



August 10, 2018

To: Honorable Phil Murphy, Governor  
Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, Transportation Commissioner  
Kevin S. Corbett, NJ Transit Executive Director

On behalf of the South Orange and Maplewood communities, our resident commuters, and NJ Transit customers utilizing our three collective train stations on the Morris and Essex line, we thank you for your commitment to restoring NJ Transit to its former glory. We understand change takes time, but the current situation is just plain unacceptable. We know you agree based on your public comments, including yesterday's press conference, during which it was clear you empathize with and share our deep frustrations and those of our commuting residents. We have some suggestions for how you can act on that sentiment immediately to make things better for commuters.

To that end, we want to share with you the results of a survey we conducted of South Orange and Maplewood commuters who highlighted areas of concern, which offers guidance on the types of interim measures that would make this difficult period more tolerable.

Among the results you will see below, over 80 percent of commuters are dissatisfied with NJ Transit with a remarkable half of them saying this summer is worse than last year's "Summer of Hell." An overwhelming majority also said they heard about the cancellations of their train once they were already at the station and that they "never" or "seldom" received explanations for the cancellations. This lack of communication is a key theme in the survey and our discussions with residents, and it needs to change.

For four days beginning on August 5, a total of 960 resident commuters from our two towns provided feedback regarding their experiences during the month of July 2018. Of these participants, 90 percent commute "always" or "very frequently".

**Key Takeaways:**

- More than 80 percent of survey respondents were "very dissatisfied" (43 percent) or "somewhat dissatisfied" (37 percent) with the overall rail performance of NJ Transit during the month of July.
- Respondents were asked to estimate how many times their trains were "cancelled" during this time period. Forty-five percent indicated "5-9 times," followed by "0-4 times" (41 percent), and "10-14 times" (10 percent). Please note that this question did not specify delays, only cancellations. Commuters emphasized this distinction within the comments section of the survey.
- The most alarming responses focused on communications. Eight-nine percent of respondents indicated they found out about cancellations at the station causing "significant disruption [to their] work and/or home life". Eight-three percent of

respondents either “never” (43 percent) or “seldom” (40 percent) received an explanation for the cancellations.

- Although the majority of survey respondents noted that they did not experience “loss of wages,” 84 percent of respondents incurred additional transportation-related costs as a direct result of July’s cancellations, with forty-eight percent citing \$0–\$9 in additional direct expenses, followed by \$10–\$24 (16 percent), \$25–\$49 (16 percent), \$50–\$99 (11 percent), and more than \$100 (8 percent). Respondents urged us to share that the lost time associated with cancellations and delays was the much larger concern and cost impact. Specifically, when asked if cancellations/delays impact childcare, forty-five percent indicated “yes”.
- As a point of comparison, we asked survey respondents to describe this summer’s experience as it compared to last year. Fifty-percent stated this summer is “much worse” (25 percent) or “somewhat worse” (25 percent). Within the comments, a common theme revolved around communications, predictability, and customer-centric focus. Last year, respondents felt they were prepared for what their commute would entail, were informed of the changes and received regular updates, appreciated the discounts and cross-honoring of tickets, and noted that bus alternatives and ferry options were helpful in mitigating all the challenges. Of those who expressed this year is better in some capacity, the overwhelming majority attributed this to not having to travel through Hoboken to get to NY Penn.

Following yesterday’s press conference which outlined the various challenges impacting 150,000 commuters who rely on NJ Transit daily including engineer shortages, unexplained absenteeism and the implementation of Positive Train Control (“PTC”), it’s very clear that our current situation has risen to the level of warranting the same degree of care deployed in 2017.

**We request the administration and NJ Transit take immediate steps to address the following:**

- **Communications:** There is simply no excuse that the overwhelming majority of riders are finding out on a station platform that their trains are either cancelled or delayed. A robust communications strategy, similar to 2017, needs to be put forth immediately. For the most part, NJ Transit riders understand that improvements and repairs are necessary, especially given the years of deferred maintenance and underfunding of this agency. However, all commuters deserve to have the highest level of predictability so that they may adjust their schedules accordingly.
- **Additional Buses and Hudson River Ferries:** In order to better supplement service to riders, we urge you to consider putting resources towards alternatives means of transportation unrelated to rail operations. The addition of bus and ferry options would likely not be impacted by the two main reasons provided to riders for delays: PTC implementation and engineer shortages.
- **Cross-Honoring:** The idea of discounts or refunds has been suggested but we recognize the complexity of doing that in a manner that actually benefits those inconvenienced by these disruptions because it’s been a moving target. Rather than focus your attention on that, we’d support a cross-honoring agreement with the PATH, ferries, and bus service. While this arrangement will assist commuters immediately, we appreciate that as a part of Governor Murphy’s campaign promises, he suggested this be done indefinitely — which we would fully support.
- **Local Partnerships:** Many mayors, ourselves included, were blindsided last year with the announcement that all Morris and Essex lines would be diverted to Hoboken. We

learned of this from a press conference by the former governor and NJ Transit would not respond to our requests for meetings. This led to a coalition of mayors working together to assist our communities and constituents; as a result, the relationship with agency became very contentious. We attended legislative hearings and lobbied for additional measures to improve the experience for our commuters before Amtrak repairs began. A positive takeaway was NJ Transit's commitment to coordinate regular meetings and/or conference calls with local officials to keep us apprised of what was happening, answer our questions, and listen to the suggestions we were offering. We propose a quarterly meeting with NJ Transit officials, with a more frequent schedule of calls when severe disruptions occur, such as last summer and this summer. Mayors and local officials are a great vehicle through which to distribute information to our communities, and we have opportunities locally to better assist/accommodate disruptions in service.

In the long term, we remain partners with you and advocates for the Gateway Tunnel Project. While we speak directly on behalf of two communities, there are 116 municipalities with rail operations serving tens of thousands of commuters daily. The absence of this project moving forward will have devastating impacts to New Jersey's economy as transit hubs represented roughly sixty percent of growth in the state over the past decade. We believe Governor Murphy and the administration's acknowledgement of the importance of our transit system. Even yesterday, Governor Murphy put this issue comparable to the importance of quality public education for the state. We agree.

Lastly, we urge Governor Murphy to fill the two vacant seats on the NJ Transit Board that are to be occupied by members of the public — seats that have not been filled since 2016. The voice of the public and NJ Transit customer experience must be represented at the table. We would gladly work with the administration and offer up names for consideration. As you can likely see from the tremendous response from our resident commuters, our communities don't suffer from lack of engagement or desire to be a part of solutions.

In closing, thank you for the taking the time to understand and address our concerns. We remain committed to working with the administration and agency on how we can collectively restore our transit operations to national prominence.

In partnership,



Sheena Collum  
Village President  
Township of South Orange Village



Victor De Luca  
Mayor  
Township of Maplewood

**Enclosure:** South Orange and Maplewood NJ Transit Commuter Survey

cc: South Orange Board of Trustees  
Maplewood Township Committee  
NJ Transit Board of Directors  
Senator Richard Codey  
Assemblyman John McKeon  
Assemblywoman Mila Jasey  
New Jersey State League of Municipalities  
Mayors representing NJ Transit Morris & Essex Lines