

## SUMMING UP:

# Transportation Must Again Be the Backbone of New Jersey Economy

A strong transportation network is essential for a densely populated corridor state such as New Jersey. Instead, New Jersey is beset by aging and deteriorating infrastructure that threatens the state's competitive advantages and quality of life.

In recent years, New Jersey's public investment in roads, bridges, and mass transit has failed to keep up with needs. Rather than responsibly educate the public about the value of mobility to the state's prosperity and the need for investment to maintain a robust transportation system, policymakers have dismissed the warning signs and allowed transportation operations to become inadequate and unstable.

The state's transportation system still has the potential to make life easier for New Jerseyans and propel the state economy if policymakers commit to restoring and maintaining its safety and reliability and act with urgency to support important projects. Necessary steps include:

- Developing, maintaining, and modernizing a robust, financially stable state transportation network
- Prioritizing critical interstate connections, beginning with the Gateway projects
- Streamlining administrative structures to improve planning and increase public engagement
- Embracing new technology to improve safety and reduce costs

### **Key Recommendations**

New Jersey's top transportation priority needs to be completing the Gateway array of projects—including constructing two new rail tubes into New York Penn Station, rebuilding the existing two North River tunnel tubes, expanding Penn Station's platforms and tracks to a "Penn South Annex," and constructing the Bergen Loop connection.

- The projects' high cost (estimated at \$24 billion to \$29 billion), multiyear construction, and complex institutional relationships and financing will require consistent monitoring.

**The importance to New Jersey commuters of a new or expanded Port Authority bus terminal requires the state to make sure its interests are protected in every step of development and construction.**

- Protect and expand the Port Authority's capital plan commitment to the project.
- If necessary, aggressively seek federal support for a portion of the project's cost.
- Make sure the project includes assurance that road links connecting to the Lincoln Tunnel can accommodate the growing number of buses and that convenient connections to the subway system and pedestrian street network are provided.

**Under the leadership of NJDOT, direct the staffs of NJ Transit, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, and South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization to jointly conduct long-range planning.**

- For this to work, the Governor's Office would have to be fully involved.
- A vision plan prepared in this integrated fashion would likely increase public participation and attract greater support than have previous efforts.

**Eliminate temporary funding sources for the NJ Transit operating budget and the uncertainty that threatens stability and efficiency; evaluate options for new, stable revenue sources.**

- Strong consideration should be given to ending dependence on Turnpike Authority revenues to provide stability for NJ Transit's future operating budgets. Turnpike funds could appropriately be used to support NJ Transit capital improvements, but operating support must come from other sources.
- Better options for the NJ Transit operating budget include: using motor vehicle license and registration fees, beyond sums needed for Motor Vehicle Commission improvements, and devoting to NJ Transit new taxes on real estate transactions or business payrolls, following the pattern of the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority.

**Change NJ Transit's governing structure to be accountable to the public and representative of everyone with a stake in a strong mass transit system.**

- A good start would be creation of a panel to advise the governor on proposed legislative criteria for selection of new NJ Transit public board members.

**Pursue ways New Jersey can lead development of self-driving car technology.**

- Examine the possible use of ride hail contractors to provide "first mile" and "last mile" specialized transportation services and replace low-density and special-market bus service.
- Some complementary initiatives could be automating the exclusive bus lane to the Lincoln Tunnel to increase its capacity and making the state's roadways, especially the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway, friendly to self-driving cars and trucks.

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*Transportation Must Again Be the Backbone of New Jersey Economy* is part of the *Crossroads NJ* series produced by The Fund for New Jersey to inform debate in this pivotal election year. The full text of reports and other information about *Crossroads NJ* are available at [www.fundfornj.org/crossroadsnj](http://www.fundfornj.org/crossroadsnj).