

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Testimony for Senate Budget Committee Public Hearing
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Good afternoon Chairman Sarlo, Vice Chairman Stack and members of the Senate Budget Committee. First and foremost I would like to thank the Committee for selecting Montclair State University for the location of today's hearing given its ease of accessibility using mass transit. In the future, I hope that all hearings, executive agency and off-site legislative, are just as easily accessible using mass transit.

My name is Janna Chernetz and I am the New Jersey Advocate for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit policy watchdog organization working for better transit and transportation policy in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut.

These are not just issues that are priorities for Tri-State but priorities for New Jersey voters as well. According to an October 2011 poll conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute, 75 percent believe that maintenance and repair of existing roads and highways should be a high priority, and 54 percent give the same rating to expanding and improving train and bus services. In fact, a majority of NJ residents believe transportation related issues such as reducing traffic congestion and improving access to public transportation should be within the top 10 highest priorities for NJ leaders. In addition, 2/3 of New Jersey residents think the state needs more sustainable communities (places with a variety of transportation choices and neighborhoods are within walking distance of services and shopping).

I do not have the benefit of having reviewed the NJDOT Capital Program before preparing my testimony for today as I understand the document will not be released until the end of the month at the earliest. **We urge the**

Senate to require NJDOT to make these documents available in time for budget hearings so that taxpayers know how the state is investing our funds in transportation.

With that said, Tri-State would like to provide recommendations:

(1) Provide Adequate Funding for NJTransit

NJ Transit provided service to almost 248 million riders in 2011, quadruple the ridership since 1984. That number is expected to increase again this year according to projections in the proposed FY2013 Budget (page D-349). In 2008, there were a record number of people using mass transit; when gas prices topped over \$4 a gallon. Similar prices are projected this year, forecasting high ridership on NJ Transit. While ridership has increased exponentially, funding has not: in 2004, transit funding encompassed half of the overall NJDOT budget. Last year, it was only a third.

Over half of New Jersey residents believe Trenton should be prioritizing improving access to public transportation according to the October 2011 Monmouth University Polling Institute poll. However, over the years, it has decreased funding to NJ Transit to all-time low levels. Such inadequate funding is leaving riders with more breakdowns, increasing delays, higher fares, less service and longer commutes. Yesterday's *Wall Street Journal* article found that the average delays for NJ Transit riders has increased from 2 hours 24 minutes to 3 hours 25 minutes; time that commuters could be spending at work or at home with their families. Investing in public transportation is a smart choice as public transportation is shown to increase jobs, boost the economy, reduce traffic congestion and protect our environment.

I would also like to address a new project that is poised to put an additional strain on NJ Transit's budget. Developers of large projects must be required to pay their fair share to fund the mass transit improvements their projects demand. Triple Five, who took over the failed Xanadu project, estimate average daily visitors to exceed 150,000 for their renamed American Dream Meadowlands projects, leading to even more traffic in an already heavily congested area. Triple Five is calling upon NJTransit, at a time of severe budget constraints, to provide robust bus service and regular rail service; service that does not currently exist in order to ease the inevitable traffic burden this project poses. New Jersey taxpayers should not have to foot the bill for services demanded by large developers; especially those who have already received substantial tax breaks from the state.

(2) Reduce pedestrian and bicycle fatalities statewide

Last week, Tri-State released its annual report on the Most Dangerous Roads in the region. For the fourth year in a row, Route 130 (Burlington Pike) was the most deadly road for pedestrians; 10 pedestrians were killed. Route 130 is an arterial road: one that has at least 4 lanes of traffic, speeds above 40 mph, and few pedestrian amenities like crosswalks or median islands. Our analysis found that in the three years between 2008 and 2010, 435 pedestrians were killed on New Jersey's roadways. While the number of pedestrian deaths decreased in 2010 from 158 fatalities to 139, recently released 2011 data from the NJDOT shows a slight increase in pedestrian fatalities, suggesting that NJ's roadways are far from safe for pedestrians.

These are preventable deaths. The state should continue to adequately fund programs that pay for pedestrian safety initiatives. **Local Aid** funding must be restored to at least \$200 million, after suffering a \$10 million cut last year, to help municipalities maintain their roads while adhering to the 2% annual property-tax cap signed into law by Governor Christie. Local Aid projects will help the state meet its goal of building 1,000 new miles of bike lanes, and allow municipalities to develop safer walking routes along Main Streets.

The "**Safe Streets to Transit**" program, which was slashed to \$500,000, should be increased to \$1.5 million. This program helps make streets safer for pedestrians and bicyclists headed to transit hubs. Demand is strong for this program. In 2011, the state received over 75 applications, but was only able to provide funding for 6; a mere 8% of applications.

Also, beginning in FY 2013, NJDOT should renew and continue to fund the **Pedestrian Safety Initiative** at \$100M over five years and target grants to municipalities that have adopted Complete Streets policies. While \$10 million a year was promised from FY2008 to 2012, TSTC's review of NJDOT's Capital Programs *for each fiscal year* in this time period shows that the Pedestrian Safety Improvement Design and Construction line item has only once been fully funded at \$10 million. From fiscal year 2008-2012, the program received \$25.8 million. Funding this program adequately could help pay for crosswalks (TSTC goal of 250 new crosswalks through the state) that would help reduce pedestrian fatalities throughout the state. According to NJ State Police data, pedestrians and cyclists made up 27% of these traffic fatalities in 2011.

Lastly, Tri-State calls upon the Legislature to consider a **Vulnerable User bill** to protect pedestrians, cyclists, construction workers, police officers, and others from reckless drivers. A Vulnerable User bill would hold these drivers accountable through increased penalties for careless driving.

(3) Target investments to existing roads and bridges and refocus the NJDOT on its Fix-it-First Policy

NJDOT must prioritize keeping NJ's roads bridges and mass transit infrastructure in a state of good repair over road widening projects. This is consistent with the 2000 Transportation Trust Fund Reauthorization which mandated a reduction in the backlog of deficient roads and bridges. However, in 2012, spending on road widening projects made up 11% of the capital program, the largest percentage in nearly a decade. In fact, increasing spending on capacity expansions is a troubling trend in recent NJDOT capital programs. In 2009, road widening was only 3.6% of the capital program but steadily increase in 2010 and 2011 to 7.5% and 8.9% respectively. Such spending trends threaten to undermine the state's "fix-it-first" goals.

(4) Support Smart Growth

Tri-State urges the restoration of funding for the nationally recognized Transit Villages Program to at least \$1 million annually. Last year, the state eliminated funding for the program despite having a draft State Strategic plan that touts the benefits of transit orientated development (TOD) and calls for programs that incentivize investments near transit. The Transit Village program has helped make New Jersey a national leader and role model in promoting sustainable, transit-oriented development by helping towns develop where it makes the most sense: near rail and bus hubs. The program is successful. There are currently 24 designated Transit Villages and that number is growing.

(5) Ensure the Transportation Trust Fund has Adequate, Dedicated Revenue

The current 5-year transportation funding plan is reliant upon one-shots from the PANYNJ and significant transfers from the general fund each year starting with \$76 million in 2012, to a whopping \$605 million by year 2016; however, there is no clear indication where the money going into the general fund will come from in the future. The current proposed budget provides a general fund transfer of \$89 million however, Tri-State cautions that this type of transportation funding is neither viable nor sustainable. New revenue sources must be identified in order to continue to fund transportation infrastructure needs in NJ. Years of irresponsible borrowing and failure to identify new revenue sources has resulted in massive debt, unsustainable fund transfers, and poor infrastructure. The Legislature must find new sources of revenue to reverse this pattern. If we fail to do so, the next generation will be forced to pay for increasing debt caused by irresponsible borrowing.

On behalf of Tri-State Transportation Campaign, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before this esteemed committee today.