

MEMORANDUM

TO: House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
FROM: Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill (NJ-11)
DATE: April 17, 2023
SUBJECT: Testimony for T&I Member Day Hearing, April 18, 2023

TESTIMONY:

Thank you Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee for providing me the opportunity to testify today. I also want to thank my good friends and colleagues from New Jersey, Reps. Payne and Menendez, for their outstanding work to support our state's priorities on this Committee.

I want to begin today by highlighting the devastating impact of the pandemic on my constituents' access to affordable and reliable commuting options. Commuter bus and rail lines have been hit exceptionally hard over the past three years as millions of Americans have stopped going into the office, and even as public health conditions have improved, these companies continue to deal with ridership that is far below pre-pandemic levels. This slow return to normalcy is now causing many operators, including a key bus provider in my district, to permanently shutter critical commuter routes that are relied upon by thousands of families. That company in my district has been shuttling New Jerseyans to Manhattan since 1870, when it was founded as a stagecoach company. Not only has this left riders in search of options to make their way from North Jersey to Manhattan, it has imperiled the good union jobs that the commuter service supports.

Congress, and this Committee, played a crucial role during the pandemic in protecting access to bus and rail commuter routes through their creation of the Coronavirus Economic Relief for Transportation Services (CERTS) program, which ensured that bus carriers could continue providing crucial commuter services and protected the jobs of thousands of workers. Significant and bipartisan funding to state public transit agencies through several COVID relief packages also helped those agencies to maintain reliable service even as ridership collapsed.

In keeping with these critical efforts, I now urge this Committee, alongside the Department of Transportation, to take all available actions to protect commuter bus and transit access. This should include any necessary support to state public transit agencies to ensure that key commuter routes relied upon by families are still able to operate, as well as additional funding for Federal Transit Administration grant programs that fund public transit operations in heavily-trafficked areas. My constituents, and so many millions of families nationwide, rely on affordable transportation to make ends meet, and we cannot allow the pandemic to further impact their quality of life.

Another issue before this Committee that is critical to my district's economy and the standard of living of my constituents is the Gateway Tunnel Project, the nation's most critical infrastructure

project. As you know, the Northeast Corridor is the most heavily trafficked rail corridor in the nation and is crucial to the travel and livelihoods of millions of Americans in our region, moving a workforce that adds more than \$50 billion annually to the US economy. The Gateway Project, and specifically the Hudson River Tunnel, is the linchpin at the center of this network.

But the Tunnel is over a century old and was heavily damaged by Superstorm Sandy, creating the risk of a devastating failure that could cost American businesses and households \$16 billion over four years and reduce property values by \$22 billion in New Jersey alone. The Hudson River Tunnel Project will eliminate the risk of this potential closure and significantly expand capacity along the Northeast Corridor by doubling the number of trains able to travel under the Hudson. Amtrak estimates that the project will produce a return on investment to our region of 4-to-1 from reduced travel costs and times, greater travel safety, and reduced highway congestion. The project is also projected to create over 55,000 good-paying jobs for our constituents.

I have been really excited by this Committee's bipartisan work to include significant funding within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to fund Gateway, as well as by the Administration's efforts to expedite approvals of the project's Environmental Impact Statement and Project Development Agreement. But our work is not yet done. The Federal Transit Administration still needs to finalize its risk assessments for the project and award already-appropriated grants to the Gateway Development Commission to allow construction to begin as soon as this summer. I strongly urge this Committee to continue advocating for Gateway and overseeing the delivery of grant funding for the crucial project to ensure that we can realize its historic benefits as soon as possible.

I am so appreciative of the tremendous leadership that this Committee has demonstrated in support of commuter transit and the Gateway Project over the past three years, and look forward to continuing to engage with all of you on these critical issues. These are central issues to so many families and businesses in my district, and I will continue to advocate for them until every family has access to reliable and affordable transit.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.