

Mayors Coalition of Raritan Valley Rail Line

August 21, 2018

Dear Senator

As Mayors representing 23 communities and nearly 300,000 NJ residents on the Raritan Valley Line, we are writing to express our profound dissatisfaction with the current state of NJ Transit and its ongoing deterioration. The 23,000 daily commuters in our municipalities have been given a set of sub-standard choices for their daily transit needs in and out of Manhattan, and while we recognize this problem has been a long time in the making, we have assembled our collective efforts to do our part in moving toward a solution-oriented environment that effects change.

Of special concern is the recent announcement to temporarily suspend one-seat rides on the Raritan Valley Line while concurrently facing reduced availability due to lane closure on RT. 495 in and out of the Lincoln Tunnel. While service issues are indeed a significant problem across NJ Transit, this new set of changes makes neither the train nor the bus decent options for commuters on the Raritan Valley Line as its riders continue to absorb more than their fair share of disruptions.

It is our understanding that the one-seat rides will resume in early 2019, following the Positive Train Control project. We firmly believe this presents an ideal opportunity for NJ Transit to newly assess and re-allocate the dual locomotives to enable a peak one-seat ride more equitably – one that is based on ridership and appropriately incorporates the Raritan Valley Line commuters who have been underserved by the current off-peak allocation. Peak one-seat rides would allow Raritan Valley Line towns to compete equally for residential and commercial investment, enhance current economic redevelopment efforts in progress along the entire corridor, enable employers to compete for younger, skilled talent from Manhattan, and ultimately increase property values in all Raritan Valley Line municipalities. The time for progress on this front is long overdue, and further setbacks stemming from additional service disruptions are simply unacceptable for the following reasons:

- RVL ridership continues to increase and now has more than 23,000 daily commuters -- comparable to or even exceeding other NJ Transit (NJT) lines serviced by multiple direct trains into NY Penn Station.
- RVL riders must transfer platforms in Newark, adding an additional 35 minutes on average to their commute and often missing a connecting train.
- The NJT 2017 Quarterly Report states that 10 of RVL's 18 stations rank in the top half of all NJT stations in terms of average weekday passenger boarding.
- The majority of RVL towns have embraced the State's Smart Growth and Transit-Oriented Initiatives resulting in more than 8,000 new units with more in the planning. These investments in our towns and in NJ are significant and add additional commuters.

Despite these factors, the Raritan Valley Line has received no peak hour direct train service after 20 years of working and negotiating to provide RVL riders equitable service. Unless the commuter experience improves for RVL, our communities may see a decline in economic revitalization in both the residential and commercial sectors.

The RVL ridership and our towns cannot wait for 2030 and the Gateway Project. We need action and a commitment from NJ Legislators now to improve transportation for more than 23,000 commuters and to better serve the nearly 300,000 NJ residents who live in towns on the Raritan Valley Line. In the interim, we advocate for other options to be further assessed and communicated to the public:

- The progress of construction on the Hunter Flyover, which would carry the Raritan Valley Line over the Northeast Corridor tracks, eliminating the need for these train to wait for Amtrak and other commuter traffic to clear. The completion of this critical project that would cut the time for Raritan Valley trains to reach Newark and New York is vitally important to its riders.
- The improvements being made to system-wide communications, so that commuters are not faced with chronic delays and cancelations with little to no notice. The current approach leaves commuters with few options to adjust their schedules and find alternative means of timely transportation.
- The viability of extending the Raritan Valley Line to Hoboken for ferry connectivity at West 39th St., which would provide commuters a much-needed alternative as they face both short and long-term maintenance and service changes.

Our coalition agrees that there is no quick and easy solution to the current issues faced by NJ Transit, and we recognize that changes on this scale take time. That said, we remain steadfast in our commitment to improving the commuting experience for residents, employees and visitors to our communities and business districts. This effort is critical to the economic health, investment and vitality of our towns, and of course, New Jersey.

Yours in partnership,

Shelley Brindle
Mayor of Westfield

Robert Fazen
Mayor of Bound Brook

Colleen Mahr
Mayor of Fanwood

Chairs, Raritan Valley Line Mayors Coalition

Cc: Honorable Phil Murphy, Governor
Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, Transportation Commissioner
Kevin S. Corbett, NJ Transit Executive Director

One-Seat Ride allocation hasn't changed to accommodate increase in ridership

Total PEAK AM Trains arriving at Penn Station

	Total Peak Trains	2017 Average Weekday Ridership
NEC	29	121,350
Morris & Essex	15	59,500
Raritan Valley Line	0	23,250
North Jersey Coast	11	23,150
Montclair/Boonton	4	18,200

Total PEAK PM Trains Leaving Penn Station

	Total Peak Trains	2017 Average Weekday Ridership
NEC	24	121,350
Morris & Essex	15	59,500
Raritan Valley Line	0	23,250
North Coast Line	13	23,150
Montclair/Boonton	4	18,200