



May 25, 2017

**Civic Groups Call on Amtrak, USDOT to Address SafeCivic Groups Call on Amtrak, USDOT to Address Safety Concerns at Penn Station**

Dear Secretary Chao and Mr. Moorman:

We urge you to expedite the Gateway project and long-term improvements at Penn Station to help address overcrowding and safety issues. We are concerned that Amtrak's plans to repair tracks at the station this summer, while a good first step, do not go far enough to address longer term problems with Penn Station.

The past few months have demonstrated the basic inability of Penn Station to handle the demands now placed on it on a daily basis. A series of delays, cancellations and even derailments have repeatedly affected commuters' ability to get to work, school, daycare pick-ups and doctors' appointments. The service disruptions have led to severe overcrowding, causing injury and unhealthy conditions. On May 3, sewage was leaking from the ceiling of the station. One month earlier, a derailment caused delays on over 1,170 trains. On April 15, sixteen people were injured in a stampede when a police officer's taser was mistaken for a gunshot. Footage of the stampede foreshadows a far worse disaster.

The events this spring have made it clear to all what many commuters and our organizations have known for years: Penn Station is an unacceptable safety hazard. Possible improvements include better access to Penn Station from the street, bringing more light and air into the station, and improved operations for tracks leading to the station.

Both lives and livelihoods are at risk. Penn Station and the tracks that serve it are among the most vital pieces of infrastructure in our nation. Over half a million people use Penn Station every weekday, making it the busiest rail station in the western hemisphere. This station and the train service into and out of the station are essential to the economic health of our region and our nation. The New York metropolitan area produces 10% of the national gross domestic product, and this relies on functioning, safe infrastructure. The Partnership for New York City has calculated that a one hour delay on NJ Transit and Long Island Rail Road is a loss of \$14.5 million for employers based in Manhattan. Costs of delays extend much farther and affect the health and well-being of commuters in Long Island, the Hudson Valley,

New Jersey and Connecticut.

If something happens in the station now, no one can say they did not know about the magnitude of the safety concerns. The past few months have made them all too clear.

Since Amtrak owns and operates Penn Station, and the tracks and signals that lead into the station, it has the primary responsibility to fix these problems. But New York and New Jersey also play a vital role in adequately funding public transportation service on NJTransit and the MTA's Long Island Rail Road, the systems that use Penn Station alongside Amtrak. In New Jersey, state support for public transportation has plummeted since 2007. In New York, the state recently cut \$65 million in transit funding for the MTA. We urge you to work with New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie to ensure increased funding comes from both state and federal levels.

As organizations representing everyday commuters and the public interest, we can no longer ignore the severe safety concerns at Penn Station, and the urgent need for repairs to the tracks and infrastructure that serve the station.

We look forward to your visit to New York to view the situation firsthand and urge you to act immediately to address these issues, before something tragic occurs. We need your support for a bold, long-term vision to bring Penn Station into the 21st century. Advancing the Gateway project now is the critical next step.

Sincerely,

**Marcia Bystryn**, President, New York League of Conservation Voter

**Elizabeth Goldstein**, President, Municipal Art Society

**Jonathan Raskin**, Executive Director, Riders Alliance

**Gene Russianoff**, Senior Attorney, NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign

**Steve Sigmund**, Executive Director, Global Gateway Alliance

**Veronica Vanterpool**, Executive Director, Tri-State Transportation Campaign

**Paul Steely White**, Executive Director, Transportation Alternatives

**Tom Wright**, President, Regional Plan Association