

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Families across New Jersey count on accessible, efficient public transportation to get to work on time, be home for their children's soccer games, and make their lives more affordable and convenient. As the most densely populated state in the nation, New Jersey in particular has a unique reliance on public transportation and our passenger rail system to move our economy and communities forward. Given the centrality of Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT to these crucial goals and our long-running support in Congress for key investments in our region's railway network, we have been shocked and deeply concerned by the recent breakdown in Amtrak rail operations along the Northeast Corridor and the resulting many hours of delays for tens of thousands of New Jersey commuters.

Over the past week, our offices have been inundated with outreach from our constituents regarding dramatic delays in their Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT commutes that have greatly impacted their ability to work, travel, and see loved ones. On Thursday, June 20, Amtrak service along the entirety of the Northeast Corridor in New Jersey, particularly between Manhattan and Philadelphia, was suspended due to power issues as a result of malfunctioning circuit breakers on Amtrak tracks, alongside a brush fire in Secaucus that led to additional issues. Since some 60 percent of NJ TRANSIT's nearly 700 daily trains must use the Northeast Corridor for some or all of their trips – and 80 percent of NJ TRANSIT passenger rail trips touch the Northeast Corridor – all NJ TRANSIT service into and out of New York Penn Station was also suspended for the afternoon. More than 130 NJ TRANSIT trains were canceled or delayed, and thousands of New Jerseyans were stuck far from home for hours and were unable to have dinner with their families on Thursday night, as a result of these avoidable errors by Amtrak.

Again, on the morning of Friday, June 21, NJ TRANSIT customers were trapped in a commuting nightmare as service was suspended in and out of New York Penn Station due to Amtrak power problems. Many commuters undoubtedly gave up in disgust, either working from home, if they could, or climbing into their cars and fighting highway traffic, adding to our serious regional air pollution.

Unfortunately, these are not isolated incidents. Not counting the chaos last Thursday and Friday, Amtrak disruptions have created serious delays for NJ TRANSIT customers no less than

19 times over the past six weeks. These serious issues are occurring nowhere else on the 11 rail lines that NJ TRANSIT owns and maintains, only on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor.

This is especially frustrating for New Jersey citizens and their elected representatives, as NJ TRANSIT is merely a tenant on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor; NJ TRANSIT neither owns nor maintains the Corridor. Amtrak does, and Amtrak's troubles leave NJ TRANSIT in an impossible position – unable to direct repairs on Amtrak property and unable to provide proper, reliable service to paying customers who depend on them. This is seriously undermining the quality of life for New Jerseyans and their families, and if it continues it will threaten the state's economic health.

Needless to say, this situation is completely unacceptable.

As Amtrak works to address the underlying infrastructure problems that led to these delays, we therefore ask that the Department of Transportation conduct a thorough investigation into what led to the breakdowns along the Northeast Corridor route and what additional capital projects need to be completed to fix any structural deficiencies, and to present its findings to Members of Congress. We also ask that the Department provide information as to how it and Amtrak are planning to adapt to a greater frequency of extreme heat waves throughout the Northeast region, which likely played a role in last week's significant delays, and better communicate and coordinate with operators on Amtrak's lines, including NJ TRANSIT, in real time as issues arise. As these types of weather events are only expected to increase in frequency going forward, it is critical that Amtrak, NJ TRANSIT, and the Department of Transportation work together to ensure that these transportation breakdowns don't happen again and that we are better prepared in case major circuit breaker malfunctions or other issues occur.

Additionally, we urge Amtrak to immediately prioritize replacement of catenary wires and other critical infrastructure upgrades such as signals and track using the funds allocated through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These federal investments were made to ensure reliable train service and must be utilized promptly to prevent further severe disruptions along the Northeast Corridor.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter that has greatly impacted families and businesses all throughout New Jersey. We have been proud to support significant new investments in public rail transportation throughout our region, including the Gateway program, but the breakdowns that we've seen last week and over the past month-plus are incredibly disruptive and only serve to deter families in our districts from taking the train in the first place. We look forward to working with you to resolve these issues and ensure that Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT emerge far stronger from this crisis.

Sincerely,



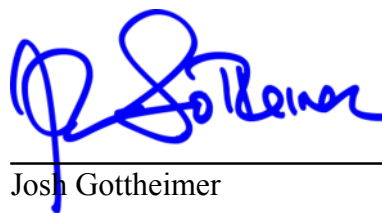
Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress



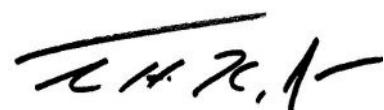
Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
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Josh Gottheimer
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Thomas H. Kean, Jr.
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Andy Kim
Member of Congress



Donald Norcross
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

cc: Coalition for the Northeast Corridor