

Beginning this month, New Jersey commuters faced the stark reality of increased fares and reduced services.

The up to 25 percent increase for rail and intercity bus service, the 10 percent increase for local bus and light-rail, and the elimination of off-peak discounts will hit New Jersey families' pocketbooks hard. Across the board this is an average fare increase of 22 percent.

To put that in real terms, a daily commuter traveling on the Northeast Corridor traveling from Princeton Junction to New York Penn Station will pay \$83 more per month, or \$996 more per year, while bus riders traveling from Jersey City to the Port Authority Terminal will pay \$324 more per year.

Cutting services and eliminating routes hit a certain segment hardest, including the elderly, students, including low-income riders, and individuals with disabilities.

To all families struggling to make ends meet, fare increases will make the difference between using public transportation and driving to work.

In the most densely populated state in the nation, adding more cars to our roadways will have a significant impact on our communities. The U.S. Census Bureau recently determined that of the towns in the U.S. with the longest average daily commute time, three towns in Central New Jersey were in the top ten nationwide.

The average New Jerseyan spends 28.5 minutes on the daily commute. However, the average commute time for someone in Marlboro is 46 minutes, for someone in Manalapan it's 43 minutes, and for someone in West Windsor, it's 42 minutes.

Adding more commuters to our roadways – as the fare increases and reduced services likely will do - will only increase congestion and commute times, robbing New Jerseyans of the precious time that they get to spend with their families.

Raising fares likely also will damage New Jersey's economy. It is no exaggeration to say that public transportation, particularly rail, is the lifeline from which New Jersey's economy draws nourishment.

Our region's employers – small, medium, and large – depend upon an integrated public transportation system to enable many of their employees to get to and from work. Clients, potential clients, and business partners use the train travel throughout New Jersey. Our local entrepreneurs use public transportation to pitch their ideas and sell their products throughout the state.

The short-sighted decision to cut public transportation will cause increased costs down the road. More cars on our roads will cause more wear and tear on our roads. More cars idling will add more pollution to our air and water and will increase greenhouse gas emissions.

While this is a state matter, I am doing what I can on the federal level to ensure that New Jerseyans have access to affordable public transit. Under current law public transit agencies like NJTransit cannot use federal funding to finance operating costs. I am working to pass legislation that would change federal law to allow federal funds to be used for operational costs. By allowing transit agencies to be able to use federal funding for their day to day operations costs, these funds could be used to keep service on the streets and on the rails.

Additionally, as Vice-Chair of the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, I am working to ensure that future jobs legislation includes provisions allowing funding for operating costs.

In these economic times New Jerseyans need access to reliable and affordable public transportation options more than ever.

Unfortunately, NJ Transit's service cuts and increased fares will cause an undue burden on families who are already struggling to make ends meet. This will cause more commuters to use our already overburdened roadways, make congestion worse, increase greenhouse gas emissions, and force New Jerseyans to spend less time at home with their families.

