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## **Dear Governor and Legislators: Thanks for the Fare Hike**

*As they brace for fare hike on Oct. 1, commuters and advocates warn of further hikes if New Jersey's transportation funding crisis is not resolved*

**Trenton** – As NJ Transit prepares to hike fares on its rail and bus lines by more than 9 percent this Thursday, commuters and advocates challenged Gov. Christie and the Legislature to act to prevent further fare hikes and additional service cuts.

The October 1 fare hikes follow service cuts rolled out through September, including stealth cuts late-night trains from New York on the Morris-Essex and Gladstone Branches, as well as six bus routes in Central and South Jersey that were eliminated or pared back and announced cuts back on the Montclair-Boonton and Pascack Valley lines. NJ Transit approved the hikes and cuts in July after the Legislature and Gov. Christie failed to adequately support NJ Transit in the 2016 budget.

“On Oct. 1, transit riders are going to take a 9 percent fare hike on the chin. New Jersey transit riders are going to pay more for worse service, and no promise of improvements,” said **Doug O'Malley, Director of Environment New Jersey**. “The NJ Transit funding crunch occurred because of a failure in leadership in Trenton from both the Legislature and Gov. Christie. This fare increase is a stealth tax hike on transit riders, and it's time for our state leaders to stop pretending like looking the other way is an answer.” “

New Jersey For Transit, the coalition calling for more equitable transportation funding, said the state's leaders must ensure public transit is a priority in the ongoing discussions about how to replenish the state's Transportation Trust Fund.

“The transportation funding structure in New Jersey is broken. NJ Transit fares already outpace inflation by 25 percent and New Jersey riders pay the highest fares in the nation.

Come 2017, the Transportation Trust Fund will not have enough money to pay for even its debt service – stifling New Jersey’s ability to fund much needed capital improvements to expand mass transit and repair its crumbling roads and bridges,” said **Janna Chernetz, Senior New Jersey Policy Analyst for Tri-State Transportation Campaign**. “We’re nearly halfway to the unveiling of our next state budget, and we’re not any closer to solving our transportation crisis so riders aren’t facing a worse crunch next year.”

The 2016 state budget included just \$33 million in state subsidy for NJ Transit, which paved the way for the NJ Transit fare hike as well as the continued raid of the Clean Energy Fund of \$62 million and redirection of \$295 million from the Turnpike Authority that was supposed to be dedicated to the cancelled ARC tunnel. The fare hikes and service cuts highlight the severity of the multi-faceted transportation funding crisis in New Jersey.

NJ Transit’s board unanimously approved these fare hikes and service cuts despite overwhelming opposition by the public, shining a light on the disconnect between the board and regular transit riders. The voice of riders is only heard during public testimony or via questionnaires, and this is woefully inadequate. It’s about time transit riders had better representation on the board; legislation sponsored by Senators Lesniak and Sacco (S-2804) would do just that. Our leaders in Trenton must make this bill a priority.

The fare hikes set to go into effect on Thursday, while not as large as 2010’s historic fare hikes, will nonetheless harm New Jersey’s working families and its economy, advocates warned.

“New Jersey’s low-wage workers are falling further and further behind, as wages stagnate, poverty stays stubbornly high, and now those who depend on public transit will have to pay an even larger share of their income just to get to work,” said **Serena Rice, Executive Director of the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey**. “If we want to grow our economy, we need to stop making it harder for our workers to get to work.”

“How can we possibly expect to build a strong economy if people cannot get to work?” asked **Ann Vardeman, Program Director at New Jersey Citizen Action**. “We cannot continue to stand by and watch our public transit infrastructure crumble. We need our elected leaders to stand up for the working people of New Jersey and properly fund transportation. There is no more time to kick the can down the road.”

The fare hikes will also harm New Jersey’s environment as higher fares and sub-par service sends more New Jerseyans into their cars.

“This week starts the great train robbery and bus robbery. Not only does the 9 percent increase rob pockets of commuters, it will cause a drop in ridership, putting more people back in cars and leading to more traffic and pollution,” said **Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club**. “The Christie Administration could have easily come up with additional funding sources like a gas tax to prevent this hike, but instead they’ve told thousands of people who opposed it to take a hike. This will hurt our economy and

businesses, people will be delayed and get to work late, while worsening our air quality problems.”

**Cyndi Steiner, executive director of the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition**, added that “these fare hikes reflect a complete disregard for the value of a transportation system that provides a variety of transportation options, enabling a workforce diverse in economic level, geographic location, transportation requirements and economic contributions to achieve their fullest potential, thereby benefiting the entire region's economy.”

Advocates stressed that it was beyond time for lawmakers to act.

“Leaders on both sides must find the courage to come together to fix this crisis. Businesses and citizens of our state should also acknowledge that roads, tunnels and transportation systems are not something that can simply be skipped for a generation or paid for by some, but not others,” said **Michael Phelan, co-founder of the New Jersey Commuters Action Network**. “Everyone in our state benefits from good transportation and everyone needs to play a role in investing in these systems so that New Jersey continues to be a place where businesses want to grow and families will want to live, work and succeed.”

### **About New Jersey For Transit**

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, and represents more than 18 diverse organizations. 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, 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.

For more information, visit [www.nj4transit.org](http://www.nj4transit.org)