



A bold voice for transportation workers

CONGRESS AND STATES MUST TAKE IMMEDIATE STEPS TO FUND GATEWAY

With the December enactment of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, Amtrak and our nation's passenger rail network has received its first long-term reauthorization since 2008. The five year bill provides much needed funding stability for Amtrak to sustain its national passenger rail network. But now public officials and lawmakers on the state and federal level must focus on completing an infrastructure project vital to one of the nation's critical economic and transportation corridors: the Gateway Program and Hudson Tunnel Project.

This project is critical for several reasons. The Northeast corridor is home to 1 in 7 Americans, creates and supports 30 percent of the nation's jobs and contributes 20 percent of our GDP. If this corridor experiences a severe transportation breakdown the effects would reverberate across the entire economy. Unfortunately, that breakdown is now occurring as Amtrak faces the daunting task of replacing century-old infrastructure that will soon have to be shut down.

The facts are startling. In October of 2014 Amtrak released a report declaring that four of its tunnels into and out of New York City urgently need to be replaced. Storm surges from Hurricane Sandy flooded both tunnels under the Hudson and two of the four tunnels under the East River. Repairs can be made to the East River tunnels but those repairs will require the shutdown of one tunnel at a time and thus will cause massive delays on the NEC. Under the Hudson, however, that option is not available, and replacement tunnels must be constructed to avoid bringing traffic on the nation's busiest rail corridor to a grinding halt.

The Gateway Program would create a new two-track tunnel under the Hudson, allowing increased capacity for the heavily traversed crossing while also allowing repairs to be done on the existing tunnels. While replacing the tunnels has rightfully garnered the most attention from politicians and the media, those initiatives are only one piece of the overall project. Gateway involves replacing and upgrading infrastructure along the critical stretch of track between Penn Station Newark and the expanded Penn Station/Moynihan Station in New York City. When completed, Gateway will improve the safety and efficiency of the busiest portion of the Northeast Corridor, and dramatically increase the trans-Hudson rail capacity.

Between Amtrak, New Jersey Transit and Long Island Railroad, the Hudson tunnels and Penn Station currently accommodate 450 trains and roughly 200,000 passenger trips per day, with minimal room to expand and meet the growing demand for more commuter and passenger rail service. The Hudson Tunnel Project involves building a new two-track tunnel to maintain current levels of service while one of the existing tracks is taken out of service to be fully repaired. Once those repairs are complete Amtrak and the other users will have two fully functioning tunnels instead of the existing one.

The added tunnels alone, however will not allow for increased capacity since the NEC narrows to only two tracks at points between Newark, NJ and Penn Station, NY. Gateway addresses this problem with a series of infrastructure improvements. The 106-year-old Portal Bridge which crosses the Hackensack River must be renovated and expanded. The Sawtooth Bridge at Kearny Meadows Junction must be completely replaced. The Highline must be upgraded and expanded. And a 4th track must be added at Harrison, NJ, among other places. Combined these projects will modernize this prized transportation corridor, transform this region and boost the entire economy which relies on a well-functioning and integrated transportation network.

Gateway is also an important job creation initiative. During the construction phase the program will invest heavily in the local workforce, creating thousands of good-paying construction, engineering and other jobs. Full application of federal Buy America laws and 100% domestic sourcing for steel and manufactured goods would also provide a boost to the U.S. steel and manufacturing sectors. With the increased capacity provided by Gateway, service will expand and rail jobs will also be created. Conversely, if action is not taken, not only would we forgo these economic benefits, but Amtrak would be forced to take one Hudson tunnel out of service at a time. This would reduce capacity to 25 percent of current level, severely slow and reduce Amtrak and commuter traffic, and cause economic hardship on those who rely on the corridor to make a living.

Unfortunately, while Gateway has been carefully planned and the next steps have been identified, there is still no funding in place to begin construction. With a price tag of roughly \$20 billion, this project will need bipartisan support from both state and federal public officials. We are beginning to see some progress. Last fall, thanks to the leadership of Senators Chuck Schumer and Cory Booker, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie announced that they had reached a deal under which their respective states along with the Port Authority of NY and NJ would cover half of the costs and the federal government could cover the other half. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx has affirmed the federal commitment to completing Gateway, and has been a vocal leader for finding funding solutions. Together, they also announced the creation of the Gateway Development Corporation, which will help develop a funding and finance plan and oversee project delivery. Furthermore, reforms to the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) program championed by Senator Booker and included in the recently enacted FAST Act could make certain aspects of Gateway eligible for financing under RRIF. The FAST Act also include a provision to ensure that projects like Gateway that incorporate both transit and passenger rail are eligible for funding under the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts Program.

The progress made last year is vitally important, but we are quickly running out of time to put real resources behind this project. For instance, construction is ready to begin on the Portal Bridge today, but \$1 billion is needed to fund it. Each day that construction is delayed only increases the ultimate cost of the project, pushes timeline for completion further into the future and idles the middle class jobs it will create and sustain. Our elected leaders on the state and federal levels have been moving in the right direction and have taken important steps toward making Gateway a

reality. The consequences for inaction are far too high both from a safety and economic perspective. Transportation labor will advocate aggressively for this project and will urge continued progress on this nationally significant transportation infrastructure upgrade.

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