

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Robert Menendez (D-NJ), and Reps. Steven R. Rothman (D-NJ-9), Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ-6), Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ-8), Albio Sires (D-NJ-13), Rush D. Holt (D-NJ-12) and Robert E. Andrews (D-NJ-1) wrote a letter to Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood in support of federal funding for high-speed rail along the Northeast Corridor. Amtrak requested funding for key components of a new trans-Hudson tunnel called the Gateway Project — including construction of a replacement for the Portal Bridge, and preliminary engineering and environmental analysis for the new tunnel. The new Portal Bridge is critical to improving the reliability of Amtrak and NJ Transit trains and reducing wait times for commuters.

“Investing in the Gateway Project is essential to the continued growth of New Jersey and the vitality of the region. Without increased capacity the traffic and congestion into midtown Manhattan will be a chokepoint for New Jersey’s economic success,” the New Jersey Congress members wrote. “High-speed rail funding for projects on the Northeast Corridor are a solid investment with a proven history of success and economic development.”

\$2 billion in high-speed rail funding remains available after Florida rejected its high-speed rail funding earlier this year. The recent designation of the Northeast Corridor as a federally-recognized high-speed rail corridor allowed Amtrak to apply for grant funding for projects on the Corridor.

*A copy of the letter to the U.S. Department of Transportation follows:*

April 20, 2011

The Honorable Ray LaHood

United States Department of Transportation

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE

Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

We write in strong support of Amtrak's application for funding for the Gateway Project from the Federal Railroad Administration's March 2011 Notice of Funding Availability for High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail projects. The Gateway Project is critical for the future growth and expansion of the entire Northeast Corridor, and will benefit the economy and passengers both in New Jersey and throughout the region.

Amtrak has said that the Gateway Project is the “cornerstone” from which it plans to build the next generation high-speed rail system, improving speeds on the Northeast Corridor to 220 miles per hour. Accordingly, Amtrak has applied for \$570 million for the replacement of the more than 100-year-old Portal Bridge. Replacing the Portal Bridge would improve system reliability, reduce delays and congestion, and boost economic development in the region, while also creating 6,000 construction jobs over the life of the project.

Amtrak has also applied for \$188 million for preliminary engineering and environmental analysis for the Gateway Project. The project would lay the groundwork for higher speed rail service and greatly increase passenger rail capacity into Manhattan, including the building of a new tunnel under the Hudson River. The existing, 100-year old rail tunnel into midtown Manhattan is the only commuter rail crossing into midtown, and it is operating at capacity during rush hour. More than 250 million rail passengers currently travel the Corridor annually and this total is expected to increase sixty percent by 2030. To meet this demand, Amtrak expects that the Gateway Project will increase capacity for NJ Transit trains from the current 20 to 33 and allow Amtrak to operate eight additional peak-time intercity trains per hour into New York.

Investing in the Gateway Project is essential to the continued growth of New Jersey and the vitality of the region. Without increased capacity the traffic and congestion into midtown Manhattan will be a chokepoint for New Jersey’s economic success. High-speed rail funding for projects on the Northeast Corridor are a solid investment with a proven history of success and economic development. We encourage you to grant Amtrak’s application for the Gateway Project.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Lautenberg

Robert Menendez

U.S. Senator

U.S. Senator

Steven R. Rothman

Frank Pallone, Jr.

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell, Jr.

Albio Sires

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Rush D. Holt

Robert E. Andrews

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