

Statement of U.S. Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) at House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing:

“Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to come before this Committee to discuss our nation’s passenger rail system, and specifically the Northeast Corridor.

“America is facing a transportation crisis—and our future depends on the steps we take to meet the economic, environmental and congestion challenges facing our workers, families and businesses every single day. But first, we must recognize some facts.

“The Northeast Corridor is the most densely populated area in the United States. More than 1,800 trains operate each day on the Northeast Corridor—and on weekdays, more than 700,000 commuters use these rails. The Northeast Corridor alone takes 243 flights out of our skies and 30,000 cars off our highways each weekday.

“Put another way, if we shut down the Northeast Corridor rail service, you’d have to build seven new lanes on Interstate 95 just to carry all the travelers that use these trains every day. Just imagine what that would look like. Cars piling up on highways, pollution spitting into the air, pockets drained at the pump, businesses waiting hours or days for products they need to sell to make payroll and boost the economy.

“The fact is: Amtrak makes our region work—and we must invest in this critical asset. Last year, we spent more than \$40 billion on highways. Over Amtrak’s entire 40-year history, we’ve spent just under \$38 billion total. That’s worth repeating: Amtrak has received less federal money in its history than highways get in a single year.

“Other countries—including China, Spain, France, Japan and Germany—are prioritizing rail investments, while we’re stuck at the station. This must change. We must be bold and make the investments that will make our economy and our country more prosperous.

“We started this process in 2008, when both parties came together and passed my Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, which reauthorized and strengthened Amtrak. This was a bipartisan bill signed into law by President George W. Bush. Our Amtrak law created the high-speed rail grants that are moving forward today in my state and many of your states. It also made critical investments in the Northeast Corridor and required Amtrak to work with the states and the federal government to bring the Corridor into a state of good repair.

“Amtrak has been making great strides to improve its service in the Northeast Corridor—and the proof is evident in the skyrocketing ridership numbers. Last year, Amtrak’s nationwide ridership hit historic highs—carrying nearly 29 million passengers—and it is on track to beat that number this year.

“Amtrak also recently launched an ambitious and aggressive plan to enlist private sector investment, asking the private sector to submit a robust business and financial plan to develop higher speed rail in the Northeast Corridor. So far, several investment firms have expressed interest in working with Amtrak. Investors know that working with Amtrak to strengthen passenger rail will help our economy, as businesses flock to communities served by faster trains.

“A stronger national rail service will also be good for our national security and the environment because it will help our country kick its dangerous oil addiction. But let me be clear: privatizing the Northeast Corridor is not a smart or viable way to meet these challenges.

“Let’s not forget: Congress created Amtrak in 1970 because the private railroads could no longer sustain inter-city passenger service on their own. If we all do our part, we’ll be able to build great projects like the Gateway Tunnel, an innovative project that will expand high-speed rail in the Northeast Corridor. Building

the Gateway Tunnel and achieving high-speed rail service on the Northeast Corridor are no small undertakings. Unfortunately, some say we can't afford vital public investments right now. I would argue that we can't afford not to make these investments.

“When I was building my business, I learned firsthand—if you want to be successful tomorrow, you must begin laying the foundation today. The same principle applies here. If we want to leave our children and grandchildren a better country, we must make smart investments on their behalf—and that means investing in Amtrak.”

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