

APPENDIX



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NEW JERSEY CHAPTER

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NJ Sierra Club Speaks at NJ Transit Public Hearing

Hackensack, NJ- Today the Senate Transportation Committee will take testimony from the public regarding governance, oversight, and accountability reforms at the New Jersey Transit Corporation. There is legislation S.630 (Gordon) that would establish four new positions on the board and restructures the existing board so that all public members are required to either have experience as regular public transportation riders or have expertise in human resources or certain transportation topics. The bill also includes statutory duties such as direct oversight of NJT's management team and monitoring financial implementation. **Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, released the following statement.**

"In the last 8 years, it has been a disaster for commuters. Prices have gone up and service and safety have gone down. It was news if you got to work on time. All while the agency can do whatever they want without being held accountable. Under Governor Christie, the agency went rogue, ruining what was once one of the best transit systems in the country. The state legislature and Governor Murphy are trying to fix our transit system and we support them.

"The Murphy Administration is trying to fix things, but Christie's years of neglect and bad decisions is making it difficult. Instead of using \$8 billion in federal funding for Positive Train Control braking systems it went to operations and maintenance because NJ Transit is broke. This braking system should have been replaced a long time ago, but the Christie Administration has cut funding by 90 percent. We need to replace these antiquated braking systems and monitor our rail lines to prevent future disasters, but we cannot do so if they keep taking the funding.

"After Superstorm Sandy, 300 trains were damaged from flooding because they were left in the Meadowlands, a place that floods. A quarter of our railroad cars were damaged or destroyed, costing the taxpayers more than a billion dollars. It has been reported that NJ Transit has the highest train breakdowns in the country. We need to make sure the agency is taking measures to prevent this sort of destruction during the next storm event. We also need to make sure that workers are protected. NJ Transit also have 12 times more equipment failures than any other commuter train in the nation. This is the direct result of funding being slashed by 90 percent in the past 11 years. We need to fix our aging trains and install breaking systems, but we cannot do so if NJ Transit continues to be a rogue agency.

"It's important to create more oversight and accountability for NJ Transit. While ridership has gone up 20 percent, capital spending has gone down 19 percent. NJ Transit has raised fares 9 times while cutting back on services. We are a heavily comminuted state, where 10% of the workforce takes mass transit. When we cannot get to work on time, it hurts our economy.

"We support Governor Murphy's reform on restoring and rebuilding NJ Transit. By undertaking an immediate capital and personnel audit, we will be able to understand the true needs of the agency. By holding Amtrak accountable and increasing their transparency, it will help minimize delays, increase



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safety, and create a more efficient and effective transit system. S.630 has important reforms such as hiring 3 board members that are from the union, having a legislative oversight, having an ethics officer, having the ability to do audits, and having committee hearings. But we must go beyond that. S.630 should have an ombudsman or commuter advocate to ensure commuter representation and assistance in helping commuters deal with complaints or problems they have with the agency. The legislation must enhance its whistleblower protections for employers so that they feel safe when identifying an issue regarding the agency or create an inspector general inside NJ Transit. We have to take this rogue agency and bring it in so that it works for the people and not the politicians.

"New Jersey's transportation system needs fixing desperately. We should try to adopt transit operations that will help improve the safety of trains like New York Penn Station's Positive Train Control breaking system that overrides the train crew in case of an emergency. Having more dissatisfied transit riders means more people will drive, adding to traffic, pollution, and sprawl.

"We must prioritize funding to make the best of our money. We need a stable source of funding for operation and maintenance so we don't keep robbing the clean energy fund and capital plans. Some of the funding mechanism policies we can use are Boston's downtown parking fees that support the maintenance of their transit system, Charlotte's sales tax that funds their transit initiatives, Los Angeles's value added tax on joining properties to increase funding for their transit system, or San Francisco's assessment that pays for business in the area or their cash out parking that requires certain employers who provide subsidized parking for their employees to offer a cash allowance in lieu of a parking space. Governor Murphy's reform to rebuild NJ Transit is good but we must go beyond that. Legislation like S.630 is an important step to help dig us out of the hole Christie put us in. The people of New Jersey deserve to have a transit system to get to work on time and safely. It's not a lot to ask."