

Congressman Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Testimony before the House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
Member Day
April 14, 2021

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, thank you very much for the opportunity to highlight my priorities as you work on a surface transportation reauthorization bill. I also want to thank my delegation colleagues on this committee, Congressmen Albio Sires, Donald Payne, Jr. and Tom Malinowski, for their work advocating for New Jersey. As a former member of this committee, I know the work it entails, and they do a fantastic job.

Our roads are aging, our bridges are crumbling, and our railways are congested. North Jersey rail commuters have suffered enough on a bridge nearly as old as the Stone Age. The most heavily traveled bridge with a deficient rating in New Jersey is the span of I-80 crossing the Passaic River. I hear my constituents demanding relief through their blaring horns commuting on century old infrastructure. Every minute, or hour, delayed is one less minute or hour that parents can spend with their families.

The White House reminded me of our need this week by giving us a D+ on its Infrastructure Report Card. I was a teacher and I can tell you D+ wasn't a grade you were pleased with. So, I'd like to highlight a few projects of importance.

While an end is near for the Gateway Project's environmental review submitted way back in 2018, it's taken too long to get here. We have long needed to totally rebuild the Hudson River rail tunnels that connect New York and New Jersey. Former Governor Chris Christie set our cause back over a decade. We must expand commuter rail capacity under the Hudson to keep up with demand. And this need has been exacerbated since the damage caused by Superstorm Sandy in 2012. Passing this next milestone is a big step to finally replacing this decaying structure. I look forward to working hand in glove with President Biden to finally finish the job.

One component of this project is the Portal Bridge spanning the Hackensack River. It is a relic built from a past time when the Philadelphia Athletics won the World Series. We must upgrade this dangerous structure and modernize our cross-river transportation. It is dead wrong that New Jerseyans and all who travel on the Northeast Corridor have been forced to traverse a bridge dating back to President Taft, and we won't stand for it.

I must also mention that we need more access to public transportation throughout northern New Jersey. New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the America. There is no more room for major roadways. Transit has lessened our road congestion and improved what is some of the worst air quality in the nation. Certainly, buses can and must play an important role in expanded transit access.

The Hudson-Bergen Light Rail is in desperate need of expansion, can also be a resource. Since it began operation in 2000, this system has revitalized older urban and suburban areas in New Jersey. By several estimates, thousands of residential units and extensive commercial development can be traced to this system. However, progress has been stalled on extending these lines throughout North Jersey and this committee can help get them back on track. The Northern Branch Corridor

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Project expansion can finally put the Bergen in Hudson-Bergen. It has had engineering proposals and environmental studies. It has local support but needs access to federal funding. The cross-county line to provide access to folks in Paterson is currently being re-envisioned as well.

I hope the reauthorization you are considering, and the American Jobs Plan, can be our savior. Thank you very much for your time and the opportunity to testify today.