an equitable way to pay for public transit, the state of New Jersey has turned to a mostly captive audience instead: riders. Unlike the gas tax, the cost of a NJ Transit train ticket has not only kept pace with inflation since the 1980s, but actually outpaced it,” said **Whiten**. “Quite simply, now – not next year, not after the next election, but *now* – is the time for this to stop.”

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. Its 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, The Lackawanna Coalition, 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.

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