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## **Transit Riders and New Jersey For Transit Protest Fare Hike at Camden Hearing**

*NJ Transit South Jersey Hearing Gives Transit Riders a Chance To Protest Fare Hike & Service Cuts Impacting South Jersey*

**Camden** –New Jersey For Transit, a new 17-member coalition calling for more equitable transportation funding, will be at tonight's public hearing in Camden to denounce NJ Transit's proposal to raise fares by 9 percent and cut bus lines in South Jersey. The Camden City Council hearing is one of eight scheduled this week before the public comment period expires Thursday.

"These fare hikes 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."

Three bus lines that serve the South Jersey area are on the chopping block: the 419 NJ Transit bus line between Riverside and Burlington City, 318 bus line between Philadelphia and Great Adventure in Jackson, and the elimination of the last evening trip on the 463 Between Woodbury and Avandale Park.

"The New Jersey Transit fare hikes and service cuts to South Jersey bus lines are a direct result of the state's failure to address its broken transportation funding structure. Transit riders alone should not be responsible for fixing it," said **Matthew Norris, South Jersey Coordinator for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign**. "The Governor and the Legislature can stop this fare increase. Doing so means finding a short term revenue source to fill the \$40m gap while also finding a long term, sustainable funding source to replenish the TTF."

As NJ Transit considers its 5<sup>th</sup> fare increase since 2000 and additional service cuts, 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.

"In communities throughout New Jersey, we see more and more homes being built for people of all incomes near transit," **Fair Share Housing Center Executive Director Kevin Walsh** said. "This is the wrong time to cut transit service that so many people rely upon."

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 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.

“Affordable public transit is so important for our lowest-income neighbors across South Jersey. Families can see huge financial benefits if they are able to rely on public transportation instead of paying the costs of owning a car,” said **Serena Rice, Executive Director of the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey**. “But in order for that to work, New Jersey needs a strong transportation system, and it has to be one that low-wage workers can afford.”

The raids to NJ Transit funding have been painfully obvious under the Christie Administration. The state contribution to NJ Transit in 2009 was \$348 million; the current FY16 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 additional capacity in and out of New York, commuters are stuck with old infrastructure and a deeply inequitable funding for transportation.

“It is inappropriate to once again ask train and bus riders to pay more for their daily commute after the massive 25% fare hike instituted across the system in 2010, especially since the tax on gasoline, the revenue source of the Transportation Trust Fund, hasn’t been raised for more than two decades,” said **Joe Russell with South Jersey Urbanists**. “To once again raise fares and cut service for transit riders while the state’s transportation fund is in shambles would amount to punishment for riding a system that’s good for the environment, good for the economy, and good for our overall regional health.”

Environmental advocates in the coalition note that by not investing in public transit, the state is making it much harder for everyday New Jerseyans to make environmentally conscious choices – with devastating long-term impacts on air quality and smog levels across the state.

“South Jersey ultimately needs to see mass transit expanded – from a Glassboro light rail line 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 a 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.”

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*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 current 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, 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, Tri-State Transportation Campaign and South Jersey Urbanists.*

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