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## **Stuck at the Station: 15 Years of Declining Investment in Public Transit Has Harmed NJ's Straphangers, Economy & Environment**

*Legislative leaders, advocates & experts make the case for adequate funding in conjunction with damning new report detailing lack of investment*

TRENTON: Assembly Speaker Prieto and Assembly Deputy Speaker Wisniewski joined the New Jersey For Transit coalition today to discuss the devastating consequences of 15 years of declining investment in New Jersey's public transit system detailed in the coalition's new report "Stuck at the Station," and call for a course correction.

"Transportation is the lifeblood of this state, vital to our economy and our ability to create good-paying jobs, yet we've let it wither to the point that NJ Transit is no longer a viable option for many commuters," **said Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto**. "The fact that we've allowed New Jersey's investment in capital projects to drop 20 percent in 15 years is appalling, and that lack of investment is being seen in countless delays, breakdowns, poor services and unaffordable fares. This is yet another reason why everyone must come together and finally devise a long-term dedicated transportation funding plan for our state that includes increased revenue and creative ideas. The longer we wait, the more problems such as the one we face at NJ Transit will become more difficult to overcome."

The press conference coincided with the release of a new report by New Jersey For Transit, which finds the state has systematically shirked its responsibility to invest the dollars necessary to create a world-class public transit system that would create a stronger economy, cleaner environment and more equitable transportation options for low- and moderate-income residents.

"For nearly a million commuting New Jerseyans, the ongoing failure to properly invest in NJ Transit manifests itself in the most frustrating of ways: higher fees for reduced and less reliable service," **said Assembly Deputy Speaker John S. Wisniewski, the chairman of the Assembly's transportation panel**. "As a corridor state, our economic prosperity is directly tied to the health of our road and rail infrastructure. We should be allocating funding to maintain a world class transportation network; not figuratively scrounging through the couch cushions to find just enough cash to hold the current patchwork of century-old equipment and elbow grease together for another few months."

The report, which was written by Ryan R. Hall of Tri-State Transportation Campaign, found that:

- Since 2002, **New Jersey's annual capital investment** in maintaining, repairing and expanding its core public transit assets has **dropped by an inflation-adjusted 19 percent**,

even as **ridership has grown by 20 percent**. (The drop is even more severe when measured from the high funding point of 2004; the decline in capital funding is **29 percent from 2004 to 2016**.)

- This drop in *capital* funding for NJ Transit has been made worse by meager state support of NJ Transit's *operating* costs, which has led the agency to **continually use capital funds to literally keep trains and buses running**.
- The lack of investment has **stalled all of the state's major transit expansion projects**, and has led to **stagnant funding for maintenance of NJ Transit's existing bus and train assets**.
- New Jersey's declining direct state support for NJ Transit's day-to-day operating costs has also led the agency to increasingly rely on **fare hikes and fund raids from other parts of the state budget** to balance its annual budgets.
- NJ Transit's train system suffers from **more breakdowns and equipment failures than most other transit agencies in the nation and our regional peers**.

"Direct state support for NJ Transit has dropped precipitously by 90.3 percent between 2005 and 2016. The years of underfunding have forced the transit agency into cannibalistic financing practices and unsustainable funding raids just to keep the wheels turning," **said Janna Chernetz, Director of New Jersey Policy for Tri-State Transportation Campaign**. "This has come at a substantial cost to the state in terms of economic growth and quality of life for its residents. Last year, NJ Transit commuters were forced to pick up the pieces of this broken transportation funding structure in the form of fare hikes and service cuts. It's now Trenton's turn."

The coalition urged lawmakers to find a solution to New Jersey's transportation-funding crisis – one that reflects the importance of public transit to the state's future by adequately investing in both capital and operating expenses for NJ Transit. And it urged legislators to do everything in their power to prevent riders from paying the price for years of disinvestment in the form of higher fares and less service.

"NJ Transit's funding is in crisis, and Gov. Christie is AWOL. NJ Transit suffers from a legacy of underinvestment which has created a generation of neglect for transit riders," **said Doug O'Malley, director of Environment New Jersey and a co-chair of the New Jersey For Transit coalition**. "Transit riders can't ignore this crisis because they're stuck on trains and buses that are breaking down, and already paying the highest fares in America. We need the Legislature to stand up for riders to ensure we don't see another round of fare hikes and service cuts."

Advocates for low-income New Jerseyans stressed that affordable, reliable public transit options are essential to allowing those working folks to work and climb their way into the middle class.

"If we want to grow our economy, we need to stop making it harder for our workers to get to work – and this means reversing the trend of disinvestment in public transit," **said Serena Rice, Executive Director of the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey**. "New Jersey has asked riders to pay more and more, with five fare hikes since 2002, yet as this report makes clear, it has not contributed its fair share. At a time when wages are stagnant, poverty is growing and millions are struggling just to make ends meet, the state must do better for the working families who depend on public transit."

And environmental groups warned that continued disinvestment in transit will force more people back into cars and ultimately harm New Jersey's environment and make Garden State a little less green.

“New Jersey's transportation funding crisis is compounding the climate crisis,” **said David Pringle, NJ Campaign Director at Clean Water Action.** “Replenishing the Transportation Trust Fund to invest in mass transit and fix it first instead of sprawl will not only alleviate both crises but also improve public safety, the economy, and air quality.”

“NJ Transit is a train wreck and the wheels are coming off our buses. The failure to fund transportation improvements has caused higher fares and worse service. NJ Transit is hurting New Jersey commuters and their ability to get to work, while impacting the environment and economy,” **added Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club.** “We need to build public transit for the good of the public as well as the environment. Compared to motorists, many transit commuters feel an unfair burden of increased costs, while the gas tax has not been increased. That is why we must institute a gas tax to fix our broken transportation system and expand it to create jobs and grow our economy.”

In addition to being good for the environment, ensuring as many people use transit as possible is also good for motorists and the roads they drive on.

“A properly funded affordable accessible public transportation system is vital to alleviating pressure on our roadways and reducing congestion,” **said Cathleen Lewis, Director of Public Affairs and Government Relations at AAA Northeast.**

The coalition urged the governor to come home to put together a real solution to the state's transportation funding woes.

“New Jersey doesn't need a governor whose only transportation policy is to rack up frequent flyer miles,” **said Ray Greaves, Chairman of the New Jersey Amalgamated Transit Union.** “New Jersey needs a governor that realizes we have a transportation crisis and it needs to be funded and fixed.”

### **About the New Jersey For Transit coalition**

New Jersey For Transit ([www.nj4transit.org](http://www.nj4transit.org)) was launched in May 2015 with the belief that proper investment in public transit would have enormous benefits for New Jersey's economy, for its environment and for all its residents, particularly low- and moderate-income residents who use transit as primary means of transportation. The coalition advocates for adequate investment in order to create and sustain affordable, efficient high-quality public transit in New Jersey.

It currently has 19 organizational members: AAA New Jersey, 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 Work Environment Council, New Jersey Working Families, South Jersey Urbanists and Tri-State Transportation Campaign.